

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

Chapter 236



Chapter 16: Don't Say My Name

Maeve

"He just left? Just got up and left?" Gemma picked at her fingernails, looking over at me from perch on the couch. We were in the atrium, a towering four-story high addition to the backside of the castle where the windows stretched to the ceiling and almost microscopic hoses ran along the beams, showering hundreds of plants in a steady flow of mist. It was what I imagined a jungle would look and feel like.

I fingered one of the leaves of a massive Monstera vine, marveling at the size of a leaf before turning to Gemma and taking a seat at on a wicker lounge chair across from her, folding my hands in my lap. "I don't think he even, uh, finished?"

Seriously?" She sat up a little straighter, her eyes wide.

"I mean, I don't know..."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"No! Nothing. He just left. I haven't even seen him since last night. Maybe it wasn't... good? Good enough for him?"

Gemma rolled her eyes, "Maeve, come on. Ask any man what constitutes good sex and they will say sex in general!"

I blushed, pressing my hands between my thighs. "I must have done something wrong."

I definitely felt like I had done something wrong. I knew I had been difficult; he had made that very clear. We had ended up in a tangle of sheets on the floor, and not in a sexy way. Oh, yeah, it was my fault. He was expecting me to be submissive, unyielding. I had failed.

"It's not your fault," Gemma said gently, her eyes piercing mine as she willed me to believe her. "Something's up with that guy."

"What do you mean?"

"He is not what I thought he'd be. Nothing like the Aaron I met when his family visited Winter Forest."

"Come on, Gem! I told you it's been ten years since-"

"He looks nothing like he should, Maeve! He was a blond! Kind of a weaking!"

"Who says hair color can't change? Rowan's hair was nearly as light as mine until he reached his twenties. Now it's as dark as Dad's!"

"His eyes, Maeve? Don't you think we both would've remembered those eyes? How often do you meet someone with eyes of two different colors, hmm?"

"Well, do you remember what his eyes looked like, Gemma? I don't! He told me they got more pronounced as he got older."

"Oh please, how is that even possible?"

paused, biting my lip.

"It's not possible!"

"What are you saying, Gemma? Do you think he's not that he's not Aaron? Who else could he be?"

"I don't know! I'm only saying he rubs me the wrong way, okay? Like he's hiding something."

"I think you're the one hiding something!" I exclaimed, narrowing my eyes at her.

She arched her brow, leaning forward in her chair. I was being defensive, trying to cover my own shame and suspicion by bringing up the one thing I currently had against her. It was a dance we'd done since my childhood, really. Gemma would try to talk some sense into me, and I would clam up, my only option being to accept defeat or throw it back at her. I never accepted defeat.

"Why are you defending Aaron when he—"

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"Why was your sweater in Ernest's office?"

She blanched, the color draining from her cheeks as she abruptly looked away from me, her throat bobbing as she swallowed. "What did he say about it?"

"He looked guilty and embarrassed," I said, trying to remain heated, but my mouth was twitching into a smile, a laugh choking me.

She snorted, waving her hand in dismissal, but I could see the same look of embarrassment lingering behind her eyes, mingled with a sense of sadness.

"What's wrong, Gemma? I was only... I shouldn't have brought it up. It's your business."

"And I guess Aaron is your business too, huh? I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too."

We looked at each other for a moment, silence passing between us.

Till tell you why the sweater was in his office if you tell me what's really going on between you and Aaron," she said, her tone serious and her expression controlled.

I nodded, my chest tightening at the challenge of putting my feelings into words. Gemma was the only person I could talk to about this who would understand.

"Do you want me to go first?"

"No, I'll go." She stood up and began pacing back and forth in front of me, looking down at the ground. She came to a stop, rounding on me, her eyes glossy with what looked like tears.

"Gemma?"

"He's my mate, Maeve."

"Who? Ernest?!"

She nodded, her face pinking again, a slight smile touching her face.

"So you guys are a thing, then?"

"No. No, we're not."

"Uh, why not? You've been waiting to feel the mate bond for so long,"

he doesn't feel it. He

"I felt it the second I laid eyes on him, the very second I walked through the doors of the castle. But thinks— I've been flirting with him, trying to get a reaction out of him. I even kissed him."

"And what did he do?"

"He liked it. He wanted more..."

"And?" The anticipation was killing me. Gemma was the queen of dragging things along to keep her audience captive.

"I told him how I felt. I told him I was sure we were mates. He didn't say anything. He just sat there looking like he was about to cry. And then he got... he got angry!"

Ernest not having anything to say? Ernest, angry?

"That doesn't sound like him at all--"

"I know. It was totally out of character. Maeve. He told me it's not safe to be around him. I couldn't believe it, you know, this is Ernest we're talking about. He wouldn't hurt a fly."

"This is kind of odd, Gemma--"

"I know. I don't know what to do. It happened a few days before we went to the social and ... I tried as hard as I could to keep him off my mind, but the pull-oh, Goddess, the mate bond is so strong. I couldn't even dance with that guy I met at social without feeling like I was going to come out of my skin the second he touched me. It was almost painful."

"So, you're sure?"

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She paused, wringing her hands, then looked me in the eyes, deadly serious. She was sure. I could tell by the look behind her eyes that she had never been more sure about something in her life.

"I'll talk to him. I'll find out what his deal is," I said firmly.

"No, you can't. It doesn't matter."

"I think it matters a lot!"

Her eyes were misting with tears. "And if we are mates, Maeve? What then? What would be the reasoning for you even being here, needing a breeder to give Ernest an heir? Don't see you? I can't act on this even if he felt the bond. I'm not the next Luna. You are."

"Don't say that," I said, my hands shaking slightly. "A mate bond overrides my position—"

"You know that's not true"

"Pursue him," I said, standing and stepping toward her. My heart was pounding against my chest, my blood thrumming in my ears. Oh, my Goddess. Gemma and Ernest. If Gemma was Ernest's mate, then they could have the heir. There'd be no need for me to be here. I would have no need of a breeder. I could walk out of this castle, tonight, nursing my broken heart on the journey home and then think of Aaron again. "I'm going to go talk to him. Right now."

She grabbed my arm as I tried to push past her, her fingernails digging into my skin as I tried to pull away. "Don't, Maeve. I know what you're thinking. This isn't going to solve your problems with Aaron."

"What problems with Aaron?"

She loosened her grip, giving me a knowing look. I let my shoulders slump and bit the inside of my lower lip to stop it from trembling and giving my true feelings away. She opened her mouth to speak, but we were suddenly interrupted by the glass door of the atrium sliding open, humid air rushing out into the corridor in a burst of mist as Ernest himself stepped into the room, followed by Aaron.

"Wow," I said, crossing my arms over my chest as they approached.

"Did we... summon them?"

Aaron flashed me a wide grin, which instantly evaporated and was replaced with his teasing arched brow when he saw the scowl on my face.

"What are you two doing in here?" Ernest asked, gripping the back of one of the wicker chairs. He glanced over at Gemma, a soft smile on his lips, and she blushed, her eyes slowly leaving her feet to meet his gaze.

"Oh, for the love of I hissed under my breath, stalking toward Ernest with every intention of dragging him out of the atrium and into his office to demand an explanation from him as to why he didn't feel a mate bond with Gemma when she clearly felt one for him.

But Aaron stepped in front of me, grabbing me by the forearm as he leaned down to whisper in my ear. "I need to talk to you."

"Well, you had a chance to do that before you ran out of my room last night like I had the plague, or something. Let go! I need to talk to Ernest!"

Ernest was seated, Gemma sitting on the couch across from him, the two of them leaning into the empty space between them as they spoke in hushed voices.

Aaron looked back at me, a sly smile on his face. "I don't think he wants to talk to you, Maeve. He's busy."

I wrenched my arm free and walked with haste toward the sliding glass door, fumbling against the weight of it. Aaron was right behind me, of course, and he put his hands on the glass to help me ease the sticky door open, his breath tickling the back of my neck. "Can we go somewhere to talk?"

"No!" I said in a harsh whisper as the door slid open. I stepped into the corridor and began to walk toward the stairwell, taking long strides despite the fact that Aaron could keep up with me with his normal gait.

He followed me regardless, grabbing me by the collar of my T-shirt and damn near tossing me into a darkened, rarely used sitting room off the backside of the castle.

"What are we doing in here, Aaron?" I asked, coughing as I inhaled and my nose filled with the sharp scent of floor polish. The door had been left ajar, likely to air it out after a deep cleaning.

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He closed the door behind us, leaning against it as though to prevent me from trying to escape. I looked him up and down, my eyes suddenly glued to his legs, which were practically bare save for a pair of shorts that hung mid-thigh. His shorts were a soft blue and looked shockingly familiar.

"Aaron," I said slowly, why the HELL are you wearing my shorts?"

"Oh, these?" he said, totally unperturbed. "I needed a pair for basketball this morning."

I stepped toward him, gaping. "So you wore mine? Are you insane? Did you, did you go through my closet?"

"Of course not," he scoffed, offended. "One of the laundry maids was bringing a basket upstairs this morning and she dropped it. I helped her, saw these, and thought— why not?" He jumped from one leg to the other, the muscles in his thighs rippling with the movement. He kicked one leg up, like a dancer. "They're great. So much room for movement."

"Take them off!" I howled.

It had been the wrong thing to say. He arched his brow, giving me a devilish smile. I had walked into his trap.

"Jeez, take me out to dinner first--"

"Why, so you can sleep with me and run off again without saying a word?" I hadn't meant to be so harsh. The look on his face made my chest ache and throat tighten against the words.

"I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry. 1-1 didn't feel right."

"Didn't feel right about what, exactly?"

"I was taking advantage of you."

"That's the whole point, isn't it? I'm supposed to lay there and you're supposed to... uh, you know, do what you need to do to get me pregnant."

He winced, shaking his head. "I don't like how you worded that."

"Well, it's the truth, isn't it? This is our job—"

He closed the distance between us in two long strides, his sneakers squeaking violently on the freshly polished wood as he pushed me against the wall, leaning down so we were eye to eye. "This doesn't feel like a job to me. Not anymore."

"Then why did you leave without saying a single word? Was it me?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"How do you think it feels for me, Maeve?"

"What, the sex?"

"No, uh-listen, the sex was fine. I meant--"

"It was fine?"

"It was great?" He gritted his teeth, and I couldn't help but utter a sputtering laugh. He watched me, eyes glimmering like gems in the soft light coming through the window above our heads. "What was it like for you?"

"Quick," I replied. He snorted, pushing off the wall and standing straight, his hands smoothing the fabric of my shorts over his thighs.

"I'm going to keep these, just for that comment."

"No, you're not. They're the only shorts I have."

"Fine, I'll take them off right now."

"No, please don't."

He smiled, shaking his head. "Good, I don't have anything underneath--"

"Ugh! Aaron, you're seriously the worst!" There it was, that despair behind his eyes like the night before when he pulled himself off

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of me and bolted towards the door. "Why... why do you look at me like that?"

He knew exactly what I was talking about by the look that flashed across his face. He looked down at his feet, tilting his head to the side before glancing back up at me. "Don't say my name next time, okay?"

"What?"

"When we're in bed together. Don't say my name."