

Chapter 414

Lily sighed sleepily and rolled over. She was immediately struck by the fact that she was alone in the huge bed that dominated what was now her new bedroom. She wasn't really surprised that Mac had come and retrieved her from Liam's room. She had a sleepy memory of his strong arms lifting her up and snuggling into his wide chest. What did surprise her was waking alone again. She'd only spent two nights in the bed since mating with her vampire and both times she'd woken to find him gone.

The subtle sound of movement by the window attracted her attention and she pushed her wild hair from her face and rolled over again to see Mac sitting on the loveseat with a pensive expression on his face. Midnight black eyes bored into her, making her feel unsure for a moment before she strengthened her resolve and met his gaze unflinchingly.

"You seem to have an issue with staying in bed with me," she commented with a yawn, before moving onto her back and staring up at the ceiling with a thoughtful expression on her face.

"Quite the contrary, sugar," Mac drawled with a resigned snort. "Leaving you alone in bed feels like the most exquisite of tortures." He rose and came to sit beside her, his long locks loose and falling over his shoulders as he searched her face.

"I don't like arguing with you, Lily. I try my hardest not to but always seem to fuck up no matter how hard I try." He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "I've been alone for so long, sugar. I don't know how to be someone's husband anymore."

Lily turned to look at him, her eyes questioning. "Husband?"

The slip of the tongue seemed to be the opening he needed to explain why he'd withdrawn the day before. But she looked so beautiful lying there with her hair fanning his pillows, and her face soft with sleep. He didn't want to ruin the moment as he ran his greedy gaze over her features.

"Talk to me, Mackenzie. I'm your mate and whatever it is that's bothering you, I'm here to listen. Please don't shut me out."

Lily's soft words pierced him deeply and Mac took a deep breath, unable to deny that she had the right to know what was wrong as it affected her just as much as it did him. He knew he was being a coward trying to put the moment off for as long as possible.

Lily watched Mac, knowing instinctively that he was struggling with what he needed to say because he wasn't shielding his facial expressions as easily as he usually did. She could also feel the roiling emotions he was experiencing through their mate bond. Whatever was on his mind was so important it was enough to unsettle him completely and that caused a shiver of fear to run through her.

What could be so bad to have Mac rattled so much? He'd handled all the revelations yesterday as if they were minor annoyances. Whatever it was must be personal and that meant it affected them as mates. She felt her fear ratchet up a little more and her wolf began to pace restlessly deep inside.

"Mac, what do you mean by husband?" Her voice trembled slightly on the last word. She knew that only humans usually used the ritual of marriage to bind themselves together. That her mate had chosen that word could only mean that in the past he had once been married before he became a vampire.

That was a surprise because the Mac she knew had always been a loner until he'd met her. It seemed strange to think of him being in love with someone else, of sharing tender moments with another even if it was so very long ago. Lily's wolf didn't like that train of thought, snarling so viciously that she quickly blanked her thoughts to pacify the beast. She somehow knew keeping control of her wolf right now was going to be one of the most important things she'd ever done in her life.

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Mackenzie looked into Lily's troubled face and reached out to cup her cheek. His touch was tender, lightly brushing her soft skin and marvelling at how perfect she was. He could feel her fear through their bond and knew his next words would cause her nothing but heartache. His Lily didn't deserve to be tied to him for the rest of her life. She didn't deserve the world of hurt that was about to come her way.

Taking a deep breath, Mac let it out slowly and tried to calm his thumping heart. There was no avoiding this conversation and he needed to be in full control to ensure that should Lily's wolf react badly, he'd be able to contain the beast before it became too feral.

"I was married once, a very long time ago." He paused and let the words sink in, giving his mate time to digest the news and taking an extra few deep breaths to calm himself further.

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"Her name was Maria and she had the sweetest, gentlest of dispositions. Her hair was only a shade or so lighter than yours and her eyes were a deep emerald green." Mac closed his eyes seeing Maria's smiling face as if he'd only seen her a few days before. Describing her to Lily helped him to remember his wife as she was and not how he'd last seen her. wWw.noVð()wotM.c©M

"When I was human I was a farmer, brash and not very good with ladies. I was rough and spoke little, but for some reason Maria saw through all that and found something worth loving in me. It was a different time then, Lily. Ladies didn't approach men and show their interest. I guess Maria got tired of waiting for me to court her and despite being so shy decided to court me."

Mac smiled, closing his eyes as he remembered the day he'd finished seeding the bottom pasture and made his way back to his modest holding. He'd been surprised to see what was obviously a lady's horse chewing grass in the nearest pasture. On further inspection, he'd noticed the small figure sitting on his porch steps with a cloth covered basket at her feet.

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Good day to you, Jonah," Maria called out, a shaky hand fixing a pretty deep green bonnet on her head. "I was in the area and thought I'd stop by. I was planning to find somewhere to rest and eat on this lovely summer's evening but was loathe to dine alone. I hope this isn't an inconvenience."

Mackenzie stared at the petite beauty before him, conscious of how hot and sweaty he was, and that she was a lady of worth, the Banker's daughter no less. Why had she travelled out of her way to his meagre holding? There was no way she had been in the area. He lived in a secluded spot far from town or neighbours.

"Begging your pardon for my state of undress, milady," he managed to stammer out when he remembered his basic manners. His chest was bare and he reached for his leather vest tucked in the waistband of his breeches. "If you give me a moment, I'll get cleaned up and presentable."