

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 13

Maeve POV

Xaden's body trembled with restrained rage as he carried me down a long hallway, past open gilded windows—where I could see the sun barely beginning to set—**draped** with red and gold—accented **curtains, and** paintings of what appeared to be royal portraits.

He didn't speak **a** word. Not even a sound.

Still, he captured my enraptured attention.

As I looked at **him**, I was hypnotized by the details of his handsome features—the surprising softness of his lips. the stubble that dusted above his upper lip. This close, I could even see a small scar across his prominent chin.

Faintly, I caught **a whiff** of his cologne, carried by the wind as he stormed through the mansion—a crisp, cool sort of scent that reminded me of lakesides and pine trees in **an** autumn forest. With a sigh, I burrowed into his chest, digging my thin fingers into the thick of his lapel, wanting **to** envelop myself in everything he was.

I could feel his heartbeat. Furious and wild against his ribcage.

He's angry, I thought in **the** silence. He's very angry.

Xaden brought us to a large door at the **end** of the corridor. With a kick from his booted foot, the door flew open and he strode inside, slamming it shut

once more with a powerful swing of his shoulder, isolating us from the rest of the mansion.

Looking around, it was apparent we were now inside the grand master bedroom—Prince Xaden’s private quarters. Shrouded in darkness, except for slivers of light peeking through the curtains, I could barely make out the details of the room. The only thing I could clearly see was a large canopy bed draped by blood-red silk curtains around each of the four frame posts, sitting against the far **wall** on a raised section of the room.

After placing me on the bed, he leaned his forehead against mine. I went still, not wanting to ruin this moment. He caressed the sides of my face, breathing long and deep, trying to calm himself down.

“Maeve.. I need answers.”

“What?”

“I’ve known you not even two days and yet, whenever I **find** you, someone is there to cause harm. I just...I can’t wrap my mind. around it.”

I opened my mouth to dispute him... but he was not wrong.

“Please help me understand, Maeve,” Xaden begged, clutching onto my arms with tight, white knuckles, but not enough to hurt me. The desperation in his voice twisted something inside me, and I felt compelled to tear my gaze away from his beseeching one. “Why does everyone treat you so horribly?”

“I don’t know...”

“I refuse to believe that they abuse you for no apparent reason,” he said sternly, clearly not wanting to take no for an answer. “They must have said something to you. Even the smallest of hints”

“I don’t know what to tell you.”

“You can tell me why you’ve avoided my eyes since we started talking”

Startled, I forced myself to **look** at Xaden.

Xaden watched me with careful consideration... “Do you think someone will come after you if you say something?”

I froze. He was getting closer to the truth. “N–No.

“Then I need you to be open and honest. Confide in me...trust me... please-

The fraught worry in his voice made me lose my composure, **and** I crumpled. “I can’t.”

He paused, his brow furrowing. “You can’t be open with me!?”

“No, I meant-“

You meant that you can’t **trust** me.”

The blood drained from my face as I realized my slip–up. I opened my mouth in the hopes of refuting him, but I was unable to find the words. I could still hear Father and Victoria whisper in my car, warning me what would happen if I ever exposed myself, and I suddenly found myself back at the house **that** haunted my dreams.

I... I couldn’t tell him the truth.

“I thought something was off in the car–I wanted to believe that maybe you still needed some time to breathe. maybe coming to my home would help you realize that you are not stuck inside that wretched house any longer.” All anger and desperation fell from Xaden’s face until there was nothing but pain, and I felt my heart clench. “But none of this means **anything** if you can’t trust me.”

I began to panic. Please don’t give up on me. I wanted to plead.

“Xaden, that’s **not** what I meant!” I gasped, lunging for his hand, falling to my knees in front of him.

He didn’t respond to my touch. He just knelt there, still like a statue.

“I do,” I said fervently with a quivering breath as tears began to pool. “I trust you more than anyone else in my life—more than you can ever begin to comprehend.”

He watched me through veiled eyes.

And, squeezing his hand, I looked back at him with all of my heart and soul, hoping he could see and feel my sincerity, even if he couldn’t believe it. “I want to tell you everything. I want to be able to live without this heavy burden and just be free... but I—I can’t.. not when it comes at the cost of others.”

Admitting all of this aloud only solidified what I feared the most.

“I...“I choked up, heavy with emotion, hanging my head, “I don’t think I can ever escape this...”

The room was silent for what seemed like forever until I heard a small sigh.

Xaden tilted my chin up so that I had no choice but to look at him, and then he pressed his lips against mine. Chaste and full of warmth but I could still feel his passion hidden underneath it, real and raw and wonderful. **His** gentle touch paralyzed me... this had to have been a dream.

It ended after **what** felt like forever and mere seconds all at once.

“Don’t cry,” he cooed, caressing my cheeks with soft swipes of his thumbs “If it **hurts too** much for you to talk about it, then I won’t ask anymore. But that doesn’t mean I won’t look into the matter myself.

I was stunned. “You kissed me...”

“I **did**,” he said, tucking stray strands of hair behind my ear. “Is that alright?”

Half-listening, I nodded vaguely in response. “W–Why did you do that?”

“Because I wanted to.”

My mind spun. No one ever said things like that to me. I was never the type of girl whose beauty turned heads...so, why did the prince go out of his way to **make** me feel like the most desired girl in the world?

He kissed me **again**. “This one is because you captivate me.”

My wet eyes fluttered shut and I sighed, melting into his touch.

“And this...” he murmured, kissing me once more—lingering and full of yearning. “is a promise... to protect you **and** always be there for you.”

A tear slid down my cheek, and I opened my eyes. As more began to fall, my vision blurred ever so slightly, but Xaden brushed them away. He might have said he was confused, but I was the one whose mind was left reeling uncontrollably. Ever since the night we met, he’d treated me with nothing but kindness.

This **wasn’t** because of the baby.

If anything, his learning about the pregnancy only seemed to enhance it.

“Why are you always so nice to me?” I whispered. I had an inkling of his feelings, but I needed to hear him say it. I needed to know it was not a figment of my imagination.

He cocked his head, bemused. “Why?” he repeated. “Because-”

A loud knock resounded at his chamber door. And just like that, the intimate moment we shared was gone.

Xaden huffed, impatient, as I blushed, suddenly remembering where we were, and who I was barricaded with. “Who’s there?” he growled.

“Ah—it’s Maggie, Your Highness.”

After a brief hesitation, he relented, “Enter”

Maggie let herself in and lowered her head in greeting. “The Alpha and his family have finished the wine,” she reported. “Not a drop is left and they are..” she struggled to find the appropriate word, “plastered”

Xaden blinked. “That...certainly was quick.”

“It wasn’t without help, my Lord.” Her face pinched with repulsion. “The guards brought funnels to speed up the process.”

I was suddenly glad that Xaden whisked us away when he did.

The mental image alone was enough to unsettle me.

Xaden, however, didn’t seem bothered in the slightest. “Thank you for informing me,” he said briskly. “Make sure their driver takes them home.”

“At once.” She made a move to leave the room, but stopped with her **hand** on the door.

He watched her. “Do you have anything else to say, Maggie?”

“Yes.. I’m sorry. Prince Xaden,” she murmured solemnly, sagging with shame so powerful even I could feel its weight in my chest. “It was my fault that Miss Maeve was left alone with those people. I thought it best to assist the Alpha and his family before my given duty.”

“Your duty precedes any judgment you might have. She’s important to me, and you need to learn that.”

“But what do I refer to her as?” she **implored**, anxious for answers.

For what he was about to say next, Xaden turned to face me, glowing with adoration.

“She’s my Luna.”