

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 21

Xaden POV

“How are you feeling?” I asked gently, gazing at Maeve as we sat together in the car.

We were within minutes of arriving in Moonstone and, the closer we got, the more she began to panic. Quick, shallow breaths that echoed in my ears, her knee bouncing like a jackhammer, her trembling hands picking at her fingernails until they almost bled.

I did not pretend to wonder why.

I fucking knew why she was frightened...**and** the reason made my blood boil.

Still, I forced myself to calm down. Breathe, slow and deep, when I could remember to. It was a helpful, little trick I'd learned during university, Practicing self-soothing techniques, such as steady, **mindful** breathing, would subconsciously encourage: others to do the same.

“I... I'm fine_” she mumbled, sounding distant.

The numbness in her voice made my heart pang.

I couldn't understand why she continued to hide herself **from** me like that. Everything in me yearned for answers so I could help her. but I was afraid. If I was too forceful with her, she might never trust me again... **she** might even leave me.

She kept picking at her fingers **and**, once I saw a small drop of blood, I grabbed her hand in mine and clasped onto it as tightly as I could, pressing my lips against her clammy skin.

I needed her to know I was with her every step of the way.

“Everything will be alright,” I swore to her with my whole being. “I will not let anything happen to you.”

Relief washed over me when she finally took a deep breath. And, slowly, she responded to my touch, further entwining her shaky hands with mine. “I know.” she whispered, putting on a **small** smile to appease me. “Thank you for doing this with **me**.”

“Don’t say **that**,” I said, firm but gentle. “There’s nowhere else I’d rather be.”

Soon enough, we parked **in** front of the Moonstone estate. Worried, I glanced at Maeve, wanting to make sure **she** was still up to doing this, but she **had** straightened all of her features into a **mask** of composure. She wanted to see this **through**.

I sighed we were doing this, whether I approved or not.

As soon as we exited the car, Alpha Burton and his Beta Minister, met **us** at the front door. “Welcome back to my home, Prince Xaden,” he greeted with a low, reverent bow, “and to you, my beloved daughter,” he added quickly.

It did not slip past me that neither his wife nor second daughter failed to show up.

“Is Sarah here?” I asked cautiously.

He cleared his throat. “Ah... yes, Your **Highness**,” he affirmed. “But she has sworn to be on her best behavior while you are visiting.”

I felt uneasy. “We shall see about that.”

With a nervous smile in response, Alpha Burton stepped aside to let us in and began to lead us through the estate to Maeve's room. I had never stepped foot inside the house itself before, but knowing how it was home to whatever torment she had endured growing up. I felt sick to my stomach, looking at all the furniture, walls, and floors she used to look at every day.

I couldn't help but wonder what she must have thought all those years... if she dreamed about finding happiness someday or if she **had** accepted a life with her family forever.

Once we passed **an** open **door**, Maeve suddenly stopped in her tracks.

I stopped as well, noticing how she had gone still when she stared inside the room, her eyes glazed over, lost and haunted by something unseen.

"Maeve?" I prodded. "Why are you standing here? We should be going to your room."

"This...this was my room," she whispered.

That made me freeze. I took a second glance over the space that really had no business even being considered a bedroom. There was hardly enough space for a bed and dresser, let alone to be able to move around comfortably. And there was only one window located at the top of the back wall, too far out of reach to **be** able to look out and barely big enough to bask **the** room with natural light.

This was her room? It was no better **than** a cell.

They dared to make her live in this?

"O—Our spare rooms were either cluttered or otherwise occupied, Your Highness," Alpha Burton stuttered his pathetic excuses, avoiding my silent but enraged glare. "But not to worry, all her things have been relocated to a new, better room."

She'll never have to come to this house again, I reminded myself firmly. She'll have anything she could ever want with me.

Gently, I ushered Maeve away from that unforgiving door and we continued to follow her father's lead until he stopped ahead of **a door** at the end of **a corridor**.

"Here we **are**," he said, sweeping the door open.

The new room was decent, but nothing noteworthy. Although roughly thrice the size of what the first room had been, and now with a sizable window to pair, it was evident everything **was** organized without a second thought. With its plain, scarce. decorations and lack of personal items, it was nothing more than a glorified guest room.

It was woefully apparent her father just wanted to save face.

Maeve and I entered the room and, when Alpha Burton moved to follow us inside, I **was** quick to block him with my arm. "Thank you. I'm sure we'll be able to handle the rest on our own," I said with a sneer, making it abundantly clear that he **was** no longer welcome around the two of us.

He paled "Y-Yes, sire," he mumbled with a quick dip of his head, and departed.

Maeve quickly got to searching the **room** and it wasn't long before she pulled out a small pouch hidden within one of her pillowcases. "It's still here," she breathed a heavy sigh of relief, cradling the pouch as if it were the most precious thing in the world. "Thank goodness.

Delicately, she opened it, revealing a rather unique silver pendant adorned with **a** large, purple crystal in its center.

I couldn't help but stare at it. "It's lovely," I complimented.

But... there was something about it that mystified me. The design was unlike anything else I had ever seen before, and as I looked closer, I thought I detected a faint glow that emanated from within the crystal.

Was it a reflection of the sun? A visual effect? I couldn't be sure, but one thing was certain: this was not typical werewolf jewelry. It might even have originated from a neighboring kingdom.

I frowned pensively, crossing my arms. Perhaps Burke could look into its origins.

"I see you found your new room."

The light, feminine voice that spoke made my skin instantly bristle with rage. This was someone I wanted nowhere near Maeve. Quickly, I snapped my gaze towards the doorway and saw her young sister, Sarah, holding a small tray with two glasses.

The nerve she **had**, showing up like this after everything she'd done.

I heard Maeve gulp quietly behind me. "Hello, Sarah," she said.

Sarah opened her mouth to speak, but I cut her off. "Well? Now you've seen her," I spat, startling her. I did not want to allow even **a** second for her to be able to sneak **a** jab at Maeve. "You got what you needed, now leave us."

To my surprise, there was something about her that was different today. She seemed... defeated, for lack **of** a better word.

But **that** was not **enough** to gain my sympathy.

"I know you're not happy to **see** me, but-"

"That's the understatement of the century," I scoffed. "First, you publicly humiliate your pregnant sister **at** your birthday party, and then you confront her at Mona Road and try to twist her mind with more of your lies. Tell me if that is not enough to justify my displeasure with you here."

Sarah flinched at my words but stood her ground. “I’m not here for you. I’m here for my sister,” she said determinedly.

“Have you considered **that** perhaps she does not want to talk to you?”

She pointedly tore her gaze away to look past me. “Maeve?”

A few moments passed before I heard Maeve sigh softly. “What is it you have to say, Sarah...?”

My chest tightened. Of course, she would hear her sister out, despite everything. She was too kind and timid to refuse.

“I... just wanted to apologize,” Sarah murmured, “for everything I’ve done.”

“You do?”

Sarah nodded. “I was jealous... and it brought out the worst in me,” she admitted. “And even though we don’t see eye to eye on many things, I do hope you can find happiness outside of Moonstone. You seem to be doing well enough now...”

Glancing at Maeve, her face seemed to light up. She sensed truth in her sister’s **words**. I wanted to believe she could gauge between truth versus hope, but this **was** Sarah we were **talking** about. I couldn’t trust a word she **said**.

“Thank you,” Maeve said with a small smile. “I appreciate **that**.”

“Oh. I also brought these for you both,” Sarah **said**, lifting the tray of water. “It’s stuffy in here, so I thought you might want something to sip on.” She placed it on Maeve’s bedside table. “I’ll **give** you two your space, then.” she trailed off. And with one final glance, she shut the door behind her.

Once I felt **certain** she was gone, I gazed at Maeve. “Are you sure that’s something you’re alright **with**?”

She looked exhausted. “I don’t **want** to hold onto any **grudges** or hatred.”

As we prepared to leave some time later, having gathered all of the personal belongings Maeve wanted to bring home, we each ended up taking a sip of the waters Sarah left behind, both feeling a bit of dry throat from the stuffiness of the room.

The moment the water hit my tongue, I was struck by an unusual earthy sort of taste but thought nothing of it. Strangely enough, the water did nothing to quench my thirst. In fact, it only seemed to make me feel even more hot...

Wait.

My heart began to pound furiously against my chest. Unnatural. Erratic.

Th–this is not normal...

All of a sudden, I caught a **whiff** of Maeve’s sweet scent, stronger and more potent than ever, and it completely intoxicated me. My mouth began to water **and** I found myself wanting to just take her.... but she was not in heat due to the pregnancy, and if I lost control, I could harm the baby!

This was not good...