

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 31

Maeve POV

“What do you think, Maeve?” Xaden murmured, gazing **at** me. “Are you alright with waiting to hold the mating ceremony?”

I couldn't even begin to describe how much I appreciated his desire for my opinion—no one ever gave a damn about my thoughts before he came along. Out of pure reflex, I nodded my approval. Only after he continued to discuss the matter with his father did it sink in what I had done.

I just agreed to officially become mated to Xaden.

The thought made my heart skip a beat. We were going to be married in less than a year, albeit with the Alpha King's tentative blessing.

To be honest, however, I wasn't sure how to feel about the whole thing in the first place. I didn't even know how these sorts of ceremonies really worked. For goodness' sake, I was barely even capable of navigating ordinary parties or gatherings.

The last one I attended stuck out all too well in my mind, how my entire family's social standing almost fell apart because of **me**.

Frantically, I wracked my brain **for** anything in my recent memory that would somehow help me mentally prepare for it. A faint recollection flashed in my mind of Alpha Prince Henry and Isabelle's mating ceremony, which my family had eagerly watched from the comfort of our home. I remembered it took

place in the Temple of Diana in the Royal Palace for loved ones and the most renowned Alpha ministers to personally witness, while also being televised for the rest of the kingdom to watch at their enjoyment,

And... that was where the memory stopped.

The moment Victoria realized I had paused my chores to catch a fleeting glimpse of the royal ceremony, she immediately began scolding and berating me. What happened in the palace was none of my business, according to her, and should never take priority over my duties at home, unless I was eager to spend a night locked away.

Her argument **was...** quite persuasive.

After that, any palace intrigue **that** reached me was instantly tucked away under lock and key. I never made it clear that I paid attention to anything, nor would I make any comments or ask any questions. I thought it would be a smart move on my part to disobey Victoria's advice.

Now, I detested how quick I was to keel over and obey. That extra bit of knowledge would have been so helpful right now!

"It's settled, then,"

The solemnity in **Alpha** King Arlan's voice pulled me back into the conversation. "The mating ceremony will be held before the year is up..." he **said**, raking over my pregnant belly, "after the pup has been born."

"Thank you, Father," Xaden said, nodding his head. And with that, the meeting was adjourned. Everyone was at their feet and preparing to leave the conference **room**.

"Much can happen in only a few months," the king said loudly as the two of us left the room, the knowing, foreboding tone in his voice making me falter. Warily, I glanced back at him and saw a hint of warning in his cold, green eyes. "Let us hope that this attachment of yours withstands the test of time."

My stomach twisted with unease. I did not like the look he gave me when he said that.

What did he mean by—t

All of a sudden, Xaden's presence once again **made** itself known beside me. "Don't listen to him, Maeve," he mumbled by my ear, the distaste in his voice apparent but contradictory to the warmth that radiated from his body. "He only means to frighten **you**."

With a **shaky** breath, I nodded, continuing to leave the room.

Yes, I thought, that makes sense. The king had made his thoughts about me very clear. He did not think me worthy of mating with one of his sons, especially one who had such an eminent claim to the throne as Xaden.

More than likely, he sought to intimidate me into fleeing with whatever scare tactics were at his disposal. It was **up** to me to prove him wrong. I could not let fear overpower my feelings for Xaden.

But how could I call it a simple fear when it reeked of nothing but truths?

Another presence materialized behind me, shielding me from the Alpha King's menacing, penetrating gaze. "Xaden's right," Princess Charlotte said reassuringly, my second conscience after Xaden, "don't let **our** father get inside head."

Something inside me calmed down as I found myself surrounded by these **two** people. I wasn't sure they were aware of the effect they had on me, and I wasn't sure I could explain it even if I tried.

Once we were well away from the king and that room, Xaden let out a loud sigh of relief, gazing gratefully at his little sister. "Charlotte, you were sent by the Goddess herself today. How could I ever repay you for your help?"

She smiled. "Think nothing of it," **she** chirped. "I'm happy you entrusted her to me."

“Thank you for everything. Your Highness,” I said earnestly, drawing her attention **back** to me. If it hadn’t been for her intervention. I would have made a fool of myself in every possible way. I **had** no idea how, but I owed her greatly for what she did.

“**What** did I say about the formalities?” she pressed, wrinkling her nose. “There is no need for any of that. If you need me, I’m here.”

The three of us exchanged pleasantries before Princess Charlotte bid us farewell, needing to finish some business of her own, **leaving** Xaden **and** me to our own devices in that hallway. As **soon** as we were finally alone, he pulled me **into** a tight embrace, breathing in my scent with long and deep inhaleds.

The sudden display of affection made my heart pound. “X-~~Xaden~~?” I questioned, startled but definitely **not** pulling away.

“I’m so sorry,” he murmured, his low voice rumbling in his chest and reverberating throughout my body. It was strangely comforting, enticing me to **wrap** my own arms around him. “I did not think this would turn into an attack on you.”

I frowned, digging my fingers into his shirt. My inner conflict was deeper than ever. Despite not having known him for long, I wanted nothing more than to be with Xaden and live happily and peacefully with our baby... but now that I was beginning **to** meet his family and I could see how deep the strain ran in their relationship, I couldn’t help but feel like my presence was only **making** things worse.

I was far from an ideal mate for him. In more ways than one.

That was made very clear to me over the last few days that I’d spent with him, and this meeting only further solidified that fear. Fated mates or not, marrying me would only humiliate everybody. There was no doubt I was well beyond the point of hoping for anything salvageable with my own family, and I didn’t want the same thing to happen to him.

He seemed to sense my mind was somewhere else, as he pulled away ever so slightly to look at me. "Talk to me, Maeve what's on your mind?"

After taking a long breath, I finally spoke up. "I feel like I'm tearing you and your family apart."

Xaden's brow creased... What?"

"I-I am," I stuttered, feeling tears sting at the **backs** of my eyes. It felt like **such** a foolish thing to worry about now that it was being said out loud, but it was all I could think about at that moment. "Your father disapproves of our union, and—and I-I don't want you to fight b—because of-

"Maeve," he cut me off urgently, cradling my face between his large, sturdy **hands**, "none of this is happening because of you. This all began long before you entered the picture. Don't even think about blaming yourself."

I gulped. "But..."

"Listen," Xaden said, more gently than before, sliding his hands down to my arms. "My father, unfortunately, is king... and, as such, he believes he has a say in every aspect **of** our lives, even when it does not concern him. For as long as I can remember, he has preached about finding mates that he deems worthy of the crown, not caring if we found happiness with them or not."

I frowned, immediately recalling the bitter dispute that exploded between Isabelle and Prince Henry just minutes before. They had been so quick to turn on each other and throw accusations, despite being the only married couple in the room. I thought she might have been happy to become a Luna Princess, but

I **wasn't** sure if the same could be said about her marriage behind closed doors.

"When I'm with you, I'm overwhelmed with feelings I never knew was possible." The warmth that radiated from him did wonders, but it was

difficult to dispel the doubts that crept up in my mind. “That’s why I don’t care what my father thinks. As long **as I** have you, I’m content. Isn’t that **enough...?**”

The question hidden within his words was apparent: Am I enough?

That was something I could answer without a moment’s **hesitation**. Wealth or status or any of those superficial things didn’t matter to me. As **long** as I was in the company of someone who cared about me and my baby, I would go to the ends of the world for them.

I nodded. “You are,” I murmured, and he visibly sagged with relief.

Xaden pressed **a** kiss to my forehead in response, not caring that we were still in the middle of an open hallway. At that moment, I didn’t care either, letting him show his affection for me before resting my head against his chest.

I needed to make this work. After being deprived of affection all my life and finally getting a taste for it, I’d become addicted.

I didn’t **know** what I’d do if I lost what we had.

A few moments of peaceful bliss later, we began to leave the palace hand in hand, when, all of a sudden....

“Xaden,” a gentle, regal voice called out, effectively stopping us in our tracks. This was a voice I couldn’t recognize, which set me on edge, my palms growing sweaty. I wasn’t sure if I could take another critical family member, but Xaden seemed unfazed. “You aren’t really going to leave without saying goodbye again, are you?”

His hand squeezed mine, a subtle reassurance for my slightly growing nerves.

“Of course not,” he said, smiling softly as he turned to greet the mystery woman. “Hello, Mother.”