

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 42

Maeve POV

“I’m so relieved to **have you** here, Maggie,” I exclaimed once we were finally in the car. “The car rides home **have** been so lonely the last few days.”

To be precise, it **had** been three days **since** my first almost disastrous meeting with Alpha King **Arlan** and the rest of the royal family. That was the day I was forced to enter the palace all by myself, due to the security restrictions prohibiting Maggie from entering without the proper, up-to-date clearance. Thanks to said rules, I had to face Isabelle’s jealous wrath alone, suffer wardrobe malfunction, and navigate the palace alone before and after my lessons with the Luna Queen.

But somehow, I **survived** those tedious three days and the time had finally come where Maggie’s new identity card arrived.

This meant today was the first in a while that she was able to pick me up from my lesson.

And what a pleasant surprise it was to see the Gamma housekeeper as I prepared to leave the palace.

She patted my knee affectionately. “You’re too kind, Miss Maeve,” she said. “However, **I’m** well aware of the you’ve made at the palace. It could not have been so bad without me there, could it?”

I sighed. “Friends or not, it’s always nice to see a familiar face.”

We spent the remainder of the car ride discussing in depth how my training with **Luna** Queen Leonora was faring, along with the news that there was to be a banquet in two days in my honor, to which Maggie seemed particularly jubilant... though she toned it down once she realized just how **nervous** I was.

Once we returned home, I went straight to the kitchen to fetch myself a cup of water.

However, I **had** not expected to see Xaden already inside and by one of the counters, **almost** as if he had been waiting for me.

“You’re **home**,” I breathed, unable to stop the smile that spread across my face. I did not think I would ever tire of the sight- coming home to someone who always lit up whenever they saw me. “Are you already done for the **day**?”

“I have a bit of time to kill before my next appointment, so I just had to stop by and see you,” he purred.

Honestly, it didn’t matter to me in the slightest anymore. He knew both of our schedules like the back of his hand and always managed to time things so perfectly that we **could** share any free breaks together. If we only had **one** hour, ten minutes, or even just five fleeting seconds, I would have taken whatever time he could spare. Just seeing him was **more** than enough to lift my spirits.

Xaden **had** somehow lodged himself so deeply in my soul, **that** I **couldn’t** even remember what it was like without him.

And I hoped I didn’t **have** to **again**.

“Before you say anything else...” he said with a growing grin, pulling a small container in front of him, “I brought you something.”

Despite playing coy, whatever was inside smelled phenomenal.

There was **such** an air of mystery and he seemed to **burst** with childlike excitement to **share** what was hidden inside. Curiosity bubbled within me, and I could not resist leaning in. “What is it?”

Xaden opened the container, revealing its mouthwatering contents. What he’d brought home appeared to be a hefty serving of spaghetti smothered with rich tomato sauce and little chunks of savory beef. I could smell the shreds of parmesan cheese mixed into the sauce the flecks of garlic scattered between the flaccid noodles. the faint scent of buttered bread used to scoop up some of the pasta. But I **could** also detect something else—something that made the back of my throat tickle with every inhale.

Pregnancy might’ve heightened my senses, but I couldn’t pinpoint this ingredient for the life of me.

Was it rosemary? Onion?

“I **had** to meet with an **ambassador** from a neighboring kingdom for lunch **today**,” he **explained**, putting the container on the kitchen counter. “She insisted on this lovely little corner bistro, so I thought I’d share some of my winnings with you.”

Oh, he had been with **a woman**. I couldn’t hide my unease.

I gulped. “**Was...** was she...?”

The corners of Xaden’s lips upturned ever so slightly. “She was over seventy years old,” he teased, savoring the embarrassed flush that rose on my cheeks. “And all she seemed to want to talk about was the good old days of her youth as a vixen.

Embarrassed, heat spread all over my **face**...but I couldn’t deny the relief I felt upon hearing **his** answer.

“Would **you** like to try?”

I nodded with a smile. I was willing to try anything he recommended to me.

Xaden then picked up a forkful of pasta and gestured for me **to** open my mouth, feeding me once I reluctantly obeyed, feeling admittedly a little awkward. No one ever offered to do that for me before, so I thought it **odd**, but it **was** impossible for me to say no when I **saw** how excited he was.

The moment the spaghetti hit my tongue, I could taste all those amazing flavors. all of the sauce, cheese, and herbs. A small moan slipped past my lips.

He grinned at me. “Delicious, isn’t it?”

Indeed, it was. But then I detected that ingredient that I couldn’t quite place earlier. And it was—um, it was.

“Are...are you alright? You’re turning red.”

I opened my mouth to try to placate him, but instead, I burst into a coughing fit, attacked by what seemed like thousands of tiny specks of spice.

That **was** no mere dusting of pepper.

Whatever was in that pasta had set every single one of my tastebuds aflame.

Xaden quickly paled. “Shit, shit, shit-“ he cursed, frantically throwing the fork aside like it was plague-ridden. With untapped desperation, he threw open every cupboard until he found a cup he deemed satisfactory enough for the job and filled it to the brim with chilled, filtered water.

Hastily, he rushed **back** over to where I stood, spilling nearly half of the water in the process. Despite myself, I couldn’t help. but giggle even as he pushed the cup into my hand, encouraging me to chug the entire thing. “**I’m** so sorry, Maeve” he fretted, **wide**-eyed. “**Y-You’re** not allergic, are **you?**”

“N–No, I–I’ve just never **had** spicy food before,” I coughed, unable to stop the startled laugh that slipped past my burning, tingling lips. How strange the sensation felt. “P–Please, don’t worry about it.”

However unpleasant the kick from that spice might have been, I bore no ill will against Xaden for sharing such a dish. How could he have known I’d **have** such a reaction? I certainly did not, and I honestly didn’t think too much of the blunder—what mattered the most to me was that he brought home something he thought I might **have** liked.

That only showed me just how thoughtful and considerate he was, despite not knowing much about my likes and dislikes, and opened my heart to him even more.

But Kaden did not share in my amusement.

Instead of laughing, he seemed to close himself off to me. The fright on his handsome face quickly morphed into pensiveness. That only served to dissipate the humor from the room, suddenly leaving me wary.

“Xaden, you’re not upset, are you?” I questioned hesitantly.

He responded with a slow **shake** of his head, but began to **back** away. “I...need to go,” he suddenly said, sounding somewhere **far** away as he retreated towards the front door. “I’ll be back soon, I promise.”

But he wasn’t.

He was gone for **hours**.

By the time evening **had** begun to roll around, I was stuck in our bedroom, waiting for him to return. Neither Maggie nor I had any idea how to contact him or where he’d suddenly disappeared to. All I could do was pace around the room and just hope and pray to the Moon Goddess that everything was alright with him.

With **us**.

That **look** on his face before he left...all serious and weighted with burden. Something about what had happened **deeply** bothered him.

And I felt like it was all my fault. Everything had been fine until I tried that food.

It suddenly became very possible that Xaden likely reached the same conclusion earlier as I had: despite everything we had been through together thus far, we still really knew nothing about each other. Maybe he just needed a breather after what happened, or maybe he finally came to his senses and was ready to leave me.

Something hot and thick pulled at my chest. Subconsciously, I halted in my tracks with a pained gasp.

I didn't **want** to believe it could be true, but how could I blame him for that?

No one would ever want to marry **a** stranger. let **alone** someone like me.

All of a sudden, the bedroom door burst open, startling **me** into looking up. To my shock and audible relief, it **was** none other than Xaden, who wore a look of fierce determination. The moment his gaze landed on me, he immediately softened.

He... he came back!

"There you are," he sighed, approaching me. "I've been looking for you."

"X-Xaden, I'm so sorry about earlier... with the food," I managed to splutter out despite my frayed nerves. "I-It just took me by sur- "

"Let's go out on a date tomorrow."

My mind blanked. Had I heard him correctly?

“What?”

He pulled my hands into his own, rubbing his thumbs gently over my knuckles. “Just you and me,” he murmured, **lacking** any of the disdain or detachment I had fully prepared myself to **hear**. “What do you **say**?”