

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 44

Xaden POV

I did it.

I asked **Maeve** out on a date—**no** guards, no chaperones, and absolutely no interruptions. Just the two of us on a proper outing like an ordinary couple. I couldn't believe that it had taken so long for me to do so.

But here I was, waiting in the grand foyer as she finished getting herself ready. Her request for a more low-key sort of date had thrown me somewhat off my game. The moment I decided to do this for her, I immediately began planning the whole **date** from beginning to end in my mind.

It was going to be perfect.

First, it would have been her choice to visit a prestigious art gallery or catch a show at a concert hall. Then, dinner reservations at L'Ambiance, the most romantic five-star restaurant in the capital, where we would have tasted a little bit of everything **and** shared dessert. And to finish, a private showing of the Luna Queen's beloved butterfly garden, which was only open one season out of the year, **and** only the most exclusive, esteemed guests were allowed entry.

I was going to spoil Maeve and show her just how she deserved to be treated.

But then she came up with her own ideas... **and** they were the complete opposite of what I had planned.

So here I was, wearing a simple button-up shirt, sleeves rolled up, and an ordinary pair of trousers like I was a mere commoner.

Well as close to dressing like a commoner as I could get. I never needed to keep such attire in my closet before, so it was admittedly quite a struggle to come up with some semblance of an outfit that would **draw** as little attention as possible. But this was what she'd wanted... and I couldn't begin to fathom denying the sparkle in her eyes when she voiced the idea aloud, so I was determined **to** do what I could to please her.

I don't know why I'm overthinking this... it's not like I'm meeting her for the first time.

Although, now that I thought about it, I supposed I was in some sort of way.

Before this, I had somehow taken her presence for granted. On that first night, the rest of our lives together had begun. She was mine and it was as simple as that. Everything else would fall into place just as easily, I figured.

But after that incident with the spice yesterday, I realized that there should be more to our relationship than just acknowledging **and** securing our future together. That was not good enough anymore, and it was time for me to turn my words into actions.

I wanted **to** savor the time I had with **her**.

Especially after discovering that I might actually 1-

"Oh—I'm so sorry for taking so long!" Her soft, delicate voice floated down the hall as dainty footsteps hurriedly rushed toward me.

Chuckling, I turned to face **her** and was fully prepared to offer some sort of **reassurance**, but any words I had planned to **say** stalled in my throat the moment I laid eyes upon her.

Like something out of a **dream**, Maeve ran towards me, wearing a romantic sage-green sundress with a heart-shaped neckline that swept off her shoulders and puffed sleeves up to her elbows. The skirt flowed beautifully and gracefully around her knees with every step, making her look like an angel bounding through heaven's meadows. Her long, black **hair** draped over her clavicle in loose, bouncing waves, much unlike her normally straight hair.

And as she got closer, I noticed something different about her face. The freckles I loved to look at were hidden underneath a thin layer of powder—just barely enough to tone them down a bit, and her black eyelashes and pink lips seemed more pronounced than ever, yet still subtle enough to look **natural**.

She... did all this for our date.

“Th—The makeup took longer than I expected...” she stammered breathlessly once she stopped, her gaze darted around before settling on me in all their blue brilliance. Suddenly, I was paralyzed. “Did you wait long.”

“You...” I murmured, faltering as I struggled with the words, “you look like nothing I’ve ever seen before.” As she blushed, I straightened myself. “You must be my date. I am utterly enchanted to meet you.” I said, pulling her hand to my lips so I could press a soft kiss against her knuckles.

Her brow creased with confusion, **making** for an adorable sight. “Yes,” she answered slowly, despite the growing **upturn** of her rose-tinted lips as she whispered a confused: “What’s going **on**?”

Fully intending to stay in character, I feigned innocence. “I’m afraid I’m not sure what you mean. I’m just an ordinary man who wants to experience a simple, quiet day out with his beautiful companion,” I answered gently. “**You** may call me Xaden.”

Her eyes lit up “I’m Maeve.”

with understanding **as** she dipped her head in a pretend greeting “Nice to meet you, Xaden,” she said, giggling.

The sound made my heart skip a beat. I wanted to hear more.

“If you’re ready, I have great plans for us today.” I gestured towards the front door. “Do you trust me?”

Maeve smiled, shy but filled with promise. “Yes, I do.”

Maeve POV

“A grocery store?” I turned to Xaden, surprised. “We’re buying food?”

This was, apparently, our first stop of the day: a small shop on the edge of Mona Road. Despite the normalcy of the location, the butterflies in my stomach fluttered. Being the hopeless romantic I was, I could think of only one activity that involved such a thing, and if my suspicions proved correct...I couldn’t wait.

It might have been simple, but this was everything I wanted.

Xaden hummed in response. “And please, don’t be shy about what you want,” he said. “Show me everything that speaks to you.”

Everything that spoke to me?

To be honest, I wasn’t entirely sure what would and wouldn’t speak to me. All I had ever eaten before he whisked me away were what my family refused to eat, or any leftovers from their plates. This was going to be as much a learning experience for me as it was for him.

I led us through the store, stopping in aisle after aisle and picking up a random assortment of food and snacks, both that sounded genuinely appetizing and others that I had no clue what they tasted like.. but had a strong curiosity to try.

All the while, Xaden paid keen attention, looking adorably focused.

As soon as we finished our shopping, we approached the counter to pay.

Upon seeing the prince, the grocer **had** come very close to bursting our little bubble of privacy, but quickly fell silent after a look from **Xaden**. Any shock or awe she felt in his presence disappeared and she kept all questions and comments to herself, allowing us to buy our groceries in peace.

Once our business at the store was done, we pulled up **to a park** on the outskirts of the capital, where all I could see were large beautiful trees obscuring **the** far horizon and numerous wildflowers scattered in bunches across the long stretch of grassy fields.

Something about it almost reminded me of the strange dreamscape I had become familiar with over the last few nights.

“Shall we?”

Xaden’s sudden question pulled me back to reality. As he offered me his **hand** while **carrying a** basket in the other, I saw nothing but pure adoration as he waited expectantly for me. Grinning, I grabbed onto him and followed his lead into **the** park.

“So... Maeve,” he murmured, swinging our hands as we strolled together. “Tell me more about yourself.”

I bit my lip. “Um...what should I **talk** about?”

“Anything you want,” Xaden said. “Anything that you’re passionate about.” He paused before elaborating his thoughts. “Tell me about your favorite

books," he suggested helpfully. "What are your favorite genres and what draws you to them?"

A simple question at face value, but it unleashed loaded answers.

"Well... I can't pick out any specific genre," I admitted. "But I love reading anything that immerses me **in** another world."

He gazed at me softly. "They were your escape?"

I nodded. "They were my way of experiencing things I never would've otherwise."

"What else did you hope to experience, apart from ponies in the park or **walks** on the beach?" he pressed, eager for more.

Our conversation flowed with ease, even as Xaden pulled to a stop in a secluded, yet safe shadowy area and arranged a blanket for us to sit on. For what seemed like hours, all we did was snack and chat. We would take turns asking questions about different things, and the other would answer **as** best we could.

As I moved to grab an apple, a loud, unfamiliar voice suddenly spoke up, startling me with a visible jolt.

"Oh, those rumors about Prince Xaden's mystery girl? I'm not sure I believe them."

Glancing behind Xaden, I saw two young women strolling mindlessly around the park, seemingly unaware of anyone else's presence but their own. They were too absorbed in their conversation to notice anything else.

I let out a small sigh of relief, but kept my guard up.

Noticing I had become distracted, Xaden was quick to block my view of the **two** women. "Don't worry about them," he murmured, tucking some loose hair behind my ear. "It's just you and me here."

With a stiff smile, I nodded. But I wouldn't calm down until they were gone.

"What?" the second woman questioned. "You don't find the rumors incredibly romantic? It sounds like a modern-day fairytale at play!"

"No girl could possibly catch the eye of someone as magnificent as he," the first woman muttered, prompting my face to fall bit. "It's unthinkable! He wouldn't **give** anyone the time of day unless they were rich, had goddess-like beauty... or if she was putting out."

"That's a good point, actually..."

Something twisted inside me as their rude gossip echoed in my ears. So, **that was** what people thought about me. Not that genuine feelings were involved or that there was even the slightest chance **that** someone as desirable as Xaden could fall for someone **as** undesirable **as** me.

They thought I **was** loose.

I **mean...** I figured that would be the **case** long ago, but it still hurt to hear.

Suddenly, their footsteps grew louder and their figures steadily moved closer. They were heading in our direction! Even if they hadn't noticed **us** yet, it was only a matter of time before we caught their attention.

Panic swelled within me.

I didn't want to be seen—not yet!