

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 47

Maeve POV

It is just a dinner.

As I sat in the center of the palace banquet hall, feigning confidence **as** I sipped my water **as was taught**, surrounded by Xaden and his younger siblings while they engaged in light conversation, I tried to breathe.

Alpha **King** Arlan and Luna Queen Leonora were a distance away at the head of the table, speaking with their eldest son, and I continued to inhale... **long**, slow, **and shaky** as I feebly tried to calm my nerves.

It's only a dinner, so relax and think of something else.

Shockingly enough, I would find my advice to be easier said than done. Everything I saw and breathed just reeked of wealth and status and pure alpha bloodlines and I felt more than ever that I did not belong.

Even more so than I ever did in Moonstone.

Who on earth was I trying to fool with my nonsense? Considering that every member of the immediate royal family would be in attendance and that I was to employ every etiquette rule I had learned over the last few days, **it** became extremely apparent that this was way more **than** just a dinner. It was yet another test I needed to pass, regardless of what Xaden or his mother tried to say otherwise.

I was just a waste of space here.. a fraud-

“Just breathe, Maeve,” Xaden murmured by my ear, the calm in his deep voice magically enticing me to obey his words despite my pitiful attempts mere minutes before. “You trained for this for days with my mother, and I’ve seen the change in you, even if you don’t feel it just yet. You can absolutely do this.”

I twisted to gaze at him, seeing nothing but sincerity.

“Tonight is all about you,” he said. “And I know you’ll blow us all away.”

Setting my jaw, I forced myself to nod in agreement. The queen had repeated many a time about maintaining a strong, invulnerable composure when in the company of nobility. Ally or not, anyone could—and would—find my weaknesses **and** exploit them for their benefit, if given the opportunity.

Not that I necessarily believed these three people would do that... but this **was** not about what I believed. This was about practicing what I learned

If I didn’t get the hang of this, I might find myself tangled with the wrong person.

“So, Maeve,” Lucas chirped, nursing his wine as he shifted his posture. Tonight, in his navy-blue suit, he looked more like a prince than ever, much unlike the youthful, bright-eyed young man I encountered in the palace hallways. “This week marked your first-time setting foot inside the palace, correct?”

I nodded.

“How has it been for you? I know it can be pretty daunting to newcomers,” he **added** with a tinge of sympathy.

I couldn’t help but think how kind it was of him to ask. “It was daunting at first... but actually,” I mused with a small smile, “I’ve had a nice time here so far.” I went on to describe **how** much I admired all of the beautiful artwork

and architecture, and how it felt like exploring a new world every time I arrived.

And, of course, I had to attribute my positive experiences to some of the people I had met thus far, from Charlotte to Lucas

And **that** was when the realization hit me.

Someone was still missing from the banquet

“Eric’s not here yet,” I pointed out. The subsequent exchange of glances and unspoken communication between the siblings did not slip past me—they seemed to know something that I did not. “Is he **not** coming after all..?”

Xaden started to answer. “Eric does not-

“**Chances** are he won’t come.”

Having suddenly appeared **near** our end of the table, Henry sighed with a lowly shake of his head, feigning sympathy. “That poor failure I’m forced to call brother can **hardly** carry his own head around on that scrawny body of his. If he’s feeling under the weather, he won’t be able to lift even his little finger, let alone lug himself out of bed.”

Charlotte looked uncomfortable. “That’s not fair of you to say. It’s **hardly** his fault he has to miss events so often.”

“I disagree,” Henry said with a casual shrug. “One’s weak constitution is **not** an issue of the body, it’s one of the mind. He **just** doesn’t care enough to even try to better himself. He’s an embarrassment to Father’s legacy.”

The bluntness **with** which he spoke startled me, but before I could even think to react, I felt a cold presence materialize behind me, while his siblings dealt with his rude comments before he retreated back to his seat.

“Hello, Maeve.”

Immediately, my skin crawled with unease. I did not want to do this—I was not ready to meet with Isabelle yet... not after how deeply she had humiliated me with her little test, but even I knew I was only attempting to delay the inevitable. She was mated to Xaden's eldest brother, after all, so we were destined to run into each other more often than not.

I took a deep breath, steeling myself.

If we were going to be part of the same family, we could **not** always resort to **rudeness** or **hostility**. And that meant either one or both of us needed to take the first step towards some sort of reconciliation.

If I needed to be the first to do so, then so be it.

Once I had somewhat composed myself, I turned to face her with a small, cordial smile. "Hello, Isabelle," I greeted with a stiff curtsy, remembering what else the Luna Queen had taught me. Regardless of age, even if we were to have the same title, she **was** married to Xaden's elder, which in turn meant that she was **also my** elder,

Her gaze washed over me. "You look lovely tonight."

I blinked, having not expected that. **Still**, I wouldn't let my guard down with her. History taught me otherwise. "Thank you... **as** do you."

Despite her ugly personality, she was indeed quite pretty. Her blonde hair was pinned up in a classy bun on top of her head, allowing for loose strands to frame her delicate heart-shaped face, and her makeup looked like it had been hand-painted by a master, illuminating her icy blue eyes—cold and desolate of any affection for her fellow women. And the dress she wore was exquisite: a sleek, glamorous deep red that clung to her slender body in all the right places while still being modest.

Perhaps in another universe, she could have been the envy of the kingdom.

"Thanks," she said off-handedly, as if she already knew that.

For the next few minutes, as the others pulled me back into their conversation, she **took** her own seat next to her husband, either making some small remark here or there, or idly minding her own business.

It wasn't long before, all of a sudden, Isabelle let out an abrupt giggle, grabbing our attention.

"Apologies," she **said**, waving her hand. "I just had a silly thought."

Charlotte raised a curious eyebrow. "What about?" she inquired before **taking** a small, delicate sip of wine.

Isabelle wrinkled her nose with a coy smile. "I really shouldn't say," she said. "I was just reminded of something from the past."

The moment those words left her mouth, I got an uneasy feeling, thinking she would once again try to bring up something **that** regarded my behavior in Moonstone. But when she did **not** say anything further, Xaden and Lucas exchanged quiet mutters of bewilderment.

"Very well, then..." the younger brother pointedly trailed off, before switching his gaze to me. "Maeve, do you like porterhouse steaks? Our chefs are renowned for their masterful skills on the grill, and it happens to be one of their specialties **for** this evening. If you'd like, I could recommend my favorite side dishes to pair."

Admittedly, I did not know what a porterhouse steak **was**, but it sounded delicious.

I opened my mouth to answer, but was quickly cut off.

"Then again, I think I should say it," Isabelle interjected thoughtfully, swiveling her gaze to me with intent. "Maeve, none of this would mean anything if you didn't feel comfortable here. This is your first dinner with the family, so I firmly believe that you should feel your very **best**."

I blinked. That sounded suspiciously considerate of her to say.

How uncharacteristic of her.

Isabelle smirked. “So then, why don’t you serve the food with the other omega servants?” she asked casually, knowing exactly how to strike me right where it hurt. “That way, it’ll feel more like home for you.”

That... was a very low blow.

Very few people in this room knew about that detail from my past. I hadn’t even divulged that truth to the Luna Queen yet, though I supposed it cleared any confusion **she** might have still **harbored** about me. And, indeed, as I took a quick glance around the room, I witnessed varying expressions of outrage, shock, and disbelief.

The Alpha King, especially, glowered with obvious displeasure. He elected not to speak, but I did not need him to. I could imagine exactly what he was thinking underneath that crown of his. They were things I heard every single day of my childhood.

But I’d had enough.

I wasn’t going to let her **taunt** me any longer. Moonstone was **long** behind me, and I was sick of hearing others bring it up in pathetic attempts to humiliate me for whatever stupid gain they sought.

It was about time I reclaimed some **control** over myself.

To hell with whatever Isabelle thought of me.