

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 48

Maeve POV

As Isabelle smirked at me from behind her wine glass, the truth was made more apparent to me than ever.

She had only pretended to be **cordial** in an attempt to lower my guard. And chances were, **if I** somehow managed to circumvent my sister's party and that tussle with her friend, and instead met Isabelle immediately after Xaden rescued me, then that jab would have done exactly what she intended.

But little did she know, this was not my first time trapped in the wolf pit.

"Y-You know what?" I muttered through gritted teeth, scrunching the skirt of my dress with tight, white knuckles. Meanwhile, Isabelle peered down at me with an arched brow, daring to continue my train of thought.

And to be honest, my first instinct was to shut up and cower.

Perhaps the Maeve from a **month** ago—maybe even five days ago—would have backed down. I could just picture how it would have happened, how I would have rolled over at even the slightest sign of resistance and exposed my belly like a docile, pathetic pup.

Maeve of Moonstone was pliable... someone easy to push and play around with when one wanted entertainment.

But **I** was not the same girl I **was** a few days ago.

I straightened myself, mustering as much courage as was physically possible.

“I... I don’t regret a single second of it. All those years living in that house showed me everything I knew I wanted out of life **and** everything I should never be. Living there helped me learn the importance of kindness and humility—something you could stand to learn a thing or two about,” I snapped with a cold glare directed straight at her, feeling far from the girl I was a week **ago**.

“And what could I possibly gain from that?” she drawled, unimpressed. “None of those will win me any favors among fellow alphas.”

I shrugged. “On the contrary, I think you could gain plenty. For starters, you could find some friends to keep you company,” I retorted. “Then you would have something better to do with your time than pick on others, since your duties as a Luna Princess clearly aren’t enough to **satisfy** you.”

Immediately, her face reddened with fury as a **thick** vein throbbed in her forehead. She did not appreciate my insinuation in the slightest. Part of me wished I could say that I felt even a little bit of pity for her, but that was difficult to do behind all the adrenaline that coursed through my veins.

“Like you would know anything about having friends or duties,” she spat. “You’ve only been here less than a week, and you’re already acting like you own everything”

“I have never claimed such a thing.” I countered, unable to stop, ignorant to the stunned faces at my side. “But your behavior is nothing like **what** I expected a Luna Princess to be like. I always imagined they were someone to look up to, someone who cared about her people... but I never thought I’d meet one who was so juvenile.”

Her eyes practically bulged out of her head the moment those words left my mouth.

And, if I was perfectly honest with myself, I couldn't believe my own audacity.

With impeccable timing, the kitchen doors blew open as carts stacked with food came rolling out before Isabelle could attempt a response. **That** was probably for the best, too. By the time I had finished my verbal assault, I was shaking with adrenaline so fervently that I couldn't focus on anything else.

What just happened, **that** was so unlike me...

I didn't think I could manage something like that again.

"That was fantastic, Maeve," Charlotte whispered next to me with a wide, mischievous **grin**, while Lucas held up a proud thumbs-up. "I almost wish I'd taken a picture of her face when you'd said that"

I smiled weakly in response, not quite sure how to feel about it.

As the servants placed the different dishes of food on the table, I **suddenly caught** a whiff of something strong that made my stomach churn. An uncomfortable sort of movement that was most decidedly not hunger. It took over my body, quick and unforgiving.

Whatever had been wheeled out on those carts.. I needed to stay away from it.

Xaden leaned in close, thankfully having realized something was wrong. "Maeve, you've gone pale," he murmured wide-eyed, caressing my back with slow, soothing strokes. "Do you not feel well?"

Suddenly overcome with strong waves of dizziness, I shook my head with a quiet groan. I could feel my skin start to grow clammy.

From the second the scent hit my nose, I knew what the culprit was

For some reason, I was highly sensitive to fish and rare-grade meats—an aversion that I was quick to discover while I tried to explore the farmer's

market at Mona Road with Maggie all those days ago—and the table was stacked full of grilled salmon and beautifully cooked steaks of varying degrees. I had never had any problems with either delicacy before, so I could only credit it to being a side effect of my pregnancy.

That was a problem. I still knew astonishingly little about how to handle situations like this, pregnant or not.

And to top it off, if the food was not taken out of the room within the next few minutes, I knew without question that I was bound to throw up in front of the entire royal family that I was desperate to impress.

I refused to let that happen.

Come hell or high water, I would not throw up in front of the royal family.

“Can someone please remove those dishes...?” I begged, trying my best to get the words out while I focused on breathing. “I don’t like fish or rare beef”

Isabelle gaped at me. “You cannot be serious,” she muttered, sounding offended. “Are your standards honestly set so high that even the food prepared by our hard-working palace chefs is not good enough for you?”

“W-What?”

“**All** this work that everyone put into pleasing you, **all** in the hopes that **you** might respect the effort put forward to welcome you to our home—**and** what do you do? You ask for food to be removed before you even try it.” She shook her head with a woeful, disappointed frown. “How very humble of you.”

My sensitive stomach sank. That knowing look in her eyes told me everything—she had planned this from the start....she might have even specifically requested for **those** potent dishes to be made. Not only did she want to humiliate me, but she also intended to vilify me in front of everybody

I couldn’t understand it. Why did this girl hate me so much?

The only connection we had, apart from this, was our fathers' longtime acquaintanceship. I hardly even knew her.

Charlotte rushed to my side, brushing hair out of my face. The cool touch of her fingers was surprisingly a great help. "Don't be ridiculous, Isabelle," she scolded incredulously, "this has nothing to do with standards, she's just-

"Don't let her fool you," Isabelle said, pointing a sneer at me, only further solidifying what I had already suspected. "She's using whatever excuses she has at her disposal to win you **over**. Tell me, how can someone who preaches about kindness and humility then go on to refuse any food that is graciously served to her?"

"She's carrying my baby," Xaden emphasized, raising his voice and sounding every bit as threatening as was possible. "That food is making her unwell. Goddess forbid, if anyone shows leniency towards my pregnant Luna!" he exclaimed, exasperated.

Isabelle scowled. "That's no excuse for entitlement."

"Henry!" he spat with ire, despite his refusal to leave my trembling side. "Control your impossible, irrational woman or so help me, **you** will have **me** to deal with once this is all over!"

Fear rose within me. I didn't want him to start **fight**s because of this!

I wouldn't forgive myself if he **got** hurt because of me.

The blatant look of distaste Henry threw at his brother, however, **was** impossible to miss. It had become more than apparent that he cared nothing for his angry little brother's threats or was ready to take on the challenge, even if it ruined the banquet. Either way, he was more than willing to let the chaos ensue and allow his wife to do whatever she pleased, all just to spite Xaden.

But when our eyes met across the table...

Something **happened**. I wasn't sure if he saw my apprehension regarding a potential fight or if it was how I struggled to fend off my nausea **or** some sort of combination of the two... but something softened in the harsh contours of **his face**.

And just like that, I seemed to have another—completely unexpected—**ally**, even if only for the moment.

Henry sighed, rubbing a tired hand through his brown **hair**, looking very similar to his father with that gesture. “Isabelle,” he called out, “you can stop your little games now. Leave the poor girl alone.”

“No,” she scoffed. “I hardly think I'm the one being irrational here. She's the one making a fuss about food.”

There was **no** sign of her giving up, even with Henry trying to talk her down. I worried Isabelle would stubbornly stick to her guns until **the** banquet came to **an** end.

That was, however, **until Alpha** King Arlan intervened.

“That's enough,” his tired, gruff voice spoke up, silencing the room. I waited with bated breath, worried he would decide to target me until his gaze ultimately swung over to the other guilty party. “I don't want to hear another word out of you tonight, Isabelle !”

I blinked.

He was scolding Isabelle?