

# The Hidden Luna Queen

## Chapter 50

### Maeve POV

The moment Prince Eric made his presence known, the banquet hall fell dead silent. No one dared to speak a word, breathe, or make even the slightest sound.

Or perhaps that was just me. I really couldn't tell anymore.

To be honest, **I had** no idea what to expect from his sudden entrance. Every rumor I had ever heard indicated that he was **either** not on **speaking** terms with his family or was merely **too** sick and feeble to attend **anything** that involved public appearances. But if what Eric had told me himself was the goddess-given truth.. about how he was the black sheep of the highly regarded royal alpha family and was shunned for not living up to their expectations, then we were going to have a real problem on our hands.

For all I knew, Alpha King Arlan **would** throw him out. Or someone **would** instigate a fight in the middle of the banquet hall. And if someone were to attack him in front of me... what was I supposed to do...?

Good goddess.... what was I supposed to do if any of those horrifying **possibilities** happened? None of the lessons I'd been taking with the queen covered that.

My stomach sunk with dread at the mere thought.

This was my informal initiation into the family. If I chose to defend him despite whoever opposed me, I could risk further damaging what little relationship I had with everyone and my marriage to Xaden could very well be on the chopping block. But if I stayed silent for the sake of neutrality, then that would hurt poor Eric, who would not hurt even a fly.

Either way, chances were that the evening could end in catastrophe. I was utterly petrified for both **him** and myself.

Amid the awkward silence, however, one person chose to speak up.

“Eric, you decided to join us, after all,” Luna Queen Leonora murmured, giving off the faintest whiff of surprise as she rose to greet her son, albeit with abundant grace and poise. “I thought you were **not** feeling well enough to be here.”

His **gaze** nervously darted around the room, but he nodded. “I... I wanted to officially welcome Xaden’s new mate. I thought it best she heard it from me personally...” he faltered, glancing up at me. “I-I **hope** that was alright”

That was directed at me. He was looking for my approval.

Again, I couldn’t help but be reminded of myself. So hungry for the approval of others.... **even at** the cost of what little dignity we had

I fully prepared to open my mouth, but I was cut off by another eager voice.

“Actually,” Henry spoke up, haughty and full of derision, “I **think** we were perfectly fine as we were.”

The younger siblings visibly shifted uncomfortably in their chairs, not seeming to agree with their eldest brother but were unsure what to do. It was Xaden, however, who attempted to intervene with an agitated huff.

“Henry, don’t-”

“It’s alright, you don’t need to pretend you like him **just** because your mate is here,” Henry interrupted, quick to stop Xaden. “I think I speak on everyone’s behalf when I say that we don’t need this pathetic alpha here.”

The Luna Queen gaped, embarrassed by her son. “Henry-

“No.”

Shocked, the whole room suddenly turned to me, **and** that was how I found out that I was the one who had interjected. Mortification crawled up my throat I didn’t even **realize** I had gotten angry enough to speak up, but I could feel it in my chest, hot and thick and unmistakably eager for a reason to be let out. I felt all the color drain from my face with all this conflicting attention, but it was too late now,

“N-No,” I repeated as firmly as I could muster. “I want you to join us. Please.”

Once he realized he had my approval, Eric cautiously took his place in the remaining open seat and proceeded to nibble with us. And so continued whatever conversations had paused just minutes prior. As the dinner went on, **however**, whenever there was an opening for Henry to make some sort of off-handed comment at his brother’s expense, he would take it with **much** gusto.

Everybody, even Xaden, **just** sat there, tiredly accepting it all.

But the Alpha King was the only one who seemed the most neutral. In fact, one might even say that he didn’t care about what was **said**.

I sat on what felt like thousands of painful pins and needles, waiting for any sort of sign that Eric would try to defend himself against his brother. It didn’t matter what it was—if he was able to throw some classy backhanded response or even a simple “stop” to put an end to Henry’s rude remarks, that would have been enough, **but...**

But...he did nothing. Not a single thing, even as dinner turned **into** dessert.

He just sat there and took it all. Absorbed it like a sponge, and every insult Henry hurled at him was a splash of water.

But even sponges have their limits, I thought. Surely, he would tire of the harassment and speak up for himself before the evening was over. I was sure his siblings would have enjoyed the sight of their eldest, obnoxious brother's ego **getting** kicked down by a few notches.

I knew I would have loved to see Eric take a stand. Do what I never had the courage to do in front of my own family.

But it never happened.

Outside of the banquet hall, as everyone began to depart, Eric approached Xaden and me. "Thank you for letting me join you, Maeve," he murmured, his gaze flickering between me and the floor. "It was... nice to see you again."

Something inside me both warmed up and deflated at the same time upon hearing him say that

"There's no need to thank me," I insisted. "I was happy to have **you** there."

Pensiveness suddenly marred his face as he glanced behind me towards the open banquet hall door. "At least you were," he said with a small smile.

After Xaden quietly apologized to him for the rude remarks made by their older brother **and** Eric had already begun to retreat to his room, Henry left the banquet hall, followed by his wife.

The moment his lazy gaze caught sight of Eric, I got this horrible, sick feeling in the pit of my **stomach**.

"Good riddance," Henry spat as he strolled past me without a care in the world, glaring a hole into the back of his younger brother's slim silhouette. And it was like the ground quaked beneath me. "Crawl back to your hole, you freak of nature."

The cruel choice of words was horrifying. I'd had enough.

Even if the hate was not directed at me, I could not stand another second of the abuse. I had just escaped a house where I was forced to accept it as my reality, where even after my days of freedom and love in Xaden's home, I struggled to free from my family's dirty clutches. It took a long time for me to even begin to tear apart at their intricate web, and I wanted mind my more than anything to help Eric out of his.

So, while Xaden chastised his brother, I stormed through the hall, desperate to share a piece of my mind.

But not to any of the princes.

No. My blind fury led straight to Alpha King Arlan, who was just leaving the banquet hall with Luna Queen Leonora, as I ignored Xaden's calls. "Why haven't you done anything to help Eric?" I demanded.

He **regarded** me slowly, almost with disbelief. "Excuse me?"

"Maeve," Xaden interjected, grabbing onto my arm with wild, worried eyes, his mother mirroring a very similar look on her face. "What are you doing?"

And just then, it dawned on me just what was happening—I was actually picking a fight with the king himself. I could get into serious trouble if I said even the slightest insult to him. I could lose everything.

But I couldn't stop.

It was like I was possessed by some vengeful spirit, desperate to have her voice heard.

"D—During dinner," I said as I lost momentum, frantically trying to gather my **thoughts** in the process, "Henry kept saying such awful things about Eric in front of everybody and you... you just let it happen. Why?"

His lip curled in response. “Why should I intervene? It’s an issue between brothers.” I couldn’t help but gape at the king. “Eric is not just some scapegoat for you or anyone to unleash your anger upon,” I spat, desperately trying to ignore the tremors that shook my body, “he’s your son. And he has the same rights as any of your other children, no matter how **you** feel towards **him**.”

**The** Alpha King did not say a word. He just watched me... very carefully.

“Do you think they asked for the weight of your crown on their shoulders?” I continued, letting this angry spirit keep control **over** me. “You’re the one who **placed** such impossibly high standards on your children.”

“I only **want** what is best for my children,” he growled, low, a warning. **Xaden’s** grip tightened around me.

I shook my **head**, not tearing my furious gaze away. “Neither Eric, Xaden, nor anyone else in this family needs to improve on anything, I insisted. “You’re the one who needs to fix themselves. Be a better father to m—to them!”

Having said everything I needed to say, I froze, heaving and shaking profusely like I had just run a marathon.

But no one else dared to speak up in **the silence**.