

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 53

XADEN POV

“Well..” Henry slumped back in his chair with a huff. “I’m certainly glad that’s over with holding a meeting after a long night is always rough”

It just so happened that, the morning immediately following the banquet, the two of us were scheduled to hold a brief, private conference regarding our men stationed near the border. With tensions increasing every passing day between us and the Hear Shifters, it didn’t hurt to err on the edge of caution, which we both agreed was the best course of action

The timing, however, was indeed rather inconvenient

“Tell me about it,” I drawled, crossing my arms, “Last night, Maeve was,,,”

Henry released a loud sigh as he rubbed a hand over his tired face, drawing my keen attention, And, for the first time that morning, the prominent circles under his eyes became very apparent, making me wonder what on earth happened in the hours following the banquet. “No offense, little brother,” he said, “but I could use a break from hearing that me for the rest of the day.”

I arched an eyebrow, “What’s your problem with my mate’s Maeve?”

“After that disastrous spat with your intended, Isabelle was practically inconsolable last night, Henry muttered pensively. “I spent what felt like hours trying to **get** her to calm down.”

Based on his **words** alone, I was prepared to **shove** even the smallest ounce of pity for him, had it not been for the smug smile that slowly spread across his face. That **was** not the look of a man fatigued from hours of lighting with his wife. As **a man** who partook in the joys of the flesh. I knew exactly what that smile meant

What a child. I couldn't help but think.

"Yes" I deadpanned. "I cannot imagine how tiresome that must have been for you.

Henry shrugged. "It was not **an** easy task, but you do what you can for your mate. She took what happened very personally, you know

I suppressed a groan. I was sick of that **woman** always playing the **victim**. All she seemed to want to do was make Maeve out to be the bad guy, no matter what she did

"Well, can you blame **Maeve** for standing up for herself?" I sharply retorted, not caring in the slightest that he winced upon hearing her name. "Your wife threw cheap shots at her expense, and all for what? Was she supposed to just sit there and take it like a **champ**—or let herself empty her stomach in front of everyone because of the stunts Isabelle pulled?"

"Look, I'm not condoning what she did by any means. But it wouldn't hurt you to show her a little kindness, too."

I scoffed. As if that would ever happen. After what she tried to do, she didn't deserve even a pinch of my sympathy.

"However brash Isabelle might have acted last night, she is still my wife, so don't you **dare** judge me for defending her, Xaden," he warned, looking **as** serious and adamant as I'd ever seen him. "You, of all people, should know how it feels to see your mate helpless and in need of comfort.

As much as I wanted to rebuke him, I couldn't deny the effect his words had on me. "I do understand, I admitted, softening up by a bit at the thought of Maeve, "but that doesn't mean I'll just let her do whatever she pleases"

Henry set his jaw. "Maybe you should worry less about my wife and pay a little **more** attention to yours."

"Excuse **me?**" I growled, daring him to continue.

"You heard me," he retorted, leveling his gaze with me boldly. "Just as clear as everyone heard that demure woman of yours in the hallways last night. What on earth got into her?"

I opened my mouth, ready to defend Maeve, but any words I had conjured in my mind stalled. Now that I thought about it, I had never really gotten a clear answer from her. She even seemed to be just as stunned by her vengeful reaction, if not more.

It was pure speculation on my part, but I got the sense that she had been holding all of that in for quite some time—the passion that was tinged within her wrath was not something that just showed up out of thin air.

It festered like a wound until it could no longer contain the pain.

What sort of hell had she been through for her to bottle up all those suppressed feelings!

MAEVE POV

Wracked with dread, I paced the grand front doors of **the** palace as I tried to gather what courage I had. I was not ready to confront Luna Queen Leonora after my embarrassing display last night.

I had gone completely against all her training and thrown all of my unresolved anger onto her husband, of all people.

Her blatant disappointment was all but palpable to me from out here.

No matter how much I tried to delay the inevitable, however, I needed to get this done. If she was going to scold me, I would rather get it over with than simmer in the mess that was my mind. Taking a long, deep breath, I entered the palace and followed the usual route to get to the queen's parlor.

I need to apologize. The resolution grounded **me**. She has to know-

I whirled around, entering full-on defense mode and taking in my surroundings as quickly as possible. For some particular reason. I **had** felt the strangest sensation of someone boring into my soul with malicious intent, like someone was about to pounce on me.

But there was no one there.

Just an empty palace corridor.

Heat rose on r my cheeks. I needed to calm down. More than likely, my stress was making me paranoid

All of a sudden, Isabelle emerged from around the corner, glancing around for something. As soon as her gaze landed on me, she stopped and composed herself with as much regality as one could muster. "Good, you've finally arrived"

What?

Immediately, my stomach filled with unease. There should have been no reason for her to search for me, especially considering how our last encounter went down. "You were looking for me, Isabelle..." I asked, tentative,

She sighed, crossing her arms. "I understand your reluctance around me

That, I could scarcely believe.

–but this is hardly the **time** or **place** for it,” she said with a note of impatience. “I’m only here because the Alpha King sent me to find you.”

My eyes widened in surprise, quickly followed by dread. “What for?” I asked, but **as** soon as the words left my lips, I realized just how ridiculous the question **was**. Only one thing had happened that could possibly justify an audience with him.

And it was something I’d desperately hoped we could move past

“As if you needed to ask. Isabelle scoffed with a blatant roll of her eyes, inadvertently answering the question I had posed in my head. “We all saw how you yelled at King Arlan in the hallway after the banquet,” she said, making me wince **with** the reminder. “He wants to speak to **you**—without Xaden around **this** time”

Anxiety gnawed at my **insides**. A private audience with the king could mean many things, if one thought about it. In my case, it could only lead to something bad.

I steeled myself, preparing to follow her lead

But then a thought suddenly occurred to me, one I couldn’t ignore. If the Alpha **King** really did wish to speak with me... then why would he send Isabelle, of all people, to look for me?

He must have known well enough by that point how much she loathed me. Surely, the palace **was** not lacking in omega servants to send at his disposal, or perhaps even his own Royal Beta to pass on the message, just as Xaden would send Burke

But no Isabelle

For a brief moment, I even tried to consider that this was all possibly some sort of test. Maybe she was sent by him **to** reaffirm that I truly was incapable

of keeping my emotions in check and, thus, was unfit to become Xaden's Luna,

Then again, why do it under the premise that I needed to see post haste?

The more I thought about this, the more nothing seemed to make sense

"Well!" she prodded, pulling me back to reality as she stood in the same spot, waiting for me to follow with an expectant stare. "Are you going to come or not?"

In a move typically unlike me. I decided to take a risk. "I can't."

She blinked, as if she **hadn't** expected me to refuse. "What?"

"I-I have a meeting with the Luna Queen that I need to get to, I quickly threw out the first excuse that came to mind, hoping that would be a good enough reason to **deter** her. And in my defense, not one part of that sentence had been a lie. "If I don't show up soon, she'll wonder where I am."

The queen can wait. But the king cannot, Isabelle muttered, taking a step closer to me, while I took a step **back**

"The queen is every bit as important as the king." I retorted, balling my hands at my fists, needing something to hold my composure together. "I can't turn her time aside just because her husband says so

She balked at me. "Are you really going to ignore the Alpha King's summons just so **you can** have a tea party with Her Majesty?" she demanded.

I was frozen in place. I-I didn't know what to do. My inner conflict was tearing at me. What if she was telling the truth?

What if she wasn't?

And then a familiar figure materialized down the hall—an unexpected hero in my time of need.