

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 57

THIRD PERSON POV

Sitting in the rose garden of **the** royal palace, Princess Charlotte was currently trapped in the middle of her own game for **survival**. In high society, nothing mattered more than one's own reputation, which could only be developed by interacting with other esteemed members of said society.

The catch, as Luna Queen Leonora was particularly careful to explain to Maeve a few days ago, was that one always had to be wary of the company they kept

That idea had been ingrained in Charlotte's mind for as long as she could remember.

Which was probably why she had trouble making friends.

As it turned out, however, all of her mother's teachings proved to be true. Being the only daughter of the Alpha King, she was a keen target for all bright and eager young women to latch onto, in the hopes of either gaining information or using her as a bridge to access her apparently very desirable brothers.

And so, she found herself in the middle of one of her tea sessions-as was customary for every young lady of high standing-

A true battle of wits and composure amongst the most ambitious ladies in the kingdom.

“And that was how my sister met her husband!” A girl, dressed in a fancy pink and cream dress, giggled out loud. “Let this be a lesson to us all. Ladies: if we want to find our dream alphas, try to get lost during a nature hike!”

Her stirring **story** prompted a chorus of delicate giggles around the table, adorned with Charlotte’s finest China and the most delicious finger sandwiches and cookies. The princess let out a small laugh, hiding behind her teacup and doing her utmost to blend in with the circle. However tame it all seemed, she knew better than to lower her guard around these pampered darlings of society.

They were vultures. Every last one of them.

“Speaking of alphas another girl drawled, swinging her hawklike gaze to the princess, “there is something I must ask Your Highness that **has** been burning on everyone’s mind for a while.”

And there it was. “Do share,” Charlotte insisted, pretending to bubble with enthusiasm.

“The rumors that have been circulating the capital like wildfire! Surely, you’ve caught whispers of them at least once?”

Charlotte raised a delicate eyebrow. “Rumors? I daresay this is the first time I’ve heard of such a thing. Care to elaborate?”

Excitement suddenly turned into anxiety. “Oh... perhaps I shouldn’t say, then.”

“Don’t say that now that you’ve gotten me all curious, Paige,” Charlotte scolded with a teasing smile. “It’s hardly fair that everyone knows what’s happening except for me. So, tell me- -what could possibly be going on that has gotten everyone so excited?”

The girl named Paige hesitated for a brief moment before lowering her cup. “Well.” she began to say, as a coy smile slowly began to spread across her powdered face. “It’s about your older brother, actually.”

“They say Prince Xaden is enamored with a mystery girl” the girl next to Paige blurted out in excitement.

Charlotte blinked, scanning the faces surrounding her. “**Kaden**—dating a woman?” she repeated, feigning shock.

The other girls surrounding the table all nodded their heads emphatically, leaning forward wide-eyed and eager for more information. They all thrived on such delicious gossip, especially if it involved any members of the royal family.

But, as it was made very clear, Xaden was quite special.

All of the young women in the kingdom hungered for the chance to catch his very worthy attention and become his Luna. If it proved to be true that such a prize was already claimed by some unknown girl- well it simply would not do!

Charlotte had known just how popular her brother was among the ladies, so she couldn’t say she was surprised by the inquiry. Unbeknownst to the girls, the princess was not only well aware of said mystery girl, but she was also becoming quite close with her.

By all **accounts**, she was the best person they could have gone to for answers.

But Charlotte’s loyalty was not something that could easily be broken. She loved her brother and respected Maeve’s privacy too much for that.

“Honestly, my poor brother has had to meet with so many women in his search for a Luna, I’ve lost track of all of them,” she ultimately **said**, tilting her **head** in false contemplation. Judging by the disappointment that weighed

on the other girls' faces, most of them seemed to buy her little act, to her subtle relief. "What sort of things have people been saying about him **and** this alleged woman?"

The question released a flurry of answers containing both truths and flat-out nonsense.

"I hear they visited the Omniscient Orenda Gorre together!"

"Well, I happened to hear they were **walking** around Mona Road **a** while back."

"Huh, I've heard she's an actress hired for publicity."

And then...

"I've heard that this woman lives with him in his mansion."

Startled, Charlotte directed her attention to the girl who spoke up. Directly across from her, sat a young woman with chestnut brown hair tied back in a lovely ponytail, wearing a muted burgundy knee-length dress. This was a girl who would attend her tea sessions on occasion **only**

But her name **was** easy to remember.

It had **a** similar ring to another name she heard almost daily.

The girl straightened up in her seat, settling her **eyes** on the princess. "Could you tell us if that rumor is true, Your Highness?"

"I have visited my brother's **mansion** many a time," Charlotte remarked calmly, leveling her gaze to match that of the heiress, "and I can assure you, I have not seen any woman, **nor** any such indication that a woman is living in that house. Well, apart from his lovely housekeeper, but she does not seem to quite fit the **rumors**," she teased.

She hoped that would be the end of that, but the emergence of this new rumor seemed to have sparked the other girls' interest

"In his **mansion**?" Talia, seated next to Paige, questioned with visible shock. "When **was** this, Bella?"

The daughter of Alpha Charles was keen to answer. "A couple of weeks ago, actually. One of my old friends visited with her family and, sure enough, it was the housekeeper who alerted them about a woman living there."

"Many important visitors come and go all the **time**," Charlotte commented, once again raising her cup. "In fact, he's met with a few ambassadors for treaty negotiations. It's very likely he invited a few to stay at his **mansion** in the meantime."

What Bella said next made her almost jolt in her seat, and made the other girls explode into frantic babbles

"I-I've also heard she's pregnant with the prince's baby."

If Charlotte was being honest with herself, that rumor caught her completely off guard. Not only because it was a-very-true secret **that** they were working so diligently to hide, but if it were only a mere rumor, it would be quite an accusation to raise among one of the members of the royal family. No one would dare to question the honor of a prince so brashly-in front of his own sister, nonetheless!

But, as far as the public was aware, it **was** only a rumor.

And she was going to keep it that way.

"My word," Charlotte let **out** a laugh, prompting the rest of the frenzied party to **ease** their murmurs. "First, Xaden has a secret live-in **lover**, **and** now he has a child on the **way**? Just where is this friend of yours finding all this sort of gossip?"

“She gets around,” Bella answered quickly, her gaze starting to dart around the room. “But I trust her judgment. She’s never lied to me before.”

All of a sudden, Charlotte placed her teacup down loudly on **its** respective saucer, not flinching when the clamor echoed around the quiet garden **space**. The other girl, however, went still and silent with bated breath. “Your friend sounds like quite the interesting character,” she remarked with a polite smile, hiding her tension. “Do you really trust her judgment over mine, Bella?”

The gauntlet had been thrown. Everyone at the table could see it.

It was up to Bella to accept the princess’s challenge or **admit** defeat.

Much to her credit, even Bella knew not to mess with royalty, especially after what happened last time, unbeknownst to Charlotte and the rest of their company. “O—Of course **not**, Your Highness,” she relented, smiling and dipping her head. “You know Prince Xaden better than anyone else here.”

Indeed, Charlotte thought, hiding her relief. And I know my brother’s life is his own.

“We’re done talking about boring brothers.” Charlotte began, focusing her attention on **a** different girl with an amused grin. “Talia, I’d love to hear more about this troublesome sister of yours. **What** on earth made her stray from her hiking trail?”

And with that, the tea party resumed without further interruptions. Charlotte had done her part, but Bella was nowhere near finished

The moment Bella left the palace grounds, she carefully took in her surroundings before pulling out her cell phone and dialing a private number. It didn’t ring for long before a woman’s voice, harsh and refined, answered the call.

“Is it done?” the woman asked, quick and to the point.

“Yes, everyone left,” she answered quietly, maintaining as much discretion as she could. I’m alone now.”

“Did the princess say anything about Maeve?”

Bella bit her lip. “No.” she admitted, “she was very careful not to admit anything. To be honest, I’m not even sure if she’s aware of her.”

An exasperated sigh resounded on the other end of the line. “Of course she is, the voice snapped, making Bella flinch. “She’s **only** pretending not to know so she can help protect her brother’s reputation. Not even Prince **Xaden** would be able to hide such a secret from his family for so **long**”

“R–Right.” she answered, her hand trembling as she held onto the phone. The mere mention of the alpha prince was enough to send tremors throughout her body, remembering her last encounter with **him** all too well

Just thinking about it made her head ache.

He had been so fearful... and yet, so beautifully commanding. Unlike any force of nature, she had ever seen before. It almost didn’t matter that he frightened the life out of her and her family—her adoration for him **never** wavered.

That beauty of a prince deserved far better than the servant–girl he serried for.

“Well, we’ve done what we can for today,” the woman on the other end reluctantly conceded, once again capturing Bella’s ready attention. “Go home and await my call. We shall need to meet in person to discuss what to do next”

Bella set her jaw, determined, “Alright. Until next time.”