

# The Hidden Luna Queen

## Chapter 61

### MAEVE POV

“Y–You?” I repeated, mouth open agape in shock **as** I scanned over his amused face. “You’re the alpha?”

Upon first glance, I had pegged him for a mere soldier, or the son of one of the soldiers, at best. Nothing about him gave me the impression that he was the rough and tough, battle–born commanding officer who had inspired **so** much morale throughout the capital

With those open, kind eyes and that charming, charismatic personality that was currently keeping me company, the thought had not even crossed my mind.

Could it truly be possible for someone to be capable of such forcefulness and kindness all at once?

Though now that I thought about it, I supposed the **same** could be said about Xaden. It should not be possible for a man of his reputation to treat me so preciously, but he defied nearly every expectation I’d had of him

Perhaps I should give this man–Nicholas–the benefit of the doubt.

He raised an inquisitive eyebrow. “Is that so surprising?”

A mortified heat flushed my face. I could only imagine how insulting that must have come across! “I–I didn’t mean...”

“It’s alright,” he said with a short chuckle, waving a hand in an attempt to appease **me**. “I actually get that a lot more than you might expect. Most people tend to mistake me **for** my father”

The way he’d said that—**all proud** and weighed with honor of the highest distinction—it was as if his father was someone everyone in the capital might have been familiar with. If my father were here, I believed that he would, without a doubt, have known who he was.

“Your father!” I prompted. “Is he someone I might know?”

Nicholas opened his mouth to respond, but before he could say anything, a familiar voice rang out from behind us

“Oh—Nicholas!” Charlotte exclaimed, drawing our attention over to her **delicate** figure as she returned to our table, closely shadowed by Kaden’s majestic frame. “How lovely to see you mingling with everybody.” She held out her hand to him, to which he promptly rose to his feet and kissed her knuckles in greeting

“I thought you were preoccupied **with** our father and the heads of the alpha **council**.” Xaden **said**, making polite conversation after shaking Nicholas’s hand. “What are you **doing** over here?”

“I was. But then I caught sight of this beauty sitting all alone.” Nicholas said, tossing a smile in my direction. “I just had to say hello.”

I blinked. Surely he was not talking about me, was he?

“She is rather beautiful, isn’t she?” Xaden remarked, looking quite proud of himself, making me blush despite everything. It seemed he could not help himself from saying such things, even with others around. “The man who holds her heart **is a** lucky fellow, indeed, to be able to behold such a rare, incomparable gem.”

Nicholas's eyes widened ever so slightly, flickering from Xaden back over to me. "Oh, I did not realize you were already taken for," he said, looking a little ashamed of himself. "I hope I was not making you feel uncomfortable."

I shook my head. "Not at all—"

"Indeed, she's quite spoken for," Xaden quipped, and my eyes widened. **Was** he going to expose our relationship to him? "She's actually engaged to..."

"Burke!" Charlotte intervened, her quick thinking taking me by surprise while, at the same time, inviting a frown on Xaden's face. All the while, Nicholas listened to the princess with rapt attention.

"She's engaged to be married to Xaden's most trusted prime beta," she repeated, looking quite pleased with herself having thought up such a brilliant lie, "which will all but practically make her family to us. However, her poor, silly fiancé—she enunciated, a subtle jab at her increasingly agitated brother, "is quite shy about displaying public affection before their mating ceremony."

Nicholas turned back to Xaden with a solid clap on his shoulder. "What great news for your beta!" he exclaimed. "You must be happy for him."

The tight smile that Xaden displayed made me wince. "Beyond ecstatic."

Oh, **what** a mess this is becoming.

I snuck a glance at the man who was now apparently my pretend-fiance, who stood near the center of the large banquet hall, blissfully unaware of his sudden involvement in our scam and deep in conversation with several men I could only assume were soldiers. Watching him mind his own business while we threw out his name as a diversion made me feel dirty, like we were taking advantage of his kindness.

Once this was all over, I would owe him a great apology and every bit of gratitude I could give him.

Turning back to the subject at hand, I let my gaze wander over Nicholas, whose focus was not on us anymore, but somewhere in the direction I had been looking. It dawned on me that he had taken to follow my eyes and was also looking at the prime beta.

However, there was something that lingered in Nicholas's face that was decidedly not pleased.

"With all due respect, Your Highness," he commented, staring at the back of Burke's distant figure with blatant disapproval, "that beta of yours should really be reprimanded. Timid or not, he has no right to leave his future mate all alone like this

Kaden bristled at my side. The longer **this** conversation **persisted**, the more restless he was becoming and the more panicked that made me, I was not sure if it was due to jealousy or his urge as an alpha to claim me, but whatever it was, it was not good. I could feel his anger roll off his body in waves, and with every passing second, I grew more and more worried for the unsuspecting alpha in our midst.

"It's really quite alright," I supplied **as** quickly and genuinely as I could. "He's a busy man. I don't want to impose on his duties."

In my defense, those words were not a lie. That was exactly how I felt when it came to Xaden. Not that Nicholas needed to know that right now.

But he remained unconvinced, "No, it's not," he insisted. "You are just as important as any duties he might have—perhaps more.

Xaden gravitated ever so closer to me, enough to make it glaringly obvious to me, while at the **same** time, not enough to inspire talk amongst any curious guests. "I think she's perfectly fine in my company, regardless if I'm her fiancé or not."

“Yes” Charlotte added, with a twinge of uncertainty. “We’re more than happy to **stay** with her while Burke is busy.”

“I just don’t understand. Why, if I had such a beauty on my arm,” Nicholas murmured, allowing his warm and inviting gaze to wash over me in front of Xaden and Charlotte, “I certainly would not hesitate to show her off to the world.”

My goodness... I thought, wanting to vanish behind the curtain of my long, black hair. He sure was not holding anything back.

And glancing at Charlotte, she looked just as helpless as I felt. There was nothing we could contribute to the conversation **that** would do any good

“You should be careful when speaking so rashly about an engaged woman” Xaden said, **all** signs of cordiality were nearly gone. I could hear the warning as clear as day through his gritted teeth. “Her fiancé might just hear you.”

Perhaps I could pick up on these changes in Xaden because of how much time I was spending with him... or **maybe** it was a quirk of being so-called fated mates

Nicholas, however, seemed painfully oblivious to any such changes. “Maybe he should,” he challenged with a quip, still assuming I was promised to Burke. “Maybe he needs to learn to take better care of her.”

All of a sudden, something seemed to snap within Xaden. Any remaining composure he might have had all but vanished in the blink of

“On second thought, Nicholas,” he seethed, “I may very well take you up on that brilliant idea of yours.” Swiftly, Xaden turned to me, offering me his **arm** with a look that left little room for debate. “Miss, let us go speak with this blasphemous fiancé of yours. He needs to know just what sort of fool he is for not wanting to claim you,”

Hesitantly, I lifted my hand but faltered. There **was a** darkness to him that was unlike anything I'd seen from him thus far. He was not defending me from people who were trying to hurt me this time. He was antagonizing a man who had been nothing **but** sweet to me.

I was a little scared, if I was being honest with myself.

"Please," he urged, softening just a little bit for me. And when I reached for his arm, he latched on, with no intention of letting go.

"Xaden-" Charlotte intervened sternly, looking at him with a loud question in her eyes, "are you sure you want to do this now?" By the look on her face, she knew that her brother was plotting something that would raise questions.

"Certainly," Xaden muttered, undeterred. "If not now, then this inexcusable behavior **is** sure to continue." However, I was not sure if that **was** directed at Burke's pretend negligence of me, or if it was directed **at** Nicholas for daring to **be** so bold in front of him

As we left, I heard Nicholas start **to** express concern, but Charlotte **was quick to distract** him. "They'll be alright," she **hastily** reassured him, her voice fading as the distance between us grew,

"But for now, let us go speak with the rest of our guests. Some are excited to meet you!"

Xaden was careful to **avoid** any large groups of guests, much to my relief. Before we made it to the door, however, he made it a point to cross paths with Burke, slowing down enough to say something to him. "Burke, come with us," he hissed under his breath, startling the beta out of his conversation with our tense appearances. "Now."

Burke faltered for a moment, but he quickly regained his composure. After dismissing himself, he followed us out of the room without another word.

My apparent fake fiancé, my secret real fiancé, and I. What a joy this was going to be.