

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 63

THIRD PERSON POV

“Thank you for gracing us with your presence, Your Highnesses.” A lowly alpha and his luna bowed before Prince Henry and his lovely wife Isabelle, who secretly simmered with a burning impatience to return to the scene of her plot.

“It was our pleasure.” **Alpha** Karl Isabelle murmured **with** a glowing smile, radiance befitting a Luna Princess of her station, and she made sure everyone knew it. “Please, feel free to come to us with anything else you might need

They bowed reverently before her, and the sight warmed her soul tremendously.

This was what she lived for. And she would be damned if she let Maeve take the **spotlight away** from her.

Immediately afterwards, Henry was called aside to speak with one of the soldiers alone, which allowed Isabelle her much-desired reprieve

As calmly as she could, she ventured back to where Maeve had last been seen, brimming with joyous eagerness to see the aftermath. She could just see it now—Maeve, overwrought by her insecurity and **humiliation**, giving up on becoming a Luna Princess **and** fleeing from the palace, never to be seen again.

Her victory was so close, she could almost taste it.

Much to her dismay, however, not a single soul was to be seen.

Stomach sinking, she glanced wildly around the hall for some sort of sign of anyone. But neither Maeve nor Delaney was seated at their table—or apparently, anywhere at all inside the room, for that nutter—while Charlotte seemed to be busy mingling with other guests.

And that stupid girl she'd brought over the one who was supposed to expose Xaden's rakish history to Maeve she was back alongside that lowborn husband of hers, decidedly not doing the job Isabelle had given her.

Isabelle wanted to hope their sudden absence, along with that girl's dismissal, meant that the job was completed. **That** Marve and Xaden **had** erupted in some sort of light and that things were finally going her way, but surely there would have been some sort of indication

From what she could tell, the atmosphere of the banquet had not been disrupted, nor were there **murmurs** of **such a scuffle** involving the prince and an unknown woman.

By all appearances, nothing had happened. It was as if the plan had never been executed at all.

Isabelle wanted to scream. She was ready to explode with unrestrained rage, but this was not the time or place to do so. Not in front of her adoring subjects.

With hurried footsteps, she rushed to a set of glass doors that led to a lovely balcony, offering a polite, forced smile to everyone who greeted her along the way. And once she made it to the open space, where she thankfully seemed to be utterly alone in the soothing afternoon breeze, she quietly shut the doors behind her.

She needed some time to breathe, to gather her thoughts.

How was it possible for **that** brat to thwart her at every turn?!

MAEVE POV

Silence.

In the **hallway just** outside the royal banquet hall, all one could **hear** was the deafening silence that came from an astonished prime beta.

Burke blinked, glancing wildly between Xaden and me as he slowly tried to process what we had just told him. “L—Let me get this straight,” he sputtered, and for a split moment, I worried that we had broken him with the news of our little ruse. “Another alpha expressed interest in you so now, I am somehow your fiancé? Am I missing the part where all of this makes sense?”

His **confusion**, I thought, was very rational.

Everyone directly connected to the royal family was well-versed in the idea that Xaden and I were going to wait to **go** public with our relationship for the time being. However, it would have been most logical to assume that, if things went haywire, Xaden would assume control and not hide away from the truth.

Not only was that not the case, but now it involved his innocent beta taking his place as my “mate” No doubt, he was wondering why.

Xaden sighed. “It was the best way to get him to leave her **alone**.”

That did not seem to clarify the situation for Burke any better. “Would it not have been easier to say that **Maeve** is a distant relative?” he inquired, throwing out different ideas that did not implicate me with another man. “Or a friend of Princess Charlotte’s, or even a random guest you had no prior connection to?”

“Burke, if you have any qualms with being my mate’s pretend fiancé, then please take it up with the true mastermind, my sister,” Xaden grumbled, crossing his arms. “It certainly was not my idea to involve you in this.”

I caught the **nervous** glance Burke threw my way as a thoughtful frown weighed on his face. Despite still not being too familiar with him, that one glance alone told me everything I needed to know.

If there **was** anything to be said about the prime beta, it was that his loyalty to Xaden could never be put into question. It didn't matter if the Alpha King or I wanted to keep this a secret. If there were even the slightest of hints that Xaden was not pleased with the idea, he would not go along with it.

Right now, it was very possible that everything could fall apart, and the thought made my stomach lurch. I needed to find a way convince them both that this was for the best.

"If you think about it," I said thoughtfully, "it's the best possible cover story I could have."

The unconvinced expressions on their faces increased my anxiety but spurred me to keep going

"The whole point of the lie is to keep our relationship under wraps until after the baby has been born, wasn't it?" I prompted, closely watching the two as they reluctantly listened to me. There are already rumors going around that Xaden has a secret lover, so being seen with me in public will only defeat the purpose of waiting

"But..." I trailed off, focusing on Xaden, "if people think I'm someone else's fiancée, someone close to you, then **that** could help explain why I'm with **you** so often."

Xaden looked tense, reluctant. "I don't like it, but it's the best way to keep eyes off you." He turned to his het. "It would help if you played along"

Hastily, I thought to add: "If it makes you feel **any** better, you can publicly dump me in whatever way you see fit." Anything that would entice him to help.

Despite the heavy, hesitant sigh he released, the corner of Burke's mouth moved to lift in a slightly amused smirk. "I must admit, that **sounds** awfully tempting," he teased lightly, making me blush that he was actually considering it. "If it helps you and Xaden, I'll do whatever I can."

I brimmed with relieved elation. Everyone was **on** board.

Things would be alright for now.

Once that was settled, the three of us re-entered the banquet hall, discovering that the guests were beginning to seat **themselves**. I recalled instantly that Burke had mentioned earlier that the Alpha King would be speaking

Seeing Alpha King Arlan in person as he stood, ready to address the room, mere days after shouting at him like **that**, unnerved me. I forced myself to stand strong. If he were going to punish me for it, he likely would have done so by now.

So, just breathe, Maeve—I thought to myself. He has better things to do than pick on you

"Today," **Alpha** King Arlan addressed us **all**, tall and majestic and stoic in his finest attire, "we have gathered to **honor** those who defended our livelihood. Thanks to the brave men and women here, our kingdom still stands strong"

The room bubbled with soft murmurs of excitement upon being personally recognized by the king himself.

"Not only that," he continued with a proud smile, "but we also have in attendance the fearless commanding officer who led those troops."

He **waved** his hand in the **direction** of Nicholas, who stood near the front of the crowd. "None of this would be happening if it weren't for Nicholas's powerful leadership that night."

As Nicholas stepped forward, gentle **applause rang** out, welcoming him to center stage. How strange it felt, to see the kind man who kept me company being acknowledged for his **efforts** in battle.

“Your words do me too much credit, Your Majesty,” **Nicholas** murmured, bowing reverently before turning to face the quieting crowd. “To serve and protect the kingdom is the greatest honor I could ever receive. Though,” he added with a charming **smile**, “I must admit it is **just** as nice to see so many cheerful **faces** in the room.”

Not too far away from me, I heard **a** chorus of delighted whispers. Glancing to the side, I could see a gaggle of single women, all young and likely relatives of the soldiers, as they gazed at **the** alpha with hearts **in** their eyes.

I would be lying if I said I didn’t understand why. His natural charisma was out of this world.

“Two nights ago, our enemies next door tried to break through our defenses while our kingdom slept soundly in their beds,” he continued, looking solemn, drawing everyone in just like he did with me not too long **ago**. “Two nights ago, they believed they would succeed and break the morale of our people.”

The room was still with bated breath, as if he were telling a riveting story. It brimmed with curiosity for him to tell the **ending**.

A daring grin spread across **Nicholas’s** face as he scanned the room. “And two nights ago, we proved them wrong,” he said, to boisterous cheers bursting from the crowd. “Tonight, we are as proud and as strong as ever! If a small patrol could hold off one of their ambushes, just imagine what we could do **with** the full force of our army!”

He threw **his** arm up into the air, clenching his fist. “They will learn to not underestimate the power of wolves in a pack!”

As the room burst into a roar of applause from alphas and gammas and omegas alike, I couldn’t help but watch in awe. Listening to him speak, I was

able to catch a glimpse **into** what those soldiers must have felt the night of that battle on the border.

He was inspiring A vision. Even Xaden couldn't hide the prideful look on his face.

I could still hear what Xaden had **said** the day before, about his worries that this might be only the beginning, but with alphas like him and Nicholas protecting our country, maybe **we** would not have anything to **worry** about. Hope bubbled inside me.

Maybe... we would be alright.