

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 66

Maeve **POV**

I needed a break. Just a little bit of time to myself to calm down and fully process everything that had happened today.

Tonight's banquet had taken an unexpected toll on me. First with that whole debacle involving Nicholas, then Xaden's subsequent jealous rage—which he adamantly denied having—and. and that woman, who apparently had a thing with Xaden some time ago. I could still see the pure desperation written across his face, how much he must've wanted to hide it from me.

It was too much for me to handle all at once.

So, here I was—taking a bubble bath. My first one, if I was being completely transparent, not just in the space of my new home, but in my entire life. They were a simple luxury that I had never been afforded before.

Back in Moonstone, one of **my** many duties had been to help arrange baths for Victoria or Sarah at least once daily, unless demanded otherwise by them. Honestly, it all depended on their mood that day—if the day proved to be kind to them then they would only ask for one, possibly two, but if that day was especially strenuous, then it was not unheard of for them to demand upwards of five baths a day. Meanwhile I, as their servant, was only permitted to take brisk showers once my day was done.

Now, as I sat submerged in bathwater, I understood the appeal.

The warm, soapy water gently slashed around me, the sound and sensation soothing to my unsettled mind. I watched, distracted, as millions of tiny bubbles collected in colorful rings around my thin knees and my **small** chest, peeking out from above the water. Though I was **careful** to tie my **hair** up into a bun, keeping my dyed hair as dry as possible.

Thankfully, Xaden seemed to have the foresight to acknowledge that I needed some time to myself, so he was courteous enough to leave me alone

That was, until he couldn't take it anymore.

Slowly, a tentative knock resounded at the bathroom door

"Maeve?"

My breath caught in my throat, **hearing** Xaden's voice at that moment.

I **had** wanted to stay angry with him. I wanted the sound of his voice to inspire rage throughout my body for keeping the truth from me **Instead**, all I felt when I heard his voice was yearning.

It had only been a couple of hours, and I already missed him with every fiber of my being.

"I brought you a fresh towel, Xaden's gentle voice said beyond the door. "I know you probably have plenty in there, but I..." he trailed off, sounding uncertain of himself, "I just wanted you to have something comfortable and warm."

It was such a pitiful excuse to entice me to open the door, to let him back into my good graces that I could not help but smile despite **myself**

I knew better than most how Xaden was more than capable of making others bend to his every whim and demand if his handling of my family, Bella, and that rude shopkeeper from weeks ago were any indication. If he so desired, he could have broken down that **door** like it was little more than a twig, eliminating any illusion of privacy I thought I had.

As an alpha prince, he could have ordered for my forgiveness **and** I would have no choice but to obey. As my future husband and the father of my baby, he was entitled to enter any room I kept myself and his son in.

As a man considerate of my feelings, however, he did none of those things.

I took a slow, deep breath, trying to steel myself for what I was about to say. "The door is not locked," I murmured, trailing my hand anxiously along the rim of the tub. "You can come inside."

And without a moment's hesitation, he entered the bathroom.

True to **his** word, he had a gray, fluffy towel that looked like heaven gripped tightly within his grasp, but it was all but forgotten the moment he was able to lock eyes on me. The way he gazed at me—all hopeless and lonesome—tugged at my heartstrings.

Like it **had** been lifetimes since he'd last seen me

However, the first words out of Xaden's mouth were: "I'm sorry," he whispered as he tossed the towel atop the vanity counter, approaching the tub **as** if by pure instinct, yet not touching me. He lowered to his knees to meet my level, not once breaking eye contact. "For everything. I want to make you mine, but not at the cost of your comfort, so... if you want to wait, then that's precisely what we'll do okay?"

I didn't say anything, but I gave him a slight nod.

He reached out tentatively to touch me, hovering uncertainly above my hand and waiting for any sort of sign that I would reject him.

But I did **not** pull **away** this time, and once he seemed to **realize** that he **was** in the clear, he visibly **sagged** with relief, letting his hand fall on top of my own **once** more and squeezing with all of the feelings he could muster. The gesture, albeit simple, was a beautiful comfort and did wonders to ease my tempered, desolate spirit.

“Please-“ he entreated, gently pulling my **hand** up to his mouth so he could pepper soft kisses against my tense knuckles, “don’t ignore me any longer. Maeve. Let me explain myself.” The pain that sprawled across his face scraped at my heart.

I found it impossible to refuse such a request.

With a slow, pensive swallow, I nodded, bracing myself against the tub for whatever I was about to hear.

Xaden pushed his free **hand** through his hair. “My father..” he trailed off, gathering himself, “I believe I told you before that he believes we should only mate with those he deems worthy of the crown. Well, he thought the best way **to** secure this would be to arrange meetings on our behalf.”

He sighed. “I’ve been doing this since I was eighteen—meeting with **alpha** daughters from **all** corners of the kingdom in the hopes of finding a Luna my father would approve of. But as time went on,” he continued to explain. “I never found her, and I started to lose all hope. The hopelessness I felt quickly turned into a more physical need.”

I swallowed hard, not wanting to hear this part. But I couldn’t ignore the painful pangs I felt in my heart for him. I had no idea he’d felt this way.

How lonely it must’ve been.

“But ever since the night I met you.” he murmured, “there hasn’t been anyone else. No more meetings, no one-night stands—I can’t fathom even thinking of another woman now when I have you in my life.” The heartfelt passion in his voice enraptured me, taking my breath away. and as I felt the backs of my eyes start to prickle, I heard him gulp.

“I l’m not proud of some of the things l’ve done, Maeve. I know l’m far from a perfect man, but I would never-“ he swore ardently, “**do** something that could hurt you!”

All of a sudden, he swiped his thumb across my cheek, making me realize **that** I had actually started to cry. “You and our baby are everything I could ever ask for,” he said. “I can’t let my past stupidity jeopardize that.”

Slowly, he leaned forward, pressing gentle kisses to my left cheek, followed by my right, before settling his lips against mine. kissing me with the most beautiful tenderness that I had no choice but to respond I sighed against his lips, savoring the feeling of having him so close.

“I wish we could have met all those years ago,” I confessed softly once we’d pulled apart. The thought was one I’d had for a while. “Then we wouldn’t have wasted so much time.

Despite the heaviness that lingered in his green eyes, telling me how much he agreed with my sentiment, Xaden managed a small smirk. “Eighteen-year-old me was too reckless and dangerous for my own good,” he said, gently running his fingers along my bare shoulder and crossing over to my back, tickling me. “You wouldn’t have liked me back then, I promise you that”

If all the rumors were any indication, then... **yes**, that was probably true. Still, part of me wished I could have at least seen what he was like as a teenager with my own eyes. And if what Orenda Gorre had said about us being fated mates **was** to be believed, then who knows what would have happened **back** then!

Maybe we could **have** fallen for each other without us knowing it

“Probably not out loud,” I ultimately agreed with **a small, teasing** smile peaking at the corners of my lips, “but I still would’ve been in awe of you. Even so much as a hello from you would have swept me off my hopeless feet.”

He cocked his head, gazing at me intently. “I would have rescued you from that horrible place,” he vowed. “I wouldn’t have let you feel hopeless a moment longer.”

I wanted to believe him, but it was hard to. “Fifteen-year-old me was not worthy of anyone’s attention,” I admitted, trying to ignore the deep frown that settled on his face. “I don’t think you would have noticed me.”

“I would have noticed you.”

I blushed, biting my lip. “You don’t have to say things like that j to make me feel better...”

Xaden shook his head, looking serious. “No, I would’ve felt it—in here,” he said, pressing my wet hand over the spot where his heart was, giving **me** a palmful of pure muscle. Despite my weak attempts to protest, not wanting to ruin his lovely black shirt with my bathwater, he held my hand firmly in place.

The intimate touch flustered me. Was that what he hoped to accomplish with **such a** move?

“Please...” I whispered, not trusting my voice **as** I lowered my eyes. “y-your shirt-”

“Feel what you do to me,” he beseeched, the plea in his voice compelling me to listen. I let my hand reluctantly settle flat against his chest where, slowly, his heartbeat made itself known to me. It pounded against his ribcage—strong, unyielding, and passionate, just like him—and it only seemed to intensify when I lifted my gaze back up to meet his.

“This is all because of you,” he said, caressing my hand. “Because my heart belongs to you, and you alone.”

Swallowing back my reservations, I wrapped my arms around his neck, pulling him in for **a kiss** despite my bath-soaked body. I melted into him once I felt his arms encircle my bare back, pulling me close.

It hurt to think about his past. It wouldn't be something I could so easily forget. But having him here, showing me just how he felt about me I couldn't hold it **against** him anymore.

Not when our present together was so sweet.