

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 82

XADEN POV

The moment I entered my bedroom that afternoon, I instantly gravitated towards my mate, who was seated near the open window overlooking the back gardens. Before she could **even** begin to greet me, I pulled her into my arms and kissed her.

Despite her initial surprise, she responded in kind, wrapping her arms around my neck. Slowly, I gently let her settle back on her feet.

“Hi,” Maeve breathed, lighting **up**. **“I didn’t expect** to see you so soon.”

It was true—I still had quite a bit of work to do before my day was done. But... as I caressed her jaw, the soft curve of her ears, I knew I’d needed to **see** her. There **was** too much confusion for me to think straight, and I needed her to help me out.

“You seem distracted,” she murmured, snapping me back. “Did something happen today?”

I took a breath. “This might be a strange, sudden request, but please,” I implored, gently squeezing her hands and rubbing **over** her knuckles, “could you humor me, just for **a** little while...?”

Her brow **creased**. “What is it?”

“Could you bring out the necklace **we** picked up from Moonstone that day? The one with the purple gemstone?”

“Oh,” she said after a puzzled pause. “Of course. Give me a moment.”

thumbs

Maeve went **over** to our bed and rummaged in her silk pillowcase, pulling out that familiar small pouch that she’d retrieved that fateful day in Moonstone. She even apparently took to hiding it in the same location—inside her pillowcase. I couldn’t help but wonder if it was purely out of habit that she kept the necklace there...

Or did she truly hold the necklace in such high regard that she couldn’t rest unless she knew it was nearby and safe?

“May I?” I asked, extending my hand towards her.

There **was** a brief moment of hesitation **as** she stared at my open, waiting hand, clutching the pouch tightly, closer to her body.

An understandable hesitation, I thought—especially if the object was as precious to her **as** I had figured in my mind. Even with someone

as close to her **as I as** the recipient, she would not hand over such an item unless she felt perfectly comfortable to do so.

In the end, Maeve smiled nervously, gently removing the necklace from its pouch and placing it in the palm of my hand with the utmost delicacy.

*Please be careful with it,” she whispered.

“I wouldn’t dream of anything else,” I promised, looking down into my hand.

And there it **was**.

The necklace itself, in all its glory.

The thin silver chain was immaculate. Not a tangle or sign of tarnish to be seen, **even** after its twenty years of living **in** a pouch. And the purple crystal

attached to the chain, brilliant and sparkling and perfectly polished, looked like something that belonged in a museum. Something priceless... timeless, that should never be handled by mortal hands.

No wonder she **was** so protective of it.

And it was nearly **a** dead ringer to the bracelet I'd found mere hours ago.

"It **really** is stunning, **you** know," I murmured after a while, my gaze flickering between her curious stare and the item in my hand. "Unlike any **piece** of jewelry, I've **ever** seen before. Not even my mother has **ever** owned something **so** unique. Did you by chance make **it** yourself?"

Maeve seemed particularly surprised by this.

"I never told...?" **she started to ask** until the words slowly died in her mouth. The slight guilt that weighed on her features did not slip **past me**, but I left it alone. "I... suppose I didn't. I'm sorry, I thought I told you,"

I shook my **head**. "**We just** haven't taken the time to talk about **it**."

"**It** used to be my mother's," **Maeve** admitted, gazing **at** the necklace. Her blue **eyes** glowed with purple, despite the warm lamplight around us. "It was the only thing of hers that that I was allowed to **keep**"

Hearing her confirm that the necklace had once belonged to her mother made my stomach twist a little, but I kept myself in check. All of my concerns were still purely circumstantial. For all I knew, her mother might have only had a unique taste in jewelry and had fashioned the necklace herself, unaware of where the style might have originated from.

I needed to know what Maeve knew—if there was anything she could share.

"You never really talk about her. Do you know anything about her?" I tried to gently prod. "What pack she might have come from, perhaps..."

She opened her mouth, poised to answer my question, but nothing came out at first. “I... I don’t know, actually,” she tentatively said after **a** while. “My father never told me anything about her. He **always** avoided the subject whenever I brought it up.”

“You don’t need him to get answers. We can figure out what your mother might’ve been by the size of your wolf”

Maeve blinked. “My wolf?”

“Yes. One’s rank determines what size wolf one has. Alpha wolves grow up to six feet tall and are built for battle, but omega wolves can stand as much as a foot shorter, with significantly less prowess and muscle mass,” I explained. “How big is your wolf?”

I was met with uncertain silence.

My pulse sped up ever so slightly. “You have shifted before, haven’t you?”

Maeve fidgeted under my gaze. “Um... actually, no. No, I... I haven’t,” she admitted, shocking me. “Sarah hasn’t either,” she added quickly once she **saw** surprise flicker across my face, “but she’s only just turned eighteen.”

My inner conflict deepened in light of this new revelation.

It was entirely possible for her wolf to be delayed because of... special circumstances. I still had no real idea of what she was subjected to growing up—what sort of strenuous physical labor or malnutrition she might have been forced to deal with at the hands of her terrible family and how that might have stunted her development—and nor was I an expert on such matters... but never had I actually heard of such **a case**.

Alpha or omega, one’s wolf always emerged around their eighteenth birthday.

But Maeve **was** twenty. Twenty years old, with no apparent wolf to be seen.

Something was not right here. The mystery surrounding Maeve's mother needed to be looked into more carefully.

"I'm not surprised something might *be* wrong," Maeve's quiet voice spoke up, reclaiming her necklace and putting it back in its pouch. "I didn't grow up under ideal circumstances."

"No," I insisted, wanting to alleviate her concerns for the time being. "It's not common, but it can sometimes take time for one's wolf to emerge. When it does, I'm sure it'll be as breathtaking as you—with those striking blue eyes that I always love to look at... and thick, silky, black fur to match your hair," I murmured, running my fingers through the ends of her hair.

Having her in front of me, seeing her... smelling her.... touching her, I made up my mind then and there. None of this mattered in the end. I did not care if Maeve was half-wolf, half-bear, or anything else. I wanted her exactly as she was, no matter what that ultimately meant.

I wanted her. All of her.

Even if your wolf doesn't emerge, I added silently, I'd never let you go. Not in a million years, nor a million lifetimes.

She smiled, avoiding my gaze. "Perhaps one day," she said, and I followed her eyes down to her protruding belly, where she rubbed the **growing** bump. "After things have calmed down."

"Of **course**."

I lowered my hand to hers, interlacing our fingers together. Unconsciously, my focus honed in on the feeling of her fingers locked between mine. How long and thin they felt, the roundness **of** her knuckles, how soft her skin was, despite her harsh upbringing.

I loved her hands. But I **couldn't** help but feel something was missing.

“If I **were** to buy **you** some **new** jewelry,” I **suggested**, drawing her attention **back to** me, “something that you could wear whenever and **wherever you’d** like... what sort of **styles** might I go about looking for?”

Her eyes widened **a** bit. “Why would **you** want to do that?”

I shrugged. “Maybe I just **want** to buy things my Luna might like.”

She smiled, shaking her head. “I don’t need any. You’ve already given me more nice things than I could ever ask for.”

“And I’ve got plenty more to offer.”

“But what would I-?”

“Maeve, sweetheart,” I said, chuckling, the sudden nickname making her pause, “would you please just let me spoil you?”

An adorable blush spread across her cheeks. Pressing her lips together, she nodded.

Maeve seemed a bit reluctant to answer. It dawned on me that this was perhaps the first time she’d been tasked with answering such a question. “I... suppose I like anything silver,” she said after a while, “with bright, beautiful colors, and that shines and sparkles no matter what time of day it is. I like things that remind me of the night sky... of sunsets....”

That was her necklace in a nutshell. I smiled.

“What else?” I asked, leaning closer to her.

She shook her head quickly. “If I tell you any more, I fear you’ll buy out an entire store’s worth of stuff.”

I rested my hand over my heart. “I promise, I don’t plan to go overboard with anything. Not at first, at least.”

“Xaden-” Maeve scolded with a grin, before I cut her off with another kiss.

Pulling away enough to look at her, I felt breath graze my mouth in short, quick bursts. “What happened to all that trust you had in me?” I asked, nuzzling her nose. “Hmm...?”

She didn’t need to know just yet that I had an idea that involved a certain finger.

She swallowed, gazing up at me with eyes so big and blue and deep I could drown in them. I saw just how vulnerable she was in that moment, that no one ever bothered to treat her so precious before.

What a bittersweet honor to be the first.

“I do,” she whispered. “More than anyone else.”

There was a softness to her face that melted me, and I leaned in for more, savoring the sigh she made when our lips reconnected.

Any questions I had remaining could be turned over to someone else. Someone deserving of a good interrogation. Maeve might not have known much about her heritage, but I knew someone who did, who never deserved to even think about Maeve again for as long as he lived.

I needed to pay a visit to my father-in-law.