

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 84

Xaden POV

“I must admit.” Burke said with mild distaste, taking in our surroundings, “I was not expecting to return to Moonstone for the foreseeable future. And I certainly did not expect you, of all people, Xaden, to want to come back, especially after how the last visit went.”

“Believe me,” I muttered. “I never wanted to come back to this place.”

“Then...” he drawled, “would you please remind me what business we have here?”

One day had passed since I found that bracelet at the border, and I found myself waiting at the front door of Moonstone’s packhouse, I let my gaze wash over the rest of the town that felt like a distant memory and a lurking shadow all at once.

Small, private businesses and homes that I’d passed by on my first trip here, which seemed like such an innocent time in hindsight, but now felt rotten to the core. People walked in the streets, living their everyday lives without so much as a second thought. Chatter and laughter rang throughout the air, happy and carefree.

Did these people know what their alpha was truly like? Did they know about the cruel atrocities that happened at the hands of him, his luna, and their spoiled daughter?

Would they have said anything if they did?

If I were honest with myself, I could've done with never setting foot in this wretched place again and leaving it behind in the mud where it belonged, but this visit certainly was not for pleasure.

This was business.

"That necklace I had you look into- "I divulged, turning to him, "I happened to find something that looks remarkably like it."

Burke blinked. "That's... good, isn't it?"

I smiled ruefully. "Not when I found its duplicate on the edge of the bear shifter's border." I watched as his face fell, dawning with the many realizations that I had also come to. "I tried to talk with Maeve about its last night, but she knew nothing."

I felt my face harden as I turned my attention back to the front door. "But it matters not. Burton knows more than he lets on. I will get answers out of him, one way or the other."

Before Burke could respond, the door finally opened.

And the moment Alpha Burton laid eyes on me, he instantly paled. It was like he had suddenly seen a ghost.

He was scared of me.

Good.

"Y-Your Highness!" he nervously exclaimed, quickly lowering his head. His frantic show of submission seemed to startle his luna into confusion, prompting her to glance around until she also realized my presence. "We were not expecting you today."

I strolled towards the **pair**. “Of course you weren’t. I had some time to spare, so I thought I’d stop by and pay a little **visit**.”

“And you are welcome **whenever** you please, Prince Xaden,” Luna Victoria chimed in, following her husband’s lead and dipping into a slow curtsy. “To what do we owe the marvelous pleasure of your company?”

I cocked my head to the side, feigning innocence, “Can’t a man take the time **to** visit his in-laws every now and then?” Burton nodded profusely. “O—Of course he can.”

“And where is our... precious daughter—the apple of our eye? The glowing pride of all of Moonstone?” Victoria asked, her gaze boring straight into me as she rose from her curtsy. “Has Maeve come with you today, Your Highness?”

Her husband might have been afraid of me, but she, on the other hand, was not holding back. She was challenging me.

“She is not here,” I answered curtly. “Frankly, she has no idea I’m even here right now.”

Something in her face twitched. “What a shame. We do miss our delicate daughter,” she said in a way that unnerved me. “Tell me, how is she doing?”

What utter audacity this woman had.

I swiveled my gaze to meet hers, taking in her stiff, proud features. Molten amber eyes that could burn a man dead where they stood, yet glowing with a veiled iciness that could send a cold chill up their spine, hidden behind carefully styled dark tresses. Her thin, narrow nose—so unlike Maeve’s adorable button nose—flared at the mention of her eldest daughter, and her bright red lips were tilted upwards in a forced smile.

She couldn’t hide anything from me.

I knew she somehow contributed to the abuse my mate endured all those years. It didn't matter if she was the ringleader or stood on the sidelines while her husband and daughter did the rest.

She never did a thing to stop it. She never stood up for her.

"How interesting," I snidely remarked, feeling all sorts of bitterness and anger towards this woman. "You've had all this time to inquire about Maeve and her wellbeing, apologize to her, or even attempt to visit her, and this is the first time that either one of us has seen you since the day Sarah poisoned us."

The reminder made her flinch. A wonderful sight for my hungry eyes.

"Sarah-"

"-made a foolish, horribly reckless decision, Your Grace," Burton hastily intervened, throwing his hand around his wife's arm and squeezing, which seemed to shut her up for the time being. "But enough about that. Would you care to take a seat...?"

I lazily sauntered towards an open chair and sat down, while my gracious hosts took their place opposite me. I felt Burke's presence materialize somewhere behind me, keeping his watchful eye on the scene.

"As much as I enjoy small talk," I murmured, "that's not why I'm here, so I'd appreciate it **if** you didn't waste my time. I found something of Maeve's that's quite fascinating. Perhaps you could shed some light on its origins. Does a certain necklace ring any bells?"

At first, I was met with silence.

"A necklace?" Burton repeated, clearing his throat. "I'm afraid I'm not sure what you're talking about, Your Highness."

"**Are** you certain?" I pressed, leaning forward and looking him dead in the eye, even when he struggled to hold contact. "It has a rather unique crystal."

It's also one of your daughter's most prized possessions, or are you saying you haven't the faintest idea of the intricacies of your own child's life?"

I pushed him, knowing he wouldn't dare to admit such a thing to me. And I **was** right.

"Oh," he quickly said with a sheepish wince, "that necklace. **Yes**, she's always been particularly attached to the thing. Admittedly, I cannot remember for the life of me where she got it in the first place."

He **was** lying.

Of course, he was. Whatever secrets he had, he **was** desperate to hold on to **them**. Just how **far** was he willing to go to hide them from me?

I ran my tongue over my teeth, as if pondering over something. "I suppose I'm just confused, is all," I muttered, watching the alpha as carefully as possible, "considering she said it belonged to her mother."

A sharp intake of breath emerged from the alpha's throat, so swift that even he was surprised by the abrupt sound. His wife glanced at him out of the corner of her eye, though I wasn't sure if that meant she was in on all the **secrecy** or was just as in the dark **as** everyone else.

"A—Ah. I misspoke. It **was** a gift from Victoria, shortly after she was born."

I hummed. "A gift from you, Luna Victoria?"

"Yes, Your Highness," Victoria answered after a moment. "It was a hand-me-down, given to me the day I got married. When our fragile daughter was born in poor health, we were desperate for a miracle, so I gave her the necklace for good luck. The necklace **has** been hers ever since."

She was a remarkably terrible liar. The whole time she recounted her story; it was like she was reading a script. Not to mention, they were still completely unaware that I knew Victoria was not Maeve's true birth mother.

I gnawed at my check. As much as I wanted to confront the pair, however, I wanted to wait for a more opportune time.

“You must love Maeve immensely to give her such an heirloom,” I ultimately said.

“Of course,” Victoria said, a sickeningly sweet smile spreading across her otherwise flat features, as Burton made sure **to** smile at me, as well. “I love my daughter more than anything else in the world.”

“You’ll have to forgive me if I find that hard to believe.”

“It’s the truth, sire. She consumes our every thought.”

“Then,” I began, “if you love her as much as you claim, you’d do whatever is needed to keep her safe, correct?”

When Victoria hesitated, Burton quickly took over the conversation once again. “Nothing less than perfect for Maeve,” he insisted.

I bit back a sharp comment. “I trust you both heard the cruel things said about Maeve during the recent press conference,” I said, feeling that familiar burning protectiveness wash over me. When they nodded, I continued my train of thought. “I want to enlist you, as her-loving-parents, to keep her identity hidden until our engagement is officially announced.”

Victoria looked intrigued. “If I may ask—as her mother,” she prodded, “when shall we expect to extend our most sincere congratulations to our new family?”

I frowned, directing my attention to her. “Don’t expect to hear anything until after the child has been born. You may be her parents, **but as far as** I’m concerned, you don’t deserve a spot at our wedding.”

Burton dipped his head, while Victoria averted her gaze. “If that pleases you. You... have my word that everything will be taken **care** of. Not **a** word will be spoken, not a soul will know.”

“That’s **not** good enough.”

Burton’s mouth opened and closed, at a loss for words. “P–Pardon?”

I glared down at him. “History **has** taught me **I** can no longer rely on your empty, meaningless words,” I said sharply, forcing him to evade **my gaze**. “**You once** swore to me your daughter would behave herself, only for her to toy with my **life** and **that** of **my** child’s. **No**, it seems the only thing you lot respond to is punishment.”

Victoria’s high and mighty demeanor shrunk significantly after those words left my mouth.

“So, if you refuse to heed my warning, or if I catch wind **of** even the slightest whispers about Maeve’s identity–”

Burton’s eyes widened.

“I will not hesitate to strip you both of your titles and sentence you to a lifetime of servitude, just like you did to Maeve,” I said. A slow, sadistic grin stretched across my face as I took in their panicked expressions. “Fitting, isn’t it? I hope I made myself clear.”

Victoria’s fists clenched in her thick black skirts, overwhelmed with a growing and bubbling outrage, while her alpha husband trembled where he sat, gulping up a storm. They both knew this was a fight they could not win.

As they learned the hard way, nothing good came from pushing an alpha prince.

“Y–Your Highness **is** too clever...” Burton stammered as he lowered his gaze to the floor. “You won’t need to worry about anything. I hear you... crystal clear.”