

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 91

Maeve POV

The moment Prince Eric made his presence known; the banquet hall fell dead silent. No one dared to speak a word, breathe, or make even the slightest sound.

Or perhaps that was just me. I really couldn't tell anymore.

To be honest, I had no idea what to expect from his sudden entrance. Every rumor I had ever heard indicated that he was either not on speaking terms with his family or was merely too sick and feeble to attend anything that involved public appearances. But if what Eric had told me himself was the goddess given truth... about how he was the black sheep of the highly regarded royal alpha family and was shunned for not living up to their expectations, then we were going to have a real problem on our hands.

For all I knew, Alpha King Arlan would throw him out. Or someone would instigate a fight in the middle of the banquet hall. And if someone were to attack him in front of me..., what was I supposed to do...?

Good goddess... what was I supposed to do if any of those horrifying possibilities happened? None of the lessons I'd been taking with the queen covered that.

My stomach sunk with dread at the mere thought.

This was my informal initiation into the family. If I chose to defend him despite whoever opposed me, I could risk further damaging what little relationship I had with everyone and my marriage to Xaden could very well be on the chopping block. But if I stayed silent for the sake of neutrality, then that would hurt poor Eric, who would not hurt even a fly.

Either way, chances were that the evening could end in catastrophe. I was utterly petrified for both him and myself.

Amid the awkward silence, however, one person chose to speak up.

"Eric, you decided to join us, after all," Luna Queen Leonora murmured, giving off the faintest whiff of surprise as she rose to greet her son, albeit with abundant grace and poise. "I thought you were not feeling well enough to be here."

His gaze nervously darted around the room, but he nodded. "... I wanted to officially welcome Xaden's new mate. I thought it best she heard it from me personally..." he faltered, glancing up at me. "I-I hope that was alright."

That was directed at me. He was looking for my approval.

Again, I couldn't help but be reminded of myself. So hungry for the approval of others... even at the cost of what little dignity we had.

I fully prepared to open my mouth, but I was cut off by another eager voice.

"Actually," Henry spoke up, haughty and full of derision, "I think we were perfectly fine as we were."

The younger siblings visibly shifted uncomfortably in their chairs, not seeming to agree with their eldest brother but were unsure what to do. It was Xaden, however, who attempted to intervene with an agitated huff.

"Henry, don't "

"It's alright, you don't need to pretend you like him just because your mate is here," Henry interrupted, quick to stop Xaden. "I think I speak on everyone's behalf when I say that we don't need this pathetic alpha here."

The Luna Queen gaped, embarrassed by her son. "Henry-"

"No."

Shocked, the whole room suddenly turned to me, and that was how I found out that I was the one who had interjected. Mortification crawled up my throat-I didn't even realize I had gotten angry enough to speak up, but I could feel it in my chest, hot and thick and unmistakably eager for a reason to be let out. I felt all the color drain from my face with all this conflicting attention, but it was too late now.

"N-No," I repeated as firmly as I could muster. "I want you to join us. Please."

Once he realized he had my approval, Eric cautiously took his place in the remaining open seat and proceeded to nibble with us. And so continued whatever conversations had paused just minutes prior. As the dinner went on, however, whenever there was an opening for Henry to make some sort of off-handed comment at his brother's expense, he would take it with much gusto. Everybody, even Xaden, just sat there, tiredly accepting it all.

But the Alpha King was the only one who seemed the most neutral. In fact, one might even say that he didn't care about what was said.

I sat on what felt like thousands of painful pins and needles, waiting for any sort of sign that Eric would try to defend himself against his brother. It didn't matter what it was-if he was able to throw some classy backhanded response or even a simple 'stop' to put an end to Henry's rude remarks, that would have been enough, but....

But... he did nothing. Not a single thing, even as dinner turned into dessert.