

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 99

Maeve POV

"Eric?" I questioned, surprised, thankful for the interruption, tearing my gaze away from Isabelle.

What is he doing here?

Eric's lanky figure shuffled uncomfortably, yet he moved with determination. "I-I was on my way back to my room. I was just in a meeting with my father," he shakily enunciated, swiftly pointing his gaze directly at me as those words left his mouth, "until he got called away for something else."

That knowing glance he gave me only served to validate that feeling of dread I'd had ever since I entered the palace. At first, I just wrote it off as my worry about what Queen Leonora had to say to me, or that I simply did not want to be around Isabelle. But now I knew my instinct was correct.

She was likely lying to me.

Isabelle's eyes widened. "You were just with the Alpha King?"

Eric immediately tried to straighten his awkward posture. "I-Is that so difficult for you to believe?" he dared to press, suddenly making her look uncomfortable. "Despite appearances, I'm still a prince of this kingdom."

"That's not what" she began to weakly protest before seeming to second-guess herself and quickly cut herself off, swinging her glare back to me.

"Look, he told me to bring you, and I cannot refuse a direct order from His

Majesty," she said before taking on a low, warning tone: "and neither should you."

Meanwhile, Eric held out his arm to me opposite Isabelle. "The Luna Queen is waiting for you."

I gulped. If both were true, I would risk insulting one person by choosing the other. But on the chance that only one told the truth, I needed to choose carefully.

Should I believe Isabelle or Eric...?

I inhaled shakily, deciding on the best course of action. "Thank you, Eric," I said, taking his arm and ignoring the distinct look of shock that marred Isabelle's face. "I've kept her waiting long enough." And with that, we departed from that hallway, wandering in the direction of the queen's parlor and leaving Isabelle alone where she stood.

I tried my best to appear calm and collected, but inwardly, I was trembling with nerves. I couldn't believe I did that- I stood up to Isabelle again. But I couldn't find it in me to regret it, I would have rather taken my chances than risk being alone with her again, especially when every fiber of my being screamed at me not to.

"Well..." Eric sighed once we were well out of reach of Isabelle. "We seem to be far away enough now."

"What did the Alpha King want with you?" I dared to ask, my worry overpowering any reservations I might have had about speaking out of turn. My mind went to any and all worst-case scenarios-that he might have faced punishment at the hands of his father for the events of last night.

My heart lurched, hoping I hadn't been the cause.

He offered a small grimace, which I assumed to be a weak attempt at a smile. "I was... actually lying about that," he said, rubbing his wrist. "I just passed by

his office on my way down here he was getting ready to talk to Lucas... not me."

I blinked. "But then?"

"He never made a summons for you," Eric clarified. "She made that up to lure you away from the Luna Queen." So... he knew she was lying, too.

He made up that whole story just to help me escape whatever trick Isabelle had planned.

"Thank you," I murmured, feeling warm inside from his bold efforts. "Why did you do all that for me?"

"I heard what you did for me last night," he said as a genuine smile spread over his thin face. "I... I just wanted to find a way to say thank you for doing that. Especially to the Alpha King. No one's ever done something like that for me."

The sentiment weighed heavily on me, reassuring me that I had indeed made the right choice, regardless of who I might have upset with my actions. "I was happy to."

Before long, we found ourselves outside the queen's parlor. Eric bade me farewell and wished me the best of luck, which I graciously accepted. I would have taken anything to help me get through this morning.

Taking a deep breath, I opened the door and immediately locked eyes with Queen Leonora, who waited patiently at her table, as she usually did.

But before the Luna Queen could say a word to me, I pulled to a stop in front of her, lowering my head in a show of deep remorse. Before we begin," I whispered, avoiding her gaze out of pure shame, "I wanted to apologize for my horrific behavior at the banquet last night. Not only did I disrespect the king... I also disrespected you... and I won't ever forgive myself for doing that, especially after how kind you have been to me."

"Maeve..."

"So, please," I begged, "I ask you to give me a chance to redeem myself "

"Maeve," Queen Leonora's insistent voice, along with her hands gently wrapping around my own, prompted me to finally face her. "You are wonderful for wanting to apologize," she said with a warm smile. "But there was no need-I have nothing to forgive you for."

My eyes widened in shock. "But?"

"You stood up for someone who was in need of help," she recalled, looking serious. "You could have feigned ignorance and let it happen without saying a word, but you didn't. You stood up against bullies, even in front of the most powerful man in the kingdom. That is what a real Luna Princess ought to do."

I felt a weight lift off my shoulders with her words. She... wasn't mad at me, even in the slightest. Truly, she was the most compassionate and understanding woman I had ever met.

"That being said..." Queen Leonora trailed off, looking pensive, "I am strongly advising you to refrain from reacting in such a way again. At least, for the time being," she added after a thoughtful pause.

I bit my lip. She still did not approve, after all. "... understand."

"I'm not quite certain you do," she murmured, her voice filled with nothing but care and kindness, making me listen to her. Dear, you must know that what I'm about to say comes only from a place of love and worry for you. To enter high society in this kingdom is to walk into a den full of starved wolves-" she said, the analogy making my eyes widen, "you will find yourself surrounded by those hungry for any little piece of food they can snatch when you're not looking."

Queen Leonora ventured ever so closer, looking incredibly serious. "Do not- ever-let the wolves take a bite out of you," she warned, taking on a low tone.

"If you lower your guard and show vulnerability, even for the most fleeting of moments, then someone will be waiting in the wings to take advantage of it."

The message in her words sounded awfully foreboding. Could that really be true about everyone? And then, suddenly, my mind flashed to the last words I heard from that mysterious voice in my dreams.

An alpha to be wary of...

Perhaps I really should take these words to heart. It could save not only my reputation, but also my life in the long run.