

The Hidden Luna Queen

Chapter 9

Maeve POV

That **was** all I'd ever be to them—always the villain in their story.

I was the one who destroyed their happy, peaceful lives.

They never held a scrap of respect for me, no matter what I did for them, no matter how desperately I tried to please them... so what did it matter if I obeyed them or not? Any guilt or dread I'd struggled with vanished in a heartbeat, replaced by **a burning** desire for payback. I was done letting them toy with my life, my **decisions**, my emotions—all of i

This was my chance to seize control for myself.

And I wanted them to know what it was like to suffer... even just for a moment.

Setting my jaw and clenching my fists, I turned **and** looked at Victoria dead in the eye for perhaps the first time in my life. “And what if that’s what I want?” I dared, feeling a rush of adrenaline and, simultaneously, cold detachment from the people in front of me, and the haughty expression on her face fell. “Maybe I want her to be locked up.”

Father let out a strangled sound of bafflement.

Sarah seemed to understand the gravity of the situation and let **out** a bloodcurdling scream. “No!” she bawled, tears rolling down her reddened face. “Mommy—Daddy—s—save me, please!”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a **smirk** form on Prince Xaden's amused face.

Finally, someone was in my corner... **and** it was emboldening.

"Please, my dear little Maeve" Victoria bemoaned, putting on a pathetic display of submission in front of all the partygoers and the Alpha Prince's posse. A few tears streaked down her heavily made-up face as she reluctantly reached out for my hand. "We know the kindness of your heart knows no bounds... I only ask that you show that kindness to your little sister one more time."

There were a few murmurs among the crowd, wondering if I'd actually go through with my bluff.

I'd hoped to teach them a lesson **in** humility, but the hatred that gleamed in her eyes told me everything. This was a performance to win the favor of the room, and she sought to win this battle of superiority.

Now that I found myself in control, however, I could only feel sadness.

Watching my wicked stepmother shed her crocodile tears and plead for mercy, I found no pleasure in treating her even a fraction of the way she'd treated me all these years, despite however much I might have wanted to. She deserved it—frankly, they all did—but that didn't mean it had to be done.

Wicked or not, I couldn't live with myself if I hurt others, and I couldn't understand how she and Sarah enjoyed this sickening feeling.

With an uncomfortable grimace, I pulled away before Victoria could touch me with those manicured claws. "Let **Sarah** go," I whispered to Prince Xaden, who had been **waiting** patiently for my decision. "Please."

"Are you sure?"

I nodded. "Yes. I don't want any of this."

After a moment of consideration, he relented and made a gesture to the guards, who quickly unhandled my sister. “Consider yourself lucky, Sarah,” he said, **looking** down at her as she fell to her hands and knees with a gasp. “Your benevolent sister **has** decided to show you mercy today

“My little girl!” Victoria **sobbed**, pulling her daughter close. “Oh, my baby!”

“**Are** you hurt, sweetheart?” **Father** pressed, touching her face. “Oh, look at your hair, your dress what a mess you’ve become.”

Sarah’s hair, which had been styled in a beautiful, fancy updo, hung around her face in loose clumps, looking almost windblown in her dishevelment. The dress she had so meticulously picked out was wrinkled and torn in various places on her body. And the makeup she had worked so long on that morning streaked down her face, rendered unsalvagable.

“Maeve.” The prince’s muscular arm wrapped around my back like a shield, ushering me away. “We should go now.”

With **a** sad, reluctant breath. I nodded. “Okay.”

As Prince Xaden and I departed the banquet **hall**, I couldn’t help but spare one last glance at Sarah. Despite everything, she was still the only blood sister I’d ever known. If things had been different, there might have been a version of reality where we liked each other. where we could have been friends.

But all I saw when I looked at **Sarah at that** moment was pure hatred, written all over the shadows of her face and the dark depths of her eyes, and it ran deeper and stronger than anything I’d ever seen on her before.

A chill ran down my spine.

It didn’t seem to matter that I’d chosen to spare her from a night in the dungeon. To her, I was still the root cause of all her misfortunes, her ruined future. And there **was** nothing I could ever do to change that.

I **had** to tear my gaze away. That train of thought only served to spiral me down a dark path that I didn't want to explore.

As we walked to the car, someone clearing their throat caught my attention. "So." Prince Xaden drawled, sounding light- hearted, "this is where you've been hiding all this time. You're a surprisingly difficult **woman to find**, you know."

That startled me. "You looked for me?"

"It's not every day I find myself in bed with a mysterious woman in the capital."

I winced. "Your Highness, I didn't mean to-"

"Call me Xaden. We're long past formalities at this point, wouldn't you agree?"

Fidgeting in my seat, I pressed my lips together. "Xaden," I relented, resisting a blush. "I can't tell you how sorry I am about how things transpired... none of this was supposed to have ever happened."

"As far as I'm concerned, you have nothing to apologize for."

The seriousness in his face was unmistakable. A question that had burned in my mind during the party reignited itself and forced its **way out** of my mouth. "Why didn't you believe Sarah?"

His answer came faster than I anticipated. "I know what I saw that night," he murmured. "**The** fear in your **eyes**, scent of alcohol you emitted, the confused glaze. those factors combined don't just happen naturally."

Our conversation paused as we entered the car—more like a limousine, actually. I was seated the furthest in the car. Prince Xaden right next to me, and his Prime Beta sat by the door

Once our privacy was ensured, he continued. “That night we met in the capital...” he muttered slowly, as if to compose his thoughts, “what happened in the moments before I arrived?”

It had been a while since I last reflected on the first half of that night. Whenever I was reminded of it, I limited myself to the time spent with Xaden.

Those were the only hours I could think back on with fondness.

I swallowed. “Someone tried to give me a drink, and when I refused, they shoved it down my throat. By the time I realized what was happening, it was too late.”

“Was Sarah the one who did this?”

I faltered. Even though she **was**, indeed, the one responsible, I hesitated if I should attach her name to the crime. Thanks to the years of brainwashing from my father about pack honor.

“Yes, it was Sarah,” I admitted softly. “But I don’t know if it was her idea.”

His face pinched with utter bafflement. “But, she’s your family—they all are, are they not? They treat you **so** poorly, yet put your sister on a glass pedestal.”

Welcome to my world, I wanted to say.

I wanted to hope there was even one moment when Father might have felt love for me. maybe when I’d been born, or even if I had somehow exceeded his expectations when it came to completing an order. but I always came up empty.

No matter how hard I tried, I knew he never loved me.

I gulped, my lips tightening in a firm line. “That’s just how it’s always been.

It was strange. It would explain so much if I'd just **said** I was Alpha Burton's illegitimate, unwanted child... but I couldn't. Despite no longer being under the control of my abusive family—**separated** by miles of **road**, thousands of buildings, **and** millions of lives—I could still hear their cruel voices in my ear as if they were right there, muttering their hateful words like they were my daily affirmations

Even though my body was free, my mind was not.

It was like a curse that I couldn't break.

My silence was deafening, but it reached the cars of the prince and his Prime Beta. Out of the corner of my eye. I saw them exchange wordless glances.

Evidently, my answer did not sate their curiosity.

Xaden seemed to recognize that I **didn't** want to talk anymore about it, however, so he was courteous enough not to bring it up again

The remainder of the drive was peaceful **enough**. For the most part, I relaxed **back** into the comfortable leather seat **and** allowed myself to decompress, while Xaden and his Beta spoke in hushed tones about different duties that needed to be taken care of.

As I peered out the car window sometime later, I saw a large building in the distance that grew as we got closer.. and closer. **With** its **colossal** towers and a multitude of **tiny**—slitted windows, that glittered in the afternoon sun it almost resembling what I imagined the royal palace to look like.

Wait

Where did he say we'd be going?