

## The Luna Choosing Game by Jane Above Story Chapter 136

Chapter 0136

Love has **no** place in royalty.” Nicholas

tilted his head down and lowered his gaze. “I will be **forced** to

marry the best Luna candidate in the Choosing Game. I can only hope that, at the **very** least, perhaps a

sense of friendship will blossom later.”

“And Lilliana is the best?” I asked.

He **sighed**. “**She** is the one my father has chosen for now. It could change over the course of the

competition. His whims can be fickle. But what would it matter? They are more or less all the same.”

My heart broke at his words. Hearing this usually confident man so... complacent – so accepting of such

an unwelcomed fate – tugged at my emotions.

“I want children,” he continued. “I believe that my life will be fulfilled enough with family, even if I can’t be

with a partner I would have truly wished for.”

I shook my head, refusing to accept it. “No one should turn away from their heart so fully.”

“I don’t have any choice, Piper.”

I took him by the arm and shook him. He was well-muscled, he only wobbled a bit and likely only to

appease me.

“You do. When you are King, you can –”

“I need to be married to be King.”

Oh. Right. I had forgotten about that and deflated a bit. But it still couldn't be hopeless. There had to be some way for Nicholas to appease his family **while** still marrying the person he wanted – whoever that

may be.

As for my jealousy, surely I would be able to contain it if I knew Nicholas was with some one who he

loved, who was his match in both generosity, spirit, and heart.

Though no one here truly seemed to fit those qualifications. Except perhaps Susie, but she was happy

enough with her own choices.

“I truly don't have any choice,” Nicholas said.

“I'm sorry,” I told him. “I just can't accept that.”

He sighed. “You've always been stubborn.”

Maybe, but... “Especially when it comes to you. I care about you too much to see you throw your life

+15 BONUS

His gaze lifted to me. Under the bright sunlight, the green flecks in his eyes seemed to sparkle. He was unbelievably handsome. I could easily stare at him forever.

Til help you find someone,” I said. One of these girls had to be alright, somewhere under the surface. If I really looked closely, gave them more chances...

He gave me a tight-lipped smile. It was sad, and didn't last more than a second or two.

It has to be Lilliana,” he said.

My brow pulled together. “Because the King chose her? Surely anyone here would suit, if we

“Not just anyone would suit him, I'm afraid.” His gaze lingered on me a beat longer in **silence**, before he

dropped it away.

“There you are,” said a voice too near us. I glanced up to see Lilliana approach.

I had been staring at Nicholas so intently that I had not noticed her **drawing** near.

“I was looking for you, Prince Nicholas. I didn't see the two of you sit down.” Her face was blank, with a

dull smile on her face.

I wondered briefly if I should stand so she could sit, but then pushed that thought away.

We were equals

here.

Nicholas, however, did not feel the same. He quickly rose to greet her. “Hello, Lilliana. I'm sorry to have

disappeared on you.”

“I have found you now. You need not apologize.” She did not look at me once.

As the only one sitting, I felt awkward and stood as well, to join them..

Finally Lilliana glanced at me, but only for a moment.

“You were so brave back there, Nicholas.”

“Thank you. Linda has a tendency to push too far, I’ve noticed.”

“I’ve noticed that too,” Lilliana said. “She pushes too far.”

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“Right.” Nicholas tightened his jaw.

“Well, she certainly did in this case,” I said, inserting myself into their conversation. “I would never hurt

anyone.

Lilliana looked at me blankly.

I believe that,” Nicholas said.

Then Lilliana added, “Yes, me too. Piper would never hurt anyone.”

I frowned. This conversation felt... odd. Like attempting to speak with a puppet, she only ever seemed to

emulate what Nicholas had said.

Secretly I wished Nicholas would say something outlandish, if only to see if Lilliana would agree. He was

too good of a man for that, however.

If only Lilliana had taken to Julian instead. He would have had a field day amusing himself with her

mindless compliance.

“The cooking challenge for Linda was very inspired, Prince Nicholas,” Lilliana said.

“You are very

intelligent.”

Nicholas looked absolutely miserable standing there, frowning so deeply, eyes downcast and away.

Thank you.”

“I’m so lucky to be your favorite,” she said, side-eyeing me.

And though she had meant that, I’m sure, **as** both a claim over him and a slight to me, I was relieved to

see any type of personality formulate in her. Pity, it only manifested in such a contemptible way.

“Yes, that does make you quite fortunate,” I agreed, just to get her to ease off that line of thinking.

Nicholas looked a half minute away from digging a hole in the ground just to bury himself in it.

“If you recall,” I continued, showing even more leniency, “I am Julian’s favorite.”

“Ah.” She didn’t sound particularly impressed. “Where is your prince? I am surprised that he did not stand

up for you, as Nicholas did.”

**Not** everyone was as stout-hearted as Nicholas. I wondered if Julian would have stepped in eventually-

likely before they chopped off my head, maybe. Whenever the situation stopped being funny to **him**, most

likely.

415 BONUS

Watching the way Lilliana interacted with Nicholas, with her constant agreeing and compliments, I felt more and more terrible for Nicholas. There had to be some way I could **save** him from this fate.

I knew he wanted children, but... how could he wish to tie himself so permanently to someone like this?

Even for the sake of the crown?

The **kingdom** was important to Nicholas, in ways I didn’t and couldn’t comprehend. I tried to remember

that.

**But**, to give up his whole sense of self...?

Nicholas wasn't my boyfriend. He hadn't been for a long time. But I could never forgive myself if I walked

out of his life forever knowing how miserable he would be.

I would find a way to save him from this fate somehow.

Later, after we'd eaten lunch in the gardens, we were alerted that the kitchens were ready for **Linda's**

personal challenge. Nicholas, Lilliana, and I walked down to them together, though we became separate

just inside the door.

Joseph grabbed my arm roughly and pulled me to the side.

"You will stand here with me, in case you get any wild ideas," he said gruffly. "From here, any sabotage

you have planned will not escape my notice."

have no sabotage planned," I said.

He grunted, obviously disbelieving me.

"You better enjoy this free time you've been having," he said. "Because it's all about to come to a close."

"I didn't do anything, and soon enough you will see that."

He shook his head. "There isn't anything that will keep you out of the dungeons, sooner or later."

Sooner or later. That sounded like a threat.

Like he knew I hadn't done anything to Linda's food, or to hurt the Queen.

He was

just waiting for me to make a mistake, any mistake, and then he would pin any negative

outcomes all on me.

He smirked at the fear that was likely on my face. How was I supposed to fight against the Captain of

the Guard?

"I see you rot down there."

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+15 BOHUS

Joseph's smile was twisted with cruelty. It deeply unnerved me. This man was not a noble himself, simply employed by them. He must have been like Lena, a traditionalist. Someone who wanted to uphold the way things had always been, rather than accepting necessary changes.

I hated that such ideals constantly placed me in danger. I was merely a girl caught up in it all. I had been chosen by the selection. It wasn't like any of this was my direct choice.

Glancing across the room, I noticed Nicholas locked in conversation with Lilliana. He seemed entirely bored but dutifully gave her his attention anyway. He hadn't noticed the intimidating way Joseph was

clutching my arm. I couldn't expect a rescue this time.

I cleared my throat, attempting to gather my courage. Joseph was making threats. I couldn't simply

cower under them, or he would know how much they affected me.

"Don't I **have** to do something wrong to be sent to the dungeons?" I asked.

His eyes narrowed. "It's only a matter of time."

"No, I'm fairly certain that Piper is right," Julian said, suddenly appearing beside me. "Unless they

changed the rules in the past few minutes while I was in the bathroom?" Brow raised high, he looked at

me and then at Joseph. "No? Didn't think so."

"Prince Julian, perhaps you misheard me," Joseph began.

Julian shut him down straight away. "No, I don't think I did." He pointed to where **Joseph** gripped my

arm. "No, maybe you'd like to release Piper and move a few feet away. Or more."

Joseph's face scrunched up like he wanted to argue, but what could he say to one of the princes he was

charged with protecting?

I somehow manage to hide my own smirk as Joseph complied. He dropped my arm like it had burned

him and backed away exactly three feet. He continued to glare daggers at me.

"I don't think he likes me," I whispered to Julian, who laughed, bright and boisterous.

I

"No, it doesn't seem like he does. I had better stay near you, then, to help fend him off, as it seems my brother is otherwise occupied."

I glanced at Nicholas again. He was rubbing his forehead now.

"I feel bad for him," I said.

→ +15 BONUS

"Ah. So you've spoken with Lilliana then."

That remark wasn't kind to Lilliana, though it was absolutely the truth. Still, I decided it better **not** to

agree or disagree.

Julian just looked at me and then laughed again.

Nathan signaled it was time for Linda to begin, **and** she moved at once, collecting her supplies. She set

the stove to boil the eggs.

"Nothing quite like watching water boil," Julian whispered to me. "Except perhaps watching grass grow."

"You aren't a chef then," I said, looking at him.

He pressed a hand to his heart. "If I made a meal, it really would be poison."

Nicholas, I remembered, had worked hard more than once to prepare meals for me, when we had been together. I wondered if he maintained **his** skills after all this time. It wasn't like he had much need to

prepare his own meals nowadays.

“Your stuffed mushrooms were delicious though, Piper,” Julian said.

“Thank you, but my cooking skills are also lacking. I do what I can, with what few ingredients we have at home. A lot of the time though, my roommate Anna makes the meals for Elva and I, since I work so much.”

“That’s kind of her.”

“It is.” I missed Anna so much. I wondered all the time if she was watching the televised portions of the competition. What she must think of everything! Sometimes I could almost hear her voice, chiding me for not chasing Nicholas.

“The man needs love, and you have love to give!” she would say, as if anything was that easy. Love wasn’t the only thing keeping Nicholas and I apart

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Linda took the eggs off the stove too soon. I wondered if they had fully solidified. When she cracked

them on a **bowl**, however, **the** whites of the eggs, at least, seemed whole. Yet when she cut them in half,

to remove the yolks, the yellow yolk was slimy,

She didn’t seem to mind and poured them into a bowl anyway. A bold choice.

Nathan leaned closer, peering into the bowl. “Does that look right?”

Linda nodded. “I cook the eggs shorter than necessary so the yellow bit comes out better. It makes it

easier to mix too.”

To me, Julian said, “I wonder who they are going to get to taste test this, because not it.”

I really hoped it wasn’t me, either.

Nathan leaned back. His face crumpled like he wanted to correct her, but ultimately, he decided to stay

neutral.

Linda then mixed the other ingredients in with the eggs and began to stir. She lifted an egg half to add

the mixture, when the egg slipped down onto the ground.

“Slippery little things, aren’t they?” Linda said, laughing though it sounded nervous.

She reached down, picked up the egg, and returned it to the plate.

Everyone in the room went very quiet

Linda continued adding the mixture to that egg, like nothing had just happened.

Nathan leaned forward again. “Linda. Did you see any problem with adding that specific egg back to the

plate?”

She blinked at him in **obvious** confusion. “Accidents happen. I’m sure the floor is regularly cleaned.”

Nathan frowned. “Do you ever spend time in the kitchens at home?”

Her brow furrowed. “Sometimes,” **she** said, but her eyes shifted as she spoke. She was clearly lying.

Nicholas stepped into the center of the room. “That’s enough. I believe this experiment has proven my

case.

Grumbling, Joseph pushed off from the wall and stormed out of the room. I stepped back just in time to narrowly avoid being shouldered by him.

Sore loser, Jullan said.

don’t understand,” Linda said. “What did I do wrong?”

Someone should have been supervising the girls when they cooked,” Nicholas said to Nathan, “If we do another cooking challenge, please see to it.”

Nathan bowed. “A horrible oversight on my part. I beg forgiveness, Your Royal Highnesses.”

Nicholas nodded.

“Someone explain to me what is going on,” Linda said, voice rising in panic or anger or both.

Julian smirked. “You blew it, Linda. Not only did you undercook the eggs, but you even dropped one on the ground, then returned it to the table. Admit it, you’ve never even been into a kitchen before in your life.”

“I’ve been in one!” she announced loudly.

Julian smiled wider. She’d taken his bait and proven that, though she’d been in a kitchen, she had not been in one to cook. Very likely, she had never cooked in her entire life. Likely, **she** hadn’t seen anyone else do so either, or she would know not to pick things up off the floor.

Everyone in the room watched her with pitiful eyes, except those few who were laughing.

Yet Linda sought me out in her ire.

“This is all your fault, Piper! You. You sabotaged me!”

“We know she didn’t,” Nicholas said. “You will convince no one otherwise after what we have just witnessed.”

“If you had only listened to me,” she said instead.

“I did listen, Linda. Until you stopped speaking to me. We could have helped each other, but you were too stuck on excluding me.”

“You deserve to be excluded. You have no right to even be here!”

“Stop embarrassing yourself,” Julian said. “You’ve already had a poor showing. Just accept the failure with grace.”

“Poor showing?!” She was shouting now, her eyes wild. She looked around the room like a woman

crazed. Then her sights landed on a nearby knife.

She snatched it off the counter, then, holding it in both hands, she lunged for me.

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As Linda dived at me, knife first, both Julian and Nicholas moved at once.

Nicholas ran at me. He grabbed me around the waist and pulled me toward him, shielding me behind his body.

Julian, meanwhile, went straight for Linda. He grabbed Linda's wrist and twisted. The knife clattered

down onto the floor.

"Someone get Joseph the hell back in here!" Julian shouted at one of the guards. They ran out of the room, doing as commanded. The others closed in around Linda.

Disarmed, she shrank in on herself, seemingly realizing what she had done. Her eyes were wide and vacant. Tears streamed down her face.

Nicholas eased me back, though he kept his hands on my shoulders.

"Are you okay?" he asked me.

"Yes." That knife never had a chance to reach me with both brothers moving as if in tandem.

Still, Nicholas checked me over, dropping his gaze down the length of my body.

"No one likes Piper, but to actually try to kill her?" whispered one girl to another.

"It's too far," said another.

When the danger had passed, and Nicholas released me, Susie rushed to my side.

"Piper!"

"I'm okay," I promised her. I waved out my arms so she could see for herself.

"What happened?" Susie looked at Nicholas. "Why would Linda do that?"

Nicholas set his jaw. "Some nobles don't know how to lose."

"Linda," Julian said, loud and authoritative. It was unusual to see Julian take anything seriously, but right.

now, he looked absolutely furious, glaring down at where Linda whimpered. "For attempting to murder a

fellow candidate, you are disqualified from the competition."

“But...” She spoke weakly. Even she must have known that she had no defense. Everyone in the room

had seen her in the act.

When Joseph finally returned to the room, his eyes sunken in rage, Julian directed him to escort Linda

This is, **of** course, assuming Piper does not wish to press charges,” Julian said, looking at me. “What she has **done** is worthy of jail time, Piper.”

I considered it. Linda had certainly treated me terribly, and now this final act of terror. But, even so, if I wished to press charges, it would extend into a court hearing. Even though I would likely win, I really just wanted this entire situation to go away.

Holding Julian’s gaze, I shook my head a little. He seemed to understand.

“Take her away,” Julian said to the guards.

“You continue to be a weak-willed little mouse. You can **dress** yourself up in silks and satins, but you will always be common underneath,” Linda said, finally finding her voice. “How dare you act like you are so far above me?! Piper, you absolutely coward!”

I stepped into the way of the guards, forcing them to stop, and for Linda to face me.

“Do not confuse kindness for cowardice,” I told her.

She glared at me. “Kindness will never earn you Luna.”

“So be it,” I said, then stepped out of the way again.

The guards pushed Linda forward. “Go on.”

When she was cleared from the room, I waited for a bit, not wanting to feel like I was following her out

into the hallway. Susie and Nicholas kept me company. Julian, too, when he was done being authoritative.

He came to my side with his usual smile and swagger. “Did you see the show I put on?” he asked with a

wink.

I rolled my eyes, playing along.

Truthfully though, inside I was shaken. Even if she had been flimsy with that knife, unlikely to cause major damage, she had still attempted it. She had meant to kill me.

I'd had people hate me before. I'd also weathered my fair share of threats in the service industry. But it

was one thing for people to talk, and quite another for them to pick up a knife and charge at me with it.