

The Luna Choosing Game by Jane Above Story Chapter 141

Chapter 0141

When we were dismissed for the day, I hurried back to my room. I didn't feel whole again until I pulled

Elva into my arms for a hug.

She had a way of

"What's wrong, Mommy?" Elva asked, making me feel like the most important person

in the entire world. I was so grateful for that. It gave me the strength I needed to pull myself back

together.

To be her mother, I needed to be whole.

"Nothing now, honey," I said. "Mommy's feeling all better."

Later that evening, Nathan recalled the girls back to the parlor for announcements.

"Attention, please," Nathan said, claiming the attention of the room. "The Queen is resting now but I'm

you will all be relieved to know that she has mostly recovered from her bout of food poisoning."

A polite round of applause sounded in the room. No one would dare speak up over news of the Queen, though the anxiety was clear among many of the girls regarding the competition, specifically those who had not yet been judged.

"Now, as for the garden party event," Nathan continued. "The royal family has decided, for the sake of fairness, that a second event will be held tomorrow. This event will only be attended by those that had yet to be judged today." 1

I wondered what that meant for me. My treats were tasted, so I probably wouldn't get a chance to redo them. Plus, now I didn't have a partner.

Since there were an odd number of us, prior to Linda being eliminated, one table had been forced to include three people. But they had already planned their display. It would be grossly unfair to disrupt that

now.

I resolved myself to having my score marred by Linda's behavior. It hurt, though. I wanted to get into the

round, at least, so that Elva would continue to receive care for as long as possible.

next round

"This is not the only news that I have to share," Nathan said, hushing the chatter in the room.

More? What else could he possibly have to say? Stress rankled my nerves. It had been such a full day, I was ready to call the whole thing a wash and get some sleep.

"Regarding the next elimination," Nathan said.

"Already?" Susie whispered. I felt her worry deep down in the pit of my soul. Looking around many

+15 BONUS

"The next elimination will bring the count down from 14 to 9. But unlike the previous elimination ceremony where performance in events was the key indicator of **success**, this time there is a secondary factor to consider."

So I needed to do

well in events, as well as something else? It was quickly becoming more than I could handle. I had no idea what to expect.

"This secondary factor is the princ

themselves. Each of the princes will be selecting three candidates

to survive beyond

the elimination. They will consider your score in the events, but they have their own personal reasons that require consideration.”

A rumbled began among the girls. So many had chosen to chase after Nicholas. There was no way he could select them all, even if he wanted too. Not enough girls had tried for Joyce, and the rest would suffer now.

My own stomach twisted uncomfortably.

Julian had publically claimed I was his favorite, sure, but that didn't mean when push came to shove that he would actually select me to stay. I was only his favorite for show, and to annoy Nicholas.

Maybe I could talk to him. I had to convince **him** to select me. Surely he would listen to reason. Or, at

least, we could compromise somehow.

I must have had something he wanted. He still needed my ability to feel my wolf, right?

I wasn't sure. Nothing felt certain anymore.

But I wasn't ready to go home yet.

Chapter **0142**

The next afternoon, Elva and I watched from the window as the second garden party was held down

below.

Because of the delay, the girls had been given another chance to remake their food items that morning. This seemed a bit unfair, since their appetizers would be much fresher than those from the day before.

which had been made and then placed into storage.

I couldn't and wouldn't complain though. The girls had been denied their chance yesterday, and this was

the fairest way of making that up to them.

The Queen herself seemed much better, standing upright and majestic as ever. Linda's undercooked,

spoiled **eggs** likely only made her sick for a few hours. I'd never been able to tell she'd been sick at all,

looking at her now.

"Their dresses are so pretty, Mommy." Elva said. She seemed particularly taken with Olivia's pink ruffles. Blonde and beautiful, Olivia looked great in everything.

I hated to be so self-centered, but seeing Olivia look so regal and stunning made me pull into myself a little.

Linda's insult stuck out in my mind, reminding me that no matter how I dressed, I would always be common underneath. Such thoughts never really bothered me before. But sitting here, looking at how flawlessly Olivia and Lilliana fit into their noble rules, I felt inferior.

I truly did not belong here. No one knew that better than me.

"What's wrong? You're frowning." Elva poked at my cheek.

I took her hand in mine and placed a soft kiss to her palm. She was an observant little girl, I had to remember to school my emotions around her.

Elva needed me to be strong, so I had to be. Even if we didn't belong here, I couldn't let Elva think so. For her, I would bury my inferiority under a wave of courage.

"I'm okay." I told her. "See?" I forced a big smile.

She tilted her head like she didn't quite believe me. But then, eventually, she nodded and looked back to the window.

"Oh! There's Susie!" Elva said. "Susie!" She waved, despite **Susie** trying her best **not** to **look** at us, as the **royal** family was at her table.

+15 BONUS

In the end, only Nicholas glanced up at us, a tiny smile on his lips. He didn't look long enough for Elva to switch her attention to him, however.

I gently shush Elva. “She’s in the middle of something important. We can say hi to her later.”

“Her dress is so pretty,” Elva said.

I agreed. **She** looked great in a crimson cocktail dress with lace trim

Behind us, Mark slowly came closer to the window. I gave him a knowing look. “Would you like to take a peek, Mark?”

His cheeks flushed slightly. “No, I... Well, if it wouldn’t bother you too much.”

I waved him forward. Together, we all looked out the window. Seeing Susie, Mark’s breath caught. I pretended I didn’t notice.

Later that afternoon, the rest of the girls and I were called down to join the party, to receive the results. We stood out in the **grass**. Susie shared some of her leftover appetizers with Elva and **me**. After eating hers, Elva skipped circles around us.

“This is **delicious**,” I told Susie as I finished my own pastry treat.

She shrugged. “Thank you. There’s **no** way we won though. Neither my partner nor I knew what to talk to the royal family about. We mostly stood there awkwardly.”

“I’m sure it wasn’t all that bad,” I said, offering my friend as much support as I could

Yet she did not seem at all convinced by my words. “It was worse.”

“May I have your attention, please? Nathan called.

We all quieted down and turned toward him, waiting for him to begin. There was a brief delay as the camera crews set themselves up to capture both Nathan and the royal family behind him.

“The royal family would like to thank you all for giving your best to this garden party event,” Nathan continued, after given the green light by the camera crews. “As you know, this was a chance for you to demonstrate your ability to cooperate and negotiate with adversaries.”

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He motioned for the Queen, who stepped forward. “Maintaining diplomatic relations is one of the most

essential rules for a Luna. Finding common ground with those often considered to be your enemies is a vital piece of this diplomacy.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” Nathan said.

The girls and I clapped politely.

“Now, we will announce the winners of this event. This pair has shown the best overall cooperation, as

well as individual talent in both cooking and presentation.”

“It’s not going to be me,” Susie said softly, worrying her hands together.

I whispered to her, “At least your partner knew how to cook.”

Susie smiled a little and it felt like a victory.

“The winners are.” Nathan paused for dramatic effect. “Olivia and Megan!”

Olivia gasped, then laughed in faux disbelief. She pulled Megan beside her into a sideways hug. They

both looked physically pained at the contact, though they hid it with tight, overly-friendly smiles.

The rest of us clapped, as directed by the producers.

When the appropriate amount of time for clapping was over, Nathan continued to speak.

“Come on up here, ladies, and be personally congratulated by the royal family.”

As Olivia and Megan made their way to the front, Nathan added, “This win will earn you each a personal date with the prince of your choice.”

The King, Queen, and princes congratulated the two girls in turn, while the rest of us were forced to

watch.

Nathan then approached them. “Now, girls. Which of our three princes has earned your favor.”

Both Megan and Olivia had the same answer, “Nicholas.”

Nicholas didn’t move, but something in his face seemed to age as he heard their responses.

Beside him, **Julian** laughed and laughed. Joyce looked bored.

Nathan quickly gave the microphone to Nicholas. "Surely you have something to say to the ladies?"

+15 BONUS

Nicholas cleared his throat. "I gratefully accept." He handed the microphone back.

Nathan accepted it but looked confused a moment. Had he expected him to say more?

"Poor Nicholas," Susie whispered. "He looks so worn out."

I agreed

So much so, that I decided, when the crowds dispersed, to take Elva to see him, to hopefully cheer him

I waited around for a while, talking with Susie and helping her take her display apart. Her partner,

Jessica, was almost as shy as Susie was, but was friendly enough when we spoke.

"Jessica was hoping for a date with Joyce." Susie said, which made Jessica blush as red as her hair.

"I feel bad," she said. "No one seems interested in him." Softer, she added, "But I think he's the cutest in

the bunch."

An uncommon take, but not an unwelcome one. I was sure Nicholas would be relieved to know at least

one person here wasn't pining over him. Julian, I was just as sure, would have found it all very funny.

With the display taken down, I excused myself from the girls. Taking Elva's hand, I went in search of Nicholas. He wasn't out in the main gardens, so we entered the house.

I hoped he hadn't disappeared into the royal family's rooms or some other prohibited location.

Fortunately, I quickly found him near the entrance to the ballroom.

Unfortunately, he wasn't alone.

He had his arms around Lilliana's waist, and her arms were around his neck.

They held each other in a gentle hug.

My lungs suddenly felt too big for my chest and I struggled for breath. Yet I could not turn away.

What had Julian called it? Watching a train wreck?

I shouldn't have been bothered near so much, yet I was.

Maybe Julian had been right, after all.

What I felt now was undeniably jealousy. And I hated it.

Chapter 0144

Nicholas

I was trying my absolute best to feel good about this hug I was currently having with Lilliana, but I couldn't keep my full body from cringing away from it. As hard as I tried, I just couldn't get my chest and my **legs** to cooperate.

Inside, I wanted to be as far from Lilliana as possible, not holding her closely like this.

I knew as well as anyone that Lilliana's entire personality was fake. She always agreed with me, or said what **she** thought I wanted to hear. It was frustrating and oftentimes insulting. But I couldn't blame her exactly.

I also wore a mask, hiding my true feelings underneath.

Yet our reasons for shielding ourselves was different. I hid because the kingdom needed someone in control, who wouldn't make foolish choices based on feeling alone. She hid because she hoped to convince me that she was someone worthy of being Luna.

But I couldn't be sure. Not until I **had** seen past her shell and knew the true her underneath.

As it was, I knew next to nothing about her, really.

I pulled back from the hug, enough to speak to her. She averted her gaze from me, likely in an attempt to be demure. I guessed she would have no way of knowing that I actually preferred woman who could hold their own against me.

I did not want a weak-willed partner who would bend to my every suggestion.

But Lilliana was the person my father had chosen for me. Unless something earth-shaking were to occur to change his mind, I'd likely be stuck with her for the rest of my life.

I had to try to get along with her, if only to attempt to keep my future from being excessively miserable.

“Maybe you could tell me something about yourself,” I suggested.

“What would my prince like to know?”

I frowned at her use of ‘my prince,’ but pressed on. “Oh, I don’t know. What’s your favorite color?” I only needed one real thing to hold onto, however tiny.

My favorite is whatever my prince prefers,” she **said**.

Favorite food?

+16 BONUS

“Whatever you prefer.”

Thuffed out a frustrated breath. “Favorite season?”

“Which is yours, Prince Nicholas?”

I rubbed my forehead. I was getting nowhere fast with this conversation. “Surely you have some opinions of your own.”

“What need would I have of those, sir? I exist to ever be your second. I will spend my life supporting your rule.”

“Yes, sure. But you are your own person. Shouldn’t we at least try to see if some of our preferences align? If we are well-matched, we might even begin to like each **other**.”

Finally, she glanced up

at me, but only to cast me a curious look. “Why would we need to like each other? We would be married.”

How... depressing. “How foolish of me.” My hopes had not been high for Lilliana, but so mehow they sunk even further.

I truly was looking forward toward a life of loneliness with such a wife who would deny me even her honest opinions on her favorite color.

A flash of movement in the corner of my eye caught my attention. Further down the hallway, Piper had knelt beside Elva, Elva appeared to be crying.

At **once**, I stepped away from Lilliana. “If you will please excuse me.”

I rushed to Piper and Elva.

“Prince Nicholas,” Piper said, spotting me. Elva turned away from me, breaking my heart a little.

“Elva? What’s wrong?” I asked.

Elva sniffed. When she finally glanced up at me, it was with **shiny** damp eyes. “Do you like that other girl?”

I dropped to one knee, coming down to her level to look her in the eye. “Lilliana is...” I didn’t know how to explain. “Special.” Vague seemed best.

That didn’t **seem** to help. Elva openly sobbed.

“It’s **okay**, honey.” Piper rubbed her back. “He’s allowed to have other friends.”

Chapter 0145

Elva wiped her nose with her sleeve. Her eyes fixed on me, she asked, “But what about Mommy?”

“Oh, sweetie,” Piper said. “We’ve **talked** about this.”

“You like her more than Mommy?”

“I’m sorry,” Piper said to me.

I shook my head. “No. I don’t like her more than your mom.”

I looked at Piper **and** found her looking back at me with wide eyes. Had she thought something different? Surely she knew how Lilliana was. And out of everyone here, she would know what I truly desired in a partner.

“What’s your favorite color, Piper?”

She seemed surprised, but still answered, “Green.”

Lilliana could not hold a candle to Piper.

I

I refused to believe that I still held romantic feelings for Piper. If I felt anything more than friendship at any moment, it was likely I was only remembering how I used to feel when we had been dating.

Nostalgia held a strong influence.

But even only as friends, Piper was miles ahead of the rest of the girls here, in terms of my favor. If it had been proper for me to do so, I would have claimed her as a favorite before Julian could have a chance.

Even though she had no desire to be Luna.

“But...” Elva said. “If you like Mommy, why can’t you be my daddy?”

Piper’s face went red. “I’m

n sorry →→

I waved off her concern. “I’m not mad.”

To

a child like Elva, everything must have seemed so simply. If two people liked each other, then they should be together. It made sense, if nothing else in the world mattered.

Unfortunately, there were outside factors at play here. A crown and a throne, not least among them.

That’s a tough question, Elva,” I said. “But there are reasons, I promise.”

She tucked her chin down to her chest, sulking.

+15 BONUS

I **leaned** forward, as if telling her a joke. “You are still my little princess though, no matter what happens.”

That seemed to assuage her for now. She was still crying, but I watched as she tried to fight back a

smile.

Piper smiled as well. “Hear that, Elva? You are still his favorite.”

Elva looked at me **again**. “Yeah?”

I nodded, and suddenly had an armful of Elva, as she flung herself at me. Piper continued to rub her back as Elva buried her face into my shoulder.

For one brief moment, I could almost imagine this as my family, with Piper as my wife, and Elva as my child. My heart pumped heart and I felt light and relaxed.

It was impossible for so many reasons, but it was such a beautiful little dream, that for the full length of that moment, it stole my breath away. 1

“Well, isn’t this a cheery little sight,” said a gruff male voice from behind us.

I glanced, and seeing who it was, urged Elva away from me and into Piper’s arms instead. Then I stood and faced the intruder.

“Aren’t you going to introduce me to your friends, Nicholas? I’m dying to meet them.”

I swallow L.

I had hoped not to trouble Piper with too many royal affairs. She had made clear she was only here for Elva’s sake. But this particular intruder could not be ignored.

“Uncle, this is Piper and her daughter, Elva. Piper, this is my mother’s brother, Terry.”

Piper rose to her feet. Elva quickly shuffled to hide behind her.

“Piper, indeed. I’ve heard so much about you,” Terry said.

“Nice to meet you,” Piper said.

Uncle Terry sized

Piper up. His expression and demeanor stayed cordial, but his lingering gaze made me wonder what he thought of her.

Feeling a bit protective, I sidestepped a bit, blocking his line of sight.

His gaze shifted to me, and he smiled.

“Curious,” he said, and I wondered if I had just given my true self away.