

The Luna Choosing Game by Jane Above Story Chapter 146

Chapter 0146

Terry had said that he had heard a lot about me. I was hoping it was mostly good things, but knowing he was the Luna's brother, I had some doubts. The Luna herself did not seem overly fond of me

When Nicholas stepped between us, I began to wonder if there was more going on than I was aware

Terry had seemed friendly enough. His piercing gaze was unnerving I supposed. He looked at me like he was trying to see through my skin. But honestly, that wasn't all that unusual among the nobility

"Don't be rude, Nicholas." Terry placed his hand on Nicholas's shoulder and eased him to the side. "Let me see the girl, at least."

When I was in plain sight once more, his smile added teeth. "Ah, there you are. As stunning as they say. And where is little Elva?"

Elva peeked from around my skirts.

"Hello, little girl. Aren't you a pretty one?"

Elva quickly ducked back behind me.

"A charming child," Terry said. "You must be proud."

Now, I could start to see why Nicholas had attempted to shield me, even if subconsciously.

Terry gave off weird vibes. He seemed nice enough, but there was something tense about him. He was being almost too friendly, like he knew Elva and I well enough to laud us with compliments.

1. it.

Maybe that was just how he did things. Maybe he was simply being nice and I was reading too much into

But I had spent a lot of time around some not-very-nice people, and Terry was ringing all the alarm bells in my head, even if I couldn't properly discern the specific reasons why

"Are you here to see the King?" Nicholas said, frowning. "I would be happy to escort you."

"Would you?" Terry lifted a brow. "That would be a first."

Nicholas's jaw clenched.

And there, that was the reason I didn't trust Terry.

Because Nicholas didn't trust him, and I trusted Nicholas. I didn't really **need** a reason beyond that.

Very well," Terry said with a sigh. "Show me the way if you must." To me, he **offered** one final smile. 1

-15 BONUS

I dipped my head in acknowledgement. I had no intention of returning the gesture

As they walked away,

I took Elva's hand and began the trek to my room. I found Mark waiting for us at

the end of the hallway

Mark returned to my room with Elva and me Along the way. I struck up a conversation

"I met Terry." I said.

"Yes, I saw." He didn't offer more than that on his own

Curious

de me feel

I couldn't help but notice the tension between him and Nicholas. Admittedly, he made me uncomfortable."

Mark said, "Prince Nicholas and Terry don't see eye to eye very often. Terry's personality aligns more with Julian."

So he was a secret keeper then. Someone who observed more than they let on.

I would have to be careful around him.

"But," Mark continued. "Terry is well respected around the palace. He treats his staff well, pays very well, and generally keeps to himself. I would be careful not to alienate him."

I nodded, taking the warning for what it was. If the staff was fond of him, I would have to be careful what

I did or said, lest I earn their ire. I knew what the staff was capable of, and wanted to stay on their good

side as much as I could.

"Perhaps it was my imagination playing tricks on me," I conceded. I was very attuned to Nicholas, whether intentional or not. With him on edge, my perception was likely skewed.

If I met Terry again, maybe I would look at him differently. At the very least, he deserved a second consideration, being as well liked as he was.

The next night, at a banquet the King stood up and properly introduced Terry to the cameras and to the girls and me.

My brother-in-

law Terry is a shining beacon of nobility," the King said. "He is a royal that many aspire to

o be Generous, humorous, and kind. Please speak with him while you can and learn from him. He will be staying in the palace with us for a time.

Chapter 0147

“Don’t be coy, now, Your Majesty,” Terry said with an easy smile. “You should tell the girls that I will be helping to judge the Second Ball.”

The King nodded. “It is as he says.

The candidates began to chatter. If Terry was to be a judge, then it would be beneficial to earn his good favor.

Yet I still

direction.

ouldn’t entirely dismiss the creeping feeling that tickled my skin whenever he glanced in my

“Why do you suppose he is staying in the palace when he lives so near?” whispered the girl beside me. “He lives nearby?” I asked. That was the first I had heard of it, though I supposed it made sense

“Yes,” the girl said. “He stays in the large mansion up the road. It’s on the same land as the palace. I believe it’s on the other side of the forest.

My blood ran cold. I had been just outside the mansion on the other side of the forest.

That was the place where I had felt my wolf.

I swiveled in my chair, turning my full attention to Julian.

He had heard. I knew because his usual smirk was missing. Instead, he met my gaze with a stern one of his own. His mouth was a tight line. His eyes looked strained.

Terry lived in that house?

Then that would mean...

Did he know something about the underground organization? Was this why Julian had kept from me the owner of the house he didn’t want me to know a royal was so directly involved?

But then, Julian had always hinted it could be so. He had urged me not even to trust the King. Just how deeply did this organization **go**?

“He’s dangerous, Julian whispered, for my ears only.

I snapped upright in my chair, suddenly rigid. He’d been so overly friendly with Elva and me already. Did

he know Julian and I were the ones that had snooped outside of his home? That we had chased the car with the person who **had** stolen my wolf?

+15 **BONUS**

Half of me wanted to shake him and demand answers. The other half wanted to cower in fear.

If he was royal and in the underground organization, then he was indeed dangerous. He was powerful enough to make me disappear if he wanted, and no one would even know where to look.

“You will need a place to sit, Terry,” the King said, looking out over the table.

“If I could choose my own seat,” Terry said.

“Of course,” said the King.

My stomach sank down to the floor as Terry walked by many open seats to come toward me. He stopped just behind the chair of the girl next to me.

“I don’t suppose I could convince you to move over one seat, my dear? I promise it will only be for as long as I stay.”

Her smile wavered but she could say no. This would be an additional seat between her and Julian, her chosen prince. With obvious reluctance, she stood and moved to the next seat. 1

“It’s my honor,” she said, an obvious lie.

Terry’s smile, meanwhile, beamed, like he found personal pleasure in her annoyance. He pulled the seat out further and claimed it as his own.

Once he was seated, he turned his pearly-white smile onto me. “Hello, again, Piper. It seems like we will be seeing a lot of each other these few days until the Second Ball.”

Julian immediately leaned forward. “Hello, uncle. Fancy see you here. Typically you choose not to sit so

near me.

For the first time, I watched Terry's face tense, ever so slightly. Yet quickly, it had smoothed out again.

"Julian. A pleasure."

His eyes turned back to me, then for an instant, dipped down to peer at my bodice.

Though not as pleasurable as seeing Piper."

This man deserved no second chances. I knew immediately, deep in my bones, that Nicholas had been right not to trust him.

I swallowed hard, feeling trapped.

Chapter 0148

The servants brought out soup bowls for each of us seated. Terry and Julian both received theirs before

1. me. To do something with my hands, I was eager to lift my soup spoon and stir, even though it was ye

too hot to eat.

I couldn't look at Terry anymore. I didn't want to see the way he was looking at me.

"I'm surprised you decided to stay with us so long, Uncle," Julian said, speaking around me. "I'm sure your mansion would be much more comfortable for you."

"As I am

to be a judge at the next Ball, I thought it best to arrive early and assess the candidates on their own merits first, before I am given the specific criteria for the event." Terry tilted his head. "Besides, my mansion has had some issues of late."

"Oh? I'm sorry to hear that. Have you been letting in the wrong sort of guests again?"

"Quite the contrary. I've had a few uninvited guests."

"How strange," Julian said, maintaining his smile. Meanwhile, my heart was threatening to beat straight out of my chest.

"It is quite unfortunate, you see. These specific individuals would have been welcome in my home, had they gone about their arrival in the correct way."

"Unfortunate then, I agree." Julian lifted his own soup spoon now. "Perhaps they had some urgent reason for not making their presence immediately known."

Terry laughed lightly. "I am eager to hear what such a reason could be." He leered at me again. "Aren't you, Piper?"

Unsure how to

to answer, I glanced at Julian, yet before he could speak, the King chimed his fork against his glass, reclaiming the table's attention.

"Some of the **young** ladies here at the front **were** inquiring about the Second Ball. It is only fair that I share with all of those present." The King cleared his throat. The Second Ball will be a masquerade. You will need to dress up in an attempt to hide your identity."

A few gasps **sounded** around the table, quickly followed by soft murmuring

"We've had some clear frontrunners in this competition so far," the King continued. "This is your chance

to make a second first impression with the princes, and earn yourself their favor, to be saved from the elimination"

"Interesting," Julian said. He smirked at me. "I wonder if I'll recognize you."

I rolled my eyes at him, but his teasing did help set me more at ease. I'd been incredibly nervous since Terry sat down beside me.

"I wonder what my role will be," Terry said. "Perhaps I will determine how well everyone's costume conceals them. People have so much to hide. Don't you agree, Piper?"

Julian leaned forward. "Not everyone hides everything, Uncle. Perhaps you are projecting?"

Terry hummed in distaste.

The servants took away our empty soup bowls and brought out the next course.

Terry and Julian continued to trade polite jabs at each other for the rest of dinner, with me caught in the

middle.

After dinner, Julian immediately stood and offered me his arm. "May I escort you to your room, Piper?"

I was eager to escape, so quickly accepted his arm.

With a glance, I noticed Nicholas watching, a dark look on his face. But I had no time to smooth over his potential misunderstanding of Julian's feelings. I was too busy trying to get as far away from Julian as fast as I could. 1

Julian tugged me from the room. Once we were far enough away from anyone else, I hissed at him.

"He knew everything, Julian. He knew we were at his house. He basically called us out."

He replied in a similar tone. "Need I remind you that I was the one who wanted to stay hidden,

were the one who rushed forward?"

and you

He was right, as much as I hated to admit it. I attempted to smooth some of the ire from my tone. It wasn't based in anger anyway, especially not toward Julian. It was built from fear.

"Why is he here?" I asked. "He didn't need to stay to judge the Ball. He could have just **come** in the **day**. of. Unless you think he actually wants to spend time with the candidates?"

"I'm not sure," Julian admitted. "He does enjoy spending time with beautiful young women."

I frowned, a touch disgusted.

"Do you think he is involved in the underground organization?" I asked. It would make sense, since it was

at his mansion that I felt his wolf

It could be a coincidence. The person with your wolf was in a car driving away, not within the mansion

That didn't make me feel any better. Even if he was a pawn, that did make him involved, knowingly or not.

I also sensed that Julian wasn't telling me everything. That was nothing new, of course, but in this case, it especially irked me. Terry could be dangerous. If Julian knew, he should tell me.

He tapped my hand on his arm. "Just be careful, okay? I'm serious."

“Julian...”

“Listen to me, Piper. Don’t be alone with him.”

“Please tell me what you know. Maybe I can help.”

He shook his head. “I don’t know anything for sure.”

I sighed. That was his usual deflection. Julian played dumb quite often, but truly, he was a brick **w**all concealing many of his true, inner thoughts. I knew he was observant and intelligent. He was likely t hree

steps ahead of anyone else in the palace.

I just hated that he excluded me.

“How can **y**ou expect me to trust you when I know you are keeping secrets?” I asked.

We h

had reached the hallway outside my room, so we stopped a ways away from my door. Whatever he was going to say, he likely didn’t want the guards to hear. Or Elva. Or Mark.

He faced me then, and his eyes held an earnestness that I had never quite seen in the m before. In that

moment, he looked so much like Nicholas that my heart ached.

“Piper, I know we have our disagreements. I know you prefer my brother and I enjoy teasing you both.

But that does **n**ot mean that I want to see you physically harmed.”

Truthfully, I believed him, and not just because of his similarities to Nicholas. I had seen the way he had

jumped toward Linda when she had come at me with the knife. He hadn’t needed to ste p in, but he did

anyway, with no real benefit to himself.

“Terry wears a mask, the same as all of us,” Julian continued. “What lies underneath his is not something

I ever want you to see”

“I can handle myself,” I said, standing a bit straighter,

I could read between the lines here, and I had seen Terry staring down the front of my dress. I knew he lusted for me. It unfortunately wasn't the first time I had been in this position.

Still, Julian's continued seriousness gave me pause. The more I considered his words, the more my

mind considered the actual truth to this danger.

Terry was one of the most powerful men in the kingdom. He was potentially involved in the

organization.

I was tough as nails and could handle myself in most situations.

But I'd never stood up to a man like this one.

Julian held my gaze.

“Whether he is working for the underground organization or not, Terry has set his sights on you, Piper.”

My whole body **chilled**, even down to my bones.

Chapter 0149

Charlotte and I scoured through some magazines, looking at design ideas for new gowns for the Second

Ball.

Since us candidates needed to conceal our true identities as part of the challenge, Elva and I couldn't match this time. Therefore, every time we saw a cute kids' costume, I showed Elva to see if she cared for

We passed by several options. An owl with lots of feathers. A baby seal with pearly white fur trim. A

chameleon with shimmering fabric that changed colors in different lighting.

Finally, halfway through the third magazine, I stopped at a particular striking gown. It was a butterfly

design, bold and beautiful with wings and an assortment of colors.

“Look at this one.” I turned the magazine to Charlotte, who immediately perked upon seeing it.

“Wow! That’s gorgeous!”

With a butterfly, I liked the theme of rebirth. It felt fitting somehow, to go from my old life as a lowly

caterpillar to someone who could dare to dream of flying among the star-like princes.

Someday soon, I would have to transition again back into a butterfly. But for now, I could don my 1

and fly. 1

wings

“It will be a challenge,” I said, pointing to the many seams of the gown. The design required an immense

number of smaller fabric swatches, all sewn together like a stain-glass-mirror of color.

Charlotte shrugged. “We’ve done well on the previous gowns we’ve made. Plus **we** have all those

swatches left over

from before. The only thing we would need is some wire for the wings, but I’m **sure** I

can scrounge some from around her somewhere.”

Decided, I earmarked the page and we set that magazine aside. Instead, we began to more adamantly search for Elva’s design. So far, she had turned down the bumblebee, the lady bug, a swan, and a cat.

At the picture of the cat costume, she sighed. “Why **would** I be a cat, Mommy? I want to be a wolf!”

Charlotte and I glanced at each other. Then we poured through the magazines with renewed fervor.

Eventually, we **found** an acceptable design, a faux-fur trimmed dress with a mask in the shape of a wolf

face.

Elva loved it at once. She grabbed the magazine from my hands and held it to her heart.

“This one! This **one**, Mommy!”

When she was willing to part with the magazine again, Charlotte and I poured over the required items

and the patterns,

“We don’t have the correct materials to replicate the fur,” Charlotte said. She walked up **and** down the

table we had covered in all our remnants. “We’d have to order some.”

The Ball was fast approaching, and with my luck, I wasn’t sure we would get what we needed in time.

“I have a better idea,” I said, tapping my chin.

I walked toward the door where Mark was diligently keeping watch.

“Something the matter, Piper?”

“I was just wondering if I could go shopping. We need some things for Elva’s gown, and I’d rather not

have to wait for an order to come in.”

He drew his brows together, frowning but also clearly considering it. “That’s not typically how these

things work. Usually the servants take care of everything.”

“Mark, you know by now that I won’t make someone **else** do what I am perfectly capable of handling by

myself.”

Mark watched me for a moment, then withdrew a cell phone from his pocket. “Give me a moment.” He

opened a text. I didn’t see to who, or what he said, but I recognized the way his thumbs moved over the

bottom half of the screen.

He only waited a moment for a reply.

“Someone will be here soon to take you. Should I alert the nanny to **come** stay with Elva?”

I

I glanced behind me, ready to ask Elva if she wanted to come, but she was too busy setting up a tea

party for her stuffed animals. Those usually took all afternoon.

“If you would,” I told Mark.

Ten minutes later, the **nanny** walked through the door, ready to join Elva, Charlotte, **and** I for the tea party.

Chapter 0150

Five minutes after that, I excused myself from the party when Mark called for me.

As I headed to the door, I nearly tripped over my feet, spotting Nicholas waiting there.

“Prince Nicholas,” I said. “What a surprise.”

“You wanted to go to the store?” he asked me

I glanced at Mark, but he just stared back brightly, like nothing was

“I surely can’t ask a prince to run errands with me,” I said.

wrong.

Nicholas shrugged like it was no big deal. “It would be good to get away for a while.” He turned away

before I could think to argue. I hurried to slip on my shoes, grab a light jacket, and chase after him into the

hallway.

He drove us away from the palace in one of the less flashy sedans. It was black with tinted windows.

“If Julian had any sense, he would use one of these to sneak out properly,” Nicholas said.

I sighed, remembering our great escape of a first date. “Most of the time, he wants to be seen. He lives

for that bad boy persona, I think.”

“A pity that he drags you into it,” Nicholas said.

I supposed that was **true**, Julian had a way of bringing me straight into trouble, but I was also indebted

to him. Because of him and our outings, I was able to feel my wolf again, even if only briefly.

“He might not be all bad,” I said.

Nicholas’s face hardened. He said nothing more, **just** glared out the front windshield **as** we drove closer

to town.

To get to the fabric store, we had to pass through a portion of the town with shuttered up buildings and

run-down cars,

The car doors had locked automatically when Nicholas had started driving, but he **clicked** lock button

again now, making sure.

“I apologize,” Nicholas said. “A lady shouldn’t have to witness such an unseemly part of town.”

“It doesn’t look all that different from what I’m used to,” I said.

Nicholas turned to glance at me. Then a second time. “You’re serious.

Why would I joke about that? Or had that just been wishful thinking on his part?

“Honestly, Nicholas, much of your kingdom looks like this. Over the past few years, there’s been such an

economic downturn that many people are homeless. I’ve had to work two or three jobs sometimes to

keep a roof over Elva’s head.”

“Two or three jobs?” Nicholas repeated like he didn’t quite believe it.

I

“Yes, and we’d be much worse off if I didn’t find such a good person to room with. Anna has helped me

with Elva more than I could ever thank her for. I'll be indebted to her the rest of my life already, for these

past couple of years."

Nicholas's knuckles turned white on the steering wheel. "Things have been that dire." It wasn't a

question, not the way he said it, but I still treated it like one.

"Some points have definitely been better than others. Though the jobs that usually paid well didn't last

long before they went out of business. It's tough all over. During some of the low points, I'd have to skip

meals to make sure Elva always got hers."

I looked out the window, at the burned out streetlights and the tired people trekking down the sidewalks.

Not many had their own cars anymore. Walking and buses were the only way to get anywhere.

That was if the buses ran on time, or showed up at all.

"Living at the palace has felt like a dream. I've never eaten so well."

"**You** were too skinny when you arrived," Nicholas said. He sounded distant, like he was talking to me

from somewhere else, and not from the seat beside mine.

I turned my attention to him. "Nicholas?"

His mouth **was** a hard line.

He said, "I have let my people suffer for too long."