

The Luna Choosing Game #Chapter 191 - Read The Luna Choosing Game Chapter 191

Chapter 191

“I told you not to,” Nicholas said. “I gave you reasons.

“You don’t understand,” I said.

“What is there to understand? You are endangering yourself

“Her sister is involved,” Julian cut in. He was coming closer to us.

Nicholas’s mouth snapped closed. He furrowed his brow like he didn’t know what to believe. “How do you know?”

I looked to Julian. “Show him what you showed me.”

Julian took out his phone, prepped the surveillance video again and turned the screen toward Nicholas. He watched the entire thing.

“So she bought fabric. What does this prove?” he asked.

“She was at the second ball. Julian matched a feather that I found from her dress to the feathers in the

Then he found this footage. That’s where he’s been the past few days,” I explained.

A muscle ticked in Nicholas’s jaw. “She was at the party?”

“She was,” I said. “And she…”

“Piper,” Julian said, and it sounded like a warning. Maybe he didn’t want me to tell Nicholas the whole truth. Maybe he wanted to keep things between us.

But I couldn’t do that. My secret-keeping from before had led to me losing my wolf, and while I didn’t regret doing what I did to save Elva and my sister, now I wondered how things might have been

different if I had been more honest with Nicholas from the start.

Maybe he could have thought of another option.

Maybe we could have survived together these past three years.

I didn't know. But this was so much bigger than me now. Nicholas needed to know how deep my Sister's involvement was so that he could protect all of us.

She has thy wolf, Nicholas, I don't know how. But I saw her, and I felt i

frowned. Could it be Iver own wolf?

ing her when it a wolf ever

+15 BONUS

Nicholas's arms were still around me. He held me, unwaveringly, like he wasn't planning on letting go. I

wanted to melt into him for comfort, but I knew it wasn't my place.

He lowered his head, and spoke softly to me. "This is so dangerous, Piper. If this is real, your sister is likely involved in some nefarious stuff. If you keep on this path, you are going to get hurt."

"What else can I do?" I said back, matching his low tone. "If she's a pawn in this, I have to save her. If she's not..." It hurt me to even think of it, but I had to. I had to face the very real possibility that my

ny sister might now be a threat to me and Elva. "If she comes after Elva..."

Nicholas's arms tightened around me waist as if on reflex. "That won't happen."

"Only if we stop her. Stop them. You see now why I can't give up. While I can never give up."

His eyes met mine and I could see the war waging within them. He didn't want to agree with me, but he couldn't deny that I was right.

Slowly, he nodded. "I understand now."

"So you'll help us?"

He sighed. "I'll help protect you."

"That sounds like a yes to me," Julian said, coming closer. He patted us both on the back. A wide grin split his face. "Guess this makes us some kind of wonder trio."

"Don't get ahead of yourself," Nicholas snapped.

I lowered my forehead to Nicholas's shoulder and allowed myself to finally breathe.

I didn't want to go back to the celebration, especially after what I'd learned, and after what I'd experienced with Terry. Nicholas offered to walk me back to my room instead.

"I want to talk to Mark and the guards," he said. "We'll need to strengthen our security measures" I'm worried about Susie, though, I said. "She's still in the ballroom, and Terry might target her."

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"She's smart," Julian said. "She knows how to fade into the background. I've seen her do it."

"Even so..."

+15 BONUS

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"I'll keep an eye on her. One of us should head back to the party anyway," Julian said with a wink. "The ladies are probably missing me, the most handsome of us anyway."

Nicholas gave him a flat look.

Julian smirked and disappeared.

Then Nicholas took my arm and led me through the hallways. By now, my nerves were getting to me. I just wanted to see Elva, to hold her and know she's okay.

Nicholas was texting Mark with one hand.

“No issues today,” Nicholas said, which gave me a measure of comfort. I still would feel better if I could see it all with my own eyes.

When we reached the hallway of rooms, I was walking very quickly. Nicholas, blessedly, was keeping pace. His guards were keeping watch outside my door. Nicholas stopped to speak with them.

“Go on inside, Piper,” he said.

I nodded and walked in.

Elva and the nanny were sitting on the ground, playing with their dolls. Mark stood nearby, watching. They all turned to look at me when I came closer.
novelbin

“Mommy Elva jumped to her feet and rushed toward me.

immediately dropped to my knees, opened my arms, and scooped her into a big hug.

It was well past her bedtime but I wasn’t complaining.

She wanted to stay up to see you,” the nanny said.

and we get to stay, Mommy Elva said. She rested her head on my shoulder, clearly tired.

Winged her forehead, “We do For a bit longer, anyway,

Game into the room, then, and Eira it up ance moni

+15 BONUS

She squirmed in my arms and I had to lower her back down to the ground. She ran into Nicholas’s waiting arms instead. As he lifted her, he spun her around and she giggled.

The sound healed my heart in ways nothing else could. That Nicholas had been the one to bring such

joy out of her made me feel all the lighter.

Yet before long, another yawn burst out of Elva. It really was late for her.

I locked eyes with Nicholas and then motioned toward the bed.

“I think you need to get some sleep, little princess,” Nicholas said as he carried Elva over that way.

“Will you tell me a story?” Elva said.

Nicholas lowered her down onto the bed. I joined them there and helped tuck Elva in.

Nicholas ruffled her hair. “A story, huh? Okay.” He thought for a moment. Then he gave me a sideways

glance. “I’ll tell you a story about the bravest woman I know.”

“A princess?” Elva snuggled under her blankets, bringing them right up under her chin.

“No,” Nicholas said, smiling a little. “A Queen. She gave up her crown to save her little girl, a princess

just like you

“Did she fight a dragon?” Elva asked.

“A huge fierce, fire-breathing dragon,” Nicholas replied.

“Wow...” Elva’s eyes were growing heavy.

“She works hard every day,” Nicholas continued. “She fights anyone who would harm her daughter.” He

took a breath. “There’s also a King who searching for her. He wants to make sure she and her girl are

safe. He’d do anything for them.”

“Anything? Elva’s eyes are closed now.

“Anything”

I watched the two of them quietly. Nicholas watching Elva with fondness in his eyes Elva sleeping so

peaceful under his care.

know it was impossible but wished everyday was like this. That we could be a perfect little family

loved and cared for each other, crown or no crown.

asn't reality

In real life, this was only a temporary moment of peace. Someday, we would go our separate ways. Elva

and I would see Nicholas on TV or on our money, but he'd never see us.

Someday, Elva and I would have to find a way to live without

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The next morning, all of the candidates were called down into the parlor. I checked with Mark and the

guards before I left the room. With my twin potentially lurking around, we'd taken to a password system

to confirm my identity. The password would be changed every day and given only once in the morning.

Today's word was fireplace.

With that set, and Elva sitting with the Nanny, I headed down to the parlor to meet with the others.

Susie was there, thank goodness, and seemed unharmed.

"I didn't stay at the celebration much longer, after you left," she said. "Julian walked me back to my

room, which surprised me, but I figured you were behind his sudden shift in kindness."

"I was worried about you."

"I worried about you too, but Julian told me you were okay."

We waited for a while, until Nathan entered and moved toward the front of the room. With only 8 of us novelbin

left, the meeting felt much more intimate than before. He didn't even use a microphone.

"The events moving forward will be different than before. Since you've each been chosen by one of the

three princes, it is those princes you will now cater to. To start, you will attend a date with your prince and

your fellow candidates chosen by that prince. Piper, this means you will attend two dates."

"I understand," I said, ignoring the glares from Lilliana, Olivia, and the girls Julian had chosen.

Nathan nodded. "Nicholas's first date will be this afternoon in the gardens. You will three will be

directed there after lunch."

"Thank you," I said.

"Thank you," Lilliana said quickly after.

Olivia simply tilted her head in acknowledgement.

Nathan seemed unfazed. Maybe he was used to the treatment. Those chosen by the other princes will

have your dates soon. Be ready for further announcements:

wed, dismissing them. The girls immediately began to chatter, but even that was not ad

few people now.

for Piper Jo have two dates and the rest of us only one" one of Jalin

+15 BONUS

Nathan, who had yet to leave the room, immediately stopped and faced her. "It is not Piper's decision, nor is it yours. The princes have chosen Piper, and they each have chosen to invite her to their dates.

Surely you don't think yourself of higher judgement than your princes?"

The girl immediately wilted. "No."

Nathan turned then and walked out of the room. I stood speechless, watching after him. I knew he

wasn't an ally, since he was in service to the King who obviously hated me. But when the rules aligned in

my favor, I couldn't help but be grateful.

"See you later, Piper," Lilliana said. She said it simply enough, but knowing her, it was probably a threat.

Olivia didn't say anything, just walked out.

Susie turned to me. "Good luck with those two. I can't imagine your date is going to be much fun."

"I'll be fine," I said. "It's Nicholas who I'm worried about."

"Don't worry about him. He's used to people like them."

She was probably right, but it still seemed sad to think of it that way. Nicholas has been around too

many fake, power-hungry people for too long.

That afternoon, when I was summoned, I walked down to the gardens where Nicholas was waiting. Lilliana and Olivia were already there. I imagined they were summoned first. The King's favoritism

persisted, it seemed, even here.

Nicholas seemed tense, his arms flexed and his shoulders straight. He looked at me and raised a brow.

“Fireplace,” I mouthed, silently, and he marginally relaxed, enough at least to loosen his clenched fists.

“I thought we might walk through the grass, Nicholas said.

“Forgive me, Your Royal Highness, but did it not rain just last night?” Olivia asked.

“I suppose so,” Nicholas said.

Then, forgive me, Sir, but I would humbly request you keep in mind that ladies’ footwear is delicate to the elements.” She glanced at me. “At least for those of us that can afford finer things.

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I had more or less the same footwear as her, curtesy of the royal family, so her insult to me was at its base incorrect. But, knowing we would likely be walking through the gardens, I had chosen leather ankle

I boots rather than frilly and frail pumps or sandals.

“Not all ladies’ footwear is so delicate,” I said. “Perhaps it might have been wise to consider the location of our date and the weather before deciding what to wear.”

“A woman’s appearance is more important than her comfort.”

“Not if it’s so impractical she can’t even go on a date with her prince,” I said.

Olivia’s eyes narrowed. “There’s clearly much you do not understand about fashion or royalty.”

Nicholas sighed. “Actually, I would prefer you be able to go on this walk. If you prefer to wait here, you

can

Olivia’s smile twitched. Her face became redder and redder. “To spend time with you, Prince Nicholas, I will sacrifice my shoes.”

“I prefer whatever Prince Nicholas prefers,” Lilliana added, likely feeling excluded.

“Let’s just walk,” Nicholas said.

We started through the gardens and then crossed over into the lawn. Olivia made a disgusted face but eventually pressed her fancy shoes into the soggy grass.

I like the fresh air,” Nicholas said. “It helps clear my head.”

I also like fresh air,” Lilliana said.

I think –” I started, only to be cut off by Olivia.

I prefer the smell of freshly cut grasses. Don’t you, Sir?”

like that, and also the smell after the rain,” Lilliana said, and set Olivia a glare behind Nicholas’s back. That is, if you also like that, Your Royal Highness”

You are allowed to like your own things,” Nicholas said.

of course, Your Royal Highness,” Lilliana said,

only to be cut off by

+15 BONUS

“Don’t you love the clear sky, Sir? That color of blue is so beautiful.”

I cleared my throat. “So not so clear over there.” I pointed where some gray clouds hovered near the

horizon.

“No one asked you, Piper, Olivia said. “I was speaking with His Royal Highness.”

“As was I,” Lilliana said.

Nicholas stopped walking and turned to face us three. With his face expressionless, he glanced

between Lilliana and Olivia. “A Luna knows when to let others speak.”

Lilliana immediately lowered her head. "Forgive me, Your Royal Highness. I meant no offense. You are, of course, correct in all ways."

Olivia lifted her chin. She made no apologies, but also no reply.

However, I felt embarrassed. Nicholas already protected me from so much, I didn't need him to shield me here as well. A few cutting words from these petty girls was not going to hurt me.

In this, I could take care of myself. I didn't need him to fight all of my battles for me.

I tried not to show how angry I was. I knew, in my heart, he was only trying to look out for me. But !

wasn't made of glass. It felt like he didn't trust me not to fall apart at the slightest sign of adversity.

Haven't I proven myself capable by now? At least when defending myself from the girls?

Nicholas noticed my upset, and my quiet. He kept looking back at me as we continued our walk, and

seemed distracted when the other girls tried to talk to him.

We made our way around the grounds before returning to the gardens. The entire endeavor took about

an hour.

Nicholas dismissed and said goodbye to Olivia and Lilliana before he turned to me.

"Why were you quiet?" he asked.

"You don't trust me," I said.

What's

can mand op for myself?novelbin

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Nicholas shook his head. "I'm protective of you and Elva. Those instincts have nothing to do with

whether or not I trust you." novelbin

I wanted to believe that, but if it was true, then why did he hesitate?

"I've been alone a long time, and I've gotten by just fine." The words emerge from a place of hurt. He cut

me by not trusting me. How did he think I had survived these past three years?

what to keep you

"Is it so wrong for me to safe?" Nicholas's brow crinkled in confusion. His frown was

heavy set.

"Yes."

"Why?"

I placed a hand over my aching heart. "Because you won't be with me forever, Nick. If I get used to your

protection, enough to let myself relax, how will I ever go back to how things were before? I need to stay

tough and self-sustaining so that when this fantasy ends, I can continue on with my life."

The confusion in his face shifted into a scrunched up sort of pain. Sorrow darkened his eyes. I can't

argue with that," he said, but the bitter tone of his voice made it clear that he wanted to.

But this was the hand life had given us, and we'd made our choices. With this competition, I was living

in a dream that someday I would have to wake up from. Nicholas, however, was stuck here, forced to

marry someone he did not love to fulfill his parents' expectations of him.

He lowered his voice then, barely a whisper. "But while you are here, I will protect you."

"I don't need your protection."

"This isn't about needing it, Piper. I'm giving it to you because I want to."

I crossed my arms. I wasn't thrilled with his reasoning, but I couldn't tell him what to do. And even after

implying this action would hurt me, he still seemed set in his decision.

needed to do was think of a way that I could convince him and myself that I was still capable

hadn't made me soft, and I was able to look out for myself and for Elve

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from Him for

I made my points clear, I thought, but Susie only looked more and more unsure the longer I went on. By the time I finished, she was worrying her bottom lip with her teeth and not quite looking at me.

Had I said something wrong?

"You can see my side of it, right?" I asked.

I

She nodded a little. I think so, but... I don't know, Piper. His side doesn't seem all that unreasonable either."

I hardly thought that was true. "He's insulting me by thinking I'm some sort of wilting flower who needs looked after."

I don't necessarily believe that it's an insult for someone to need help every now and then. Everyone does, no matter how strong they are. There's no shame in it." She lowered her voice. "Just as there's no shame in wanting help either."

Wanting help? I'd never let myself want things in the past. With my limited time and money, I could only ever focus on survival. Sure, I supposed having help would have been nice, but in almost every case where help had been offered to me, it had some kind of terrible caveat attached.

My boss would help me if I'd sleep with him. A coworker would give me the bustling table if I agreed to stay after to wash dishes for her.

Only Anna had ever offered help, while wanting only friendship in return. But most people weren't like

that. I knew that well.

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"Everyone knows you are capable, especially Prince Nicholas. But wanting and needing are different,"

Susie said. "You are allowed to want things, Piper, even if you don't need them. You are allowed to want

to be taken care of once in a while. No one should have to stand alone all the time."

"I do," I said, though listening to her words, I wondered what it would be like to let myself depend on

others, even just a little bit.

I had friends here and at home. Anna, Susie, Nicholas, Julian, and Mark. They were each dependable, in

their own ways. If I needed them, they would likely answer my call.

But that was just the problem. I couldn't need them. I could let myself be weak enough to even want

their help.

I had to be able to stand on my own, as I always had.

“There has to be some way that I can prove to Nicholas that I can defend myself,” I said. “I’d feel better

then, I think, even if he still wants to protect me after. I don’t want him to think that he has to.”

Susie hummed as she considered it.

Meanwhile, Elva turned away from her stuffed animals to look at me. “Do you need more tea, Mommy?”

“That would be lovely, Elva. Thank you.” I held up my teacup for her. She lifted the pot and made a

pouring motion.

It’s hot,” Elva said.

I nodded with understanding, and so I gently blew over the cup before I pretended to drink the

Imaginary tea. “Delicious,” I said.

Elva smiled.

When I looked back at Susie, she was sneaking glances toward Mark standing at the door. He was

ancing too. Every once in a while, they would lock eyes and smile at each other. Susie would blush

dorable, watching the two of them.

dave me an idea

“Mark,” I said.

me the way ne

ed Mark.

He jumped, not having expected me to address him. A bit of red dusted his cheeks. Did he think I was

going to call him out for looking at Susie? Never.

“Yes, Miss Piper?”

“Do you know many self–defense techniques?” I asked.

“I do.”

you thinking Pino

“What are you thinking, Piper?” Susie asked.

I looked at her, but then I asked Mark, “Do you think you could teach me?”

Mark seemed surprised. Susie did too.

“If I can learn some self–defense moves, then maybe I can prove to Nicholas that he doesn’t have to

worry about me. I can prove that I can handle my own problems, and anything else that comes along.”

Susie frowned at me, but she didn’t argue. “I guess...”

“If you want to learn, I can show you a few moves,” he said. When I started to stand up, he quickly

stopped me. “Not here. Not now. Let’s meet tomorrow morning in the gym.”

I blinked. “There’s a gym in the palace?”

Mark nodded. “It’s by the barracks for the guards.”

“Okay,” I said. I would do whatever it took to prove myself. And learning a few moves certainly wouldn’t

hurt.

The following morning, I searched for the gym and eventually found it where Mark had said. I went into the large brick building and found a gymnasium with a half-basketball court to one side, and a series of

work out equipment on the other. novelbin

been expecting Mark

d into the room, it was Nicholas who greeted me.

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“Nicholas? What are you doing here?”

Crossing his arms, he tilted his head to the side. “Mark told me you asked him to teach you self- defense, but his duties are too essential to allow for the time to teach you. But, I do think it’s valuable for

I

you to learn. So I’ve decided to step in instead.”

I wasn’t entirely sure he was being honest here. Yes, Mark did have important duties, but surely so did

the prince? For Nicholas to be here instead of Mark made me wonder if there was more to this than he

was saying.

“I’m still mad at you,” I said. My hurt from the day before didn’t magically disappear.

“I’ll make it up to you.” He came closer. His eyes were earnest, even if his face was impassive. “I’m

proud of you, Piper. For how strong you are, and how far you’ve come all on your own. But I hope you will

let me help you now.”

My cheeks burned a little. “Just teach me, okay?” I didn’t know what else to say.

He smiled a little, at the corner of his mouth. "Whatever you say, Piper."

In one corner of the basketball court, some servants began to put down soft mats that we could

practice on. That way, if we fell, neither of us would get hurt.

When the area was set up, Nicholas led me over there.

I was wearing a comfortable pair of sweatpants with a tank top. He wore some loose-fitting pants with a

white t-shirt. I noticed just how tight it was when he turned his back to me. The shirt struggled to stretch

across the width of Nicholas's shoulders.

I swallowed hard and averted my eyes.

When we were on the mats, Nicholas turned to face me again.

Okay, now, for the first move. I want to show you how to stop someone who is reaching for you. Say

are just standing there, and I try to grab you."

where to stand, and then made a grabbing motion for me. A move, unfortunately, I had never seen before.

"Now twist."

+15 BONUS

I twisted.

He hissed in pain as I turned his arm in an awkward angle.

I immediately released him. "I'm sorry!"

"No," he said. "That was good. Perfect even."

Over the course of the next hour, he showed me many different defensive stances and tricks.

“Always play dirty,” Nicholas said. “If they are coming for you, it’s not a fair fight, so you don’t have to

treat it as such. Go for the groin or the eyes. Don’t ever back down.”

He was a good, patient teacher and I felt myself retaining most of what he said.

Eventually, we moved on what to do if someone trying to grab me, to what to do if they already had me.

“I’m going to grab you from behind. Show me how you would try to get away.”

He walked around behind me, moved close, and then wrapped his arms around my waist. He locked his hands together in front of my stomach. His hard chest pressed against the line of my back, and for a

moment, my thoughts went very quiet.

“Okay,” he said. His breath was hot on the shell of my ear. “Now try to get away.”

His words called me to action. I placed my hands on his wrists and tried to twist, but his grip was too strong. With his arms locked like this, I couldn’t get the leverage I needed to hurt him that way.

But honestly, in this position, I struggled to get my thoughts back online to think of anything else to do, so I ended up simply shoving at him halfheartedly.

When I started to twist my body, he made a cut-off choking noise.

stilled at once. “Nicholas?”

His voice was rough when he said, “Keep trying.”

ed and he struggled too, Eventually we were both panting a little. But his arms around me were The only difference was the heat within me was swelling, nearly unbearable.

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It's like you aren't even trying." he teased, and he wasn't entirely wrong. At this point, I didn't want to be away from him, I wanted to be closer.

In my movements, I inched my ass backwards. It rubbed against the front of his pants, and I felt the

hardness there.

Nicholas grunted.

Oh, God. He was as worked up from my closeness as I was from his. And he liked my movements, no doubt, or he would have told me how to break this hold by now. I was glad he hadn't. I didn't want to get

away yet.

I gave up all

Somehow the moment, I twisted in his arms so that I was facing him. And suddenly, I gave pretense of struggling. I looked up into his eyes as he looked down at me.

His grip loosened a little. He placed his hands flat on my back instead. It was even more effective.

His gaze dropped to my mouth. I licked my lips.

"Piper..."

He leaned down, his mouth coming closer to mine. My heart pounded out of control.

I held my breath.

His lips brushed mine.

"Miss Piper, there you are! I have a message for you!"

Nicholas's hands dropped from my back and I jumped away from him in a flash. My face burned in

embarrassment.

The official messenger looked embarrassed too, face likely mirroring mine in redness.

Only Nicholas seemed to maintain his cool, though he crossed his arms and glared at our intruder

Apologies, your Royal Highness. I had not meant to interrupt.

self-defense I shouted a bit too loudly.

Nicholas, and then how

+15 BONUS

“Y–Yes, Sir. Uh, Miss Piper, you are to meet Prince Julian and his two other selected candidates for your assigned date, after lunch, in the parlor.”

“Okay,” I said, slowly collecting myself. “Thank you.

He bowed. Then bowed again. Then kept bowing all the way back to the door,

When he was gone, I looked back to Nicholas. He wouldn’t meet my gaze.

“We better end our lesson, then,” he said. “So that you have time to clean up for your... date.” He said

date like it was dripping in venom.

He didn’t wait for my reply. Instead, he turned on his heel and left me standing in the middle of the gym

alone.

After lunch. I headed to the parlor room as I’d been instructed. Julian and the other girls were already

there. A table had been set up in the middle of the room with four chairs around it. The girls sat opposite novelbin

each other, with Julian between them, leaving the chair opposite him open.

There was also a camera crew in the room. A producer whispered in the ears of the cameramen, who

shifted angles and zoomed in for the best shot.

Obviously, Julian and I wouldn't be speaking about secret things today. This date was more for the

public, then each other.

"Piper, welcome." Julian stood up. He motioned toward the empty seat.

I walked over to it and sat down.

Julian produced a deck of cards. "Ready to play a game?" he asked us.

I lifted a brow. Seeing my expression, his smirk grew wider.

propose a game of wits and edge. A game of lying."

"Lying?" said one of the girls.

Mmmm. One person puts down a card face up. Others will take turns placing down cards of the same

en anyone else thinks they are lying, you call them out."

caid the other gil

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Julian started by placing down a queen of hearts. To his left, Veronica immediately lowered four cards. I

watched her face closely, but she revealed nothing. Her emotionless façade seemed like it could even

rival Nicholas's

I

I decided not to call her a liar. If I did so, and I was incorrect, all the cards she lowered would then go

into my hand. Since the way to win the game was to totally empty your hand, I wasn't willing to chance it.

Julian smiled at her.

The other candidate Julian had selected, Tiffany, narrowed her eyes in suspicion, but also didn't say a

word

"Piper," Julian said. "Your turn."

I looked at my hand. I only had three cards in the heart suit. If I lied and put down more cards, maybe I

could actually win this game. Julian hadn't actually said there was any benefit to winning, but it sure

would be fun to pull one over on him for once.

I lowered for cards down. I schooled my face carefully to not give anything away.

Julian laughed, even before Tiffany shouted, "You're lying!"

"You don't know that," I said quickly, but my face was turning red.

"Show your cards, then" Tiffany leaned back in her chair.

I frowned.

Julian brightened "Go on, then. Show your cards, Piper."

Begrudgingly, I flipped over my cards.

knew in Tiffany dropped her hand down on the tabletop, shaking it.

Julian said, and passed the pile of cards to me, doubling the size of my hand.

"You really

ong with being honest. Veronica said, deadpan "Unless you

to act

+15 BONUS

“Cards are boring anyway,” Julian said, throwing his hand in the pile. “It’s much more fun when we play novelbin

with secrets.

“What do you mean?” Tiffany asked.

“Forget the cards,” Julian said. “Instead, ask me something about myself and I’ll give you an answer.

Then you can decide whether or not it’s the truth.”

“That sounds dangerous,” Tiffany said.

“And fun,” replied Veronica.

“For sure,” Tiffany agreed. “I’m in.”

Julian looked at me. “Piper?”

Tiffany was right, this prospect definitely seemed dangerous, especially with the cameras watching. Though I doubted Julian would give any straight answers, no matter what he was asked.

I’m in,” I agreed. I’m not sure what they would have had me do otherwise. Sit in a corner? No way! would miss the chance to ask Julian something, even if what he told me was a lie. There was a slim chance he might tell me the truth.

Veronica went first and absolutely failed with her question. “What’s your favorite color?”

“Blue,” he said.

Tiffany frowned at her. “You wasted your question!”

Veronica tilted her head. “Did I?”

Julian laughed.

You ask one, then,” Veronica said.

It's Piper's turn, Julian said.

moment "Who is the most important person in your life?"

to consider it. Then, predictably, he smiled and said. "Me"

how

+15 BONUS

Tiffany didn't seem to know, laughing at every one of Julian's answers. If Veronica knew, she wasn't

telling. She kept a perfectly straight faced the entire time.

Eventually, the camera crew grew bored with us. "We have enough footage," the producer said, and the

group wrapped up and left the room.

When it came to be my turn again, I saw an opportunity that I couldn't pass up. This could finally be my

chance to get a straight answer out of Julian, especially with the prying ears of the public out of the way.

Chapter 200

"Piper?" Julian was waiting for my question.

"Okay." I prepared myself with a deep inhale. Then I asked, "Why did you and Prince Nicholas never

seem to get along?"

Julian's smile didn't as much as twitch, yet I still felt a tension seep into the room. Maybe it was my fault. I knew I was asking a loaded question, and with it hanging now in the air, I felt the true weight of it.

I very nearly took it back. I asked too much, got too personal. I should take it back.

Or he could just lie. I wanted him to, if that meant this terrible moment would end.

He looked at me, and then he said, "Nicholas stole my first love. Her name was Bridget."

My thoughts fizzled out. Nicholas. stole.. Julian's love? That seemed so impossible! Nicholas dated

some before me, I remembered him talking about it some. But he had always said his previous

relationships had never included anything serious.

I didn't think he would lie to me about that.

Had it been different from Julian's perspective? Or was he lying to me now?

Tiffany s

started laughing. "You can't expect us to believe that! No one, not even Prince Nicholas, would

be able to steal a woman away from you."

"You are very sweet," Julian, said, smiling at her. He placed his elbow on the table and then his chin in his hand. "And you've played right into my trap. Tell me more about how wonderful I am."

Tiffany indulged him at once. "You have the most beautiful eyes. And your wit is unmatched."

Julian continued to encourage her. "Go on. Don't stop." novelbin

Veronica glanced at me. She didn't say a word and her face looked no different than before, yet I felt

e she was giving me a vibe. Someone I knew she was telling me that Julian hadn't been lying.

had no reason to think that, really, other than a growing pit in my stomach, but it was what | believed.

down, his unusual answer remained on my mind. Veronica and Tiff any enchador. But I stayed behind.

You have questions,” he said without looking at me. “You might as well ask them.”

I traced the edge of the table with my fingers. “Were you telling the truth?”

“Of course I was.” He turned, facing me. “Blue is my favorite color.”

I ”

I sighed. “You know that’s not what I meant.”

“Do I? Veronica thought it important enough to ask that question first.”

“She also asked your star sign and which of your cars is your favorite.”

“All valid questions.” He laughed as he walked closer.

I gave him a withering look.

Just like that, his laugh turned bitter. “Don’t ask me questions you don’t actually want the answers to,

Piper.”

I want to know, Julian. You and Nicholas have been rivals for so long. I had no idea back in school that

the two of you were brothers. Rivalries are typical between siblings, but nothing like this hatred you seem

to harbor for each other.”

“Some things just aren’t meant to be sunshine and sparkles,” he said.

“I just want to understand.”

“You’re kicking a homet’s nest.” He ran a hand through his hair. Yet even as he removed his fingers, it

returned as it was, attractively messy.

I care about you both. I want to know you both better.”

Then the person you want to talk to isn't me.” Julian's smile slipped, just for a moment. “You want to know why he did it, ask him. Because honestly, Piper, you think you know him, but how well do you

actually know about his past before you came around?”