

## The Luna Choosing Game by Jane Above Story Chapter 2

### Chapter 0002

My gaze was fixed to the television screen as I tried to soak in every possible detail of my ex-boyfriend.

In the three years since I'd seen him last, Nicholas had matured, filling out his previously lanky teenage figure. Skinny arms had widened with muscle. His broad torso tapered into a narrow waist.

He'd lost the boyish width to his face. His cheekbones had always been high, but now his jawline was sharp enough to cut glass.

He had been handsome when we'd dated.

But looking at him now, at the man he became..

He was jaw-droppingly gorgeous.

And apparently... a prince?

I'd known he was nobility, but I had no idea he was that high in the royal succession.

"Turn it up," I said.

Anna increased the volume, until we could hear the newscaster's voice.

"With the borders unstable and the economy in decline, the public has expressed fear for both their future and the future of the dwindling next generation. Through this choosing game, the royal family hopes to inspire the public..."

“It’s a good distraction,” I said. Everyone I’d encountered today had been talking about it, instead of their usual woes and worries. “

Anna said. “*I’m* inspired.” When I gave her a disbelieving look, she shrugged. “It shows the royal family is actually trying, instead of sitting up in their high towers, ignoring us. That gives me hope.”

The voice on the television continued, “In addition to providing entertainment and comfort to the everyday populace, the selection offers a unique opportunity for the princes, who have yet to find their mates. As per law, a prince needs a partner to inherit the throne.”

Logically, upon seeing Nicholas in the lineup for the selection, I knew he didn’t have a mate, yet still my brain struggled to make sense of it.

When we’d dated, Nicholas had been kind and generous, talented, handsome. How could someone like that have failed to find their match?

“Can you believe this?” Anna asked me. “They are all so handsome!”

The footage of the three princes played on a loop. This time, I was able to see more than just Nicholas. Like the person beside him. One of his brothers.

*Julian?*

Nicholas and Julian had both been classmates of mine at the Royal Academy, but they had hated each other. Everyone saw them as arch-enemies. They were actually brothers?

“The royal family requires all unmarried women aged 18 to 22 to apply,” the newscaster continued. “The deadline is in two days.”

The news segment ended, and another story began. Anna lowered the volume again.

Anna shifted on the couch, lifting one leg onto the cushion so that she could face me.  
“When are you submitting your application?”

I shook my head. “I’m a single mother, Anna. I don’t think that meets the criteria.”

“Elva is your sister’s baby, not yours. How long are you going to let yourself suffer for it?”

“Elva isn’t a burden.”

“I didn’t mean it like that. What I’m trying to say is that you are holding yourself back. You shouldn’t be stuck here as a waitress in a dead-end job with a handsy boss. You deserve more. You don’t belong here.”

Elva was more important to me than anything in the whole world. I had no intention of leaving her behind so that I could blindly chase a crown.

“What about you?” I deflected. “You don’t belong here either.”

Anna gave me a sad smile. “I’m too old to apply.” She shrugged. “Come on, Piper. There’s no harm in applying. You should submit the form. I’ll look after Elva if you’re selected. Plus, you won’t have to worry about your boss at the restaurant anymore.”

“Only *if* I’m selected, and that’s a big if.”

I couldn’t deny the temptation. My time with Nicholas had been... special. To be offered the chance to see him again sent my heart racing. But that was a problem in itself.

What Nicholas and I had ended a long time ago.

“I’m a single mother, I’d never get chosen. And even if I am, I would never leave Elva for anything, not even to become Luna.”

Anna sighed, long and slow. “If I were you, I’d never pass up this opportunity.”

Before I could reply, the news displayed the princes’ video again. Anna immediately unmuted the television.

“The applicant selection process will be screened during the royal consort ceremony. We remind our viewers that this traditional ceremony hasn’t been conducted in half a century.”

“Wow,” Anna gasped.

“During this ceremony, the royal family will utilize its ancient power to select 25 finalists from thousands of applicants. The process is expected to take a half hour. You can watch the entire ceremony right here on this channel.”

“Oh, I’ll be watching alright,” Anna said.

I had no intention of watching, myself. Nicholas was a ghost of my past.

We’d said goodbye three long years ago, but that didn’t mean I wanted to watch other women vie for his affections. The thought of seeing him fall in love in real time with someone else made my stomach twist into uncomfortable knots.

“I need to get some sleep,” I said, pushing weary body up off the couch.

“Please, d-don’t!” I cried, voice breaking in a sob. “Help!”



*Nicholas, where are you? Save me. Please! Save me!*

“Remember,” said a cruel voice in my ear. “You asked for this.”

*No!*

“No!” I shouted, springing upright in bed. Sweat clung to my brow. My breaths came out heavy and ragged.

But I was alive. I was safe.

Looking around, I recognized my bedroom. I recognized –

“Mommy?”

Elva stood beside my bed. She watched me with wide eyes.

“Why are you crying, Mommy?”

I touched my cheeks, wiping away tears. I tried to control my breathing and slow the pounding of my heart. I didn't want Elva to worry.

“It was just a bad dream, honey. I'm okay.”

“A nightmare?” Elva asked.

I nodded.

In a rush, Elva left my bedside to go to her own. She returned with one of her stuffed bears. She held it out for me.

“Teacher said that toys help fight the nightmares. Mr. Fluff will pro... protect you.”

She held up the old bear with its worn button eyes and fuzzy fur so earnestly, my entire heart melted. I quickly accepted it.

“Isn’t Mr. Fluff one of your favorites?”

“Yep! He’s the best. So Mommy won’t cry anymore.”

I set Mr. Fluff beside me on the bed, then reached down and pulled Elva into my arms.

She giggled as I covered her face in butterfly kisses. The sound eased the remaining hurt lingering in my chest.

I would do anything for this little girl.

Elva fell asleep soon after. I returned her to her bed and tucked her in.

The news station had sliced together a preview for the consort selection ceremony. The flashes of Nicholas made my heart ache.

“Who will be selected as candidates for the Luna Choosing Game?” a voice said over the footage of the royal family. “Any woman in the kingdom could be selected. It could be your friend or your neighbor. Or, it could be *you*.”

I didn't have time for such silly dreaming in my life. It would be a waste of time for me to even entertain the possibility of being selected. Wolf-less single mothers did not become Luna.

But, who would be the lucky girl?