

The Luna Choosing Game #Chapter 241 - Read The Luna Choosing Game Chapter 241

Chapter 241

Chapter 0241 novelbin

Elva immediately perked upon seeing him. “Jul–an! Teach me the trick again.”

“She’s been practicing,” I said softly to Julian, like a secret.

“Then maybe you should show me.” Julian withdrew a quarter from his pocket and handed it to Elva.

I let go of her hand so she could move, though I placed my hand on the top of her head instead. I wasn’t

going to let Elva out of my sight tonight, or likely any other night. Not until Jane was caught and the

organization brought down.

“Okay. Watch!” Elva held out the coin like Nicholas had taught her. Then with a flick of her wrist, the coin

clattered down onto the floor. “Oh!” Elva bent and picked it up.

“An excellent attempt!” Julian said and clapped. “You’ll be a little thief–ah, that is, a little magician in

now time.”

I scowled at him for the slip of the tongue.

Elva beamed at the praise. She held out the quarter to give back to him.

“You keep it, Elva. Keep practicing, okay?”

“Okay.” And she did just that, pausing only when I made her hold my hand again. Still, she persisted,

trying to learn the trick one–handed instead.

Julian smiled at me. “Well. Ready for the main event?”

“Yes.” I was ready to earn that money for charity.

Each candidate and benefactor was assigned their own servant, who would keep track of who spoke

with who, to avoid any overlap. They worked as something like handlers, leading the candidates or the

benefactors to the correct spots to speak with each other. Then they moved us away when our time was

up. Julian was charming when he wanted to be, disarming many of the sterner-faced benefactors with an unexpected joke and an easy smile. Elva won the hearts of the rest. She insisted on showing her coin

trick, with limited success, to everyone we encountered.

“How darling,” said an older benefactor to her husband.

Julian leaned close to my ear and whispered, “See, she’s saving lives already.”

I didn’t roll my eyes, since I was being watched, but it was a near thing.

By the end of my hour with Julian, I had one confirmed commitment to my cause, and a half dozen

maybes. It felt like a victory.

“Well, Piper, I’m afraid this is where we must part.” Julian took my hand, lifted it to his lips and kissed my

knuckles.

He was teasing. He had to be teasing. But his lips lingered at my skin for a half-second longer than needed. When he pulled away, he didn’t look at me, instead his gaze shifted to Elva.

He patted her lightly on the head. “Keep practicing.”

“Thanks, Jul-an!”

Julian's help had been immeasurable for the hour I had him, though I knew eventually I would have to go it alone. I didn't mind all that much. I was determined to garner as much money for the orphanage as I

could.

Yet, I couldn't keep my gaze from looking across the ballroom, searching for Nicholas. I frowned when I

finally spotted him..

He stood directly between Olivia and Lilliana. Each was speaking to their own benefactor. They occasionally would turn to Nicholas and try to include him, but as soon as one of them did, the other

would start up, stealing him away.

Nicholas's face was a mix of confusion and discomfort. I doubted he could follow either conversation

when being constantly tugged between them.

Pity rose in my weary heart. I wished he could be free from this contest, and find love on his own terms.

A foolish notion, perhaps, given who he was.

Yes, he was a prince, but he was also a man. A good man, worthy of the most passionate love.

As if he could hear my thoughts, his gaze suddenly lifted, finding mine instantly. His eyes held me

prisoner, and I was willing.

I wanted little more than to move closer to him. To rescue him as he so often rescued me.

But there was a great length of space between us, bigger even than this room.

So my feet stayed still on the ground.

Chapter 242

Chapter 0242

Beside me, Elva yawned. "I'm tired, Mommy."

I immediately crouched down beside her. I touched my hand to her forehead, but I didn't feel a fever. Still, my nerves were frayed and I couldn't help but worry. "Do you feel hot?"

"No. Just sleepy." She rubbed at one eye.

I hated to leave early. We really needed this victory to stay in the competition. The stakes were so much higher now that I knew the underground organization had their sights on me and Elva. The minute we

stepped foot off the palace grounds, we'd likely be snatched up.

But I couldn't chance Elva's health. She'd been doing so well since she started receiving regular

treatments. I wouldn't dare risk taking her health any steps in the wrong direction.

"Honey, do you want to go

"There you are, Piper."

A shiver rattled my bones. I knew that voice. I dreaded that voice.

I looked up and Terry was beside us, standing too close, peering down with the eyes of a viper.

"A pleasant picture, seeing you on your knees," Terry said. He smirked, but the joy of it did not extend

beyond his lips.

"A vile thing to say in front of a child." I pushed myself up to my feet, then ushered Elva behind me.

"I meant it innocently, I assure you."

I hadn't needed Julian's mental self-defense lessons to know that was a lie.
novelbin

"But is that anyway to greet me?" Terry continued. His gaze narrowed slightly, like a predator eyeing his

prey. "After all, we are such good friends now that you feel comfortable visiting unannounced. I only

wished I knew you were coming. I would have prepared one of the cells for you."

He was needling me, trying to get a reaction. I had to stay calm, as Julian had helped me train. I couldn't

let him get to me. Only if I was calm, could I poke back.

"You had your hands full, as I recall," I said, attempting a sneer.

Something sparked in his eye, a flicker of fire. "Yes. I did."

I tasted bile.

This wasn't going to work. I didn't want to go toe to toe with Terry. I didn't want to even be in the same room as him. But I especially didn't want to talk about my sister somewhere Elva could overhear.

"You shouldn't expect a return visit," I said, struggling to maintain my composure. I was proud when my voice didn't waver. "That path has been permanently sealed."

It was a bluff. The secret tunnel might have been sealed but I already knew Terry had brought Piper back into the house through some other means. Unfortunately, I couldn't call him out on it and press for more

information. Not with Elva in earshot. 2

Just then, Elva peered around my shirt to look up at Terry.

Terry flashed her a crooked grin.

Elva gasped and returned to hiding behind me.

“Why don’t you just go?” I said. “I’m sure many other women would be interested in speaking with you

tonight.”

His smile turns cruel.

I wanted to run from him. To take Elva, and fly to an entirely different continent if I had to. Whatever it

took to get away from him and keep him away.

Terry leered openly at my barely–exposed cleavage. He licked his lips.

“Oh, Piper. Don’t you know? I’m a benefactor tonight. And as a benefactor, it is my obligation to speak

with each and every candidate, including you. Such a lovely little practice, isn’t it? A bit of money, and I

get what I want?”

I swallowed the rising lump in my throat. “You donate the money to charity,” I said. “You don’t get

anything.”

“I get time with you,” he said.

“That time is up.”

Chapter 243

Chapter 0243

Suddenly, Nicholas was beside me, a look of unabashed anger on his face. Terry met it with an easy, self-

satisfied smirk.

“Why, nephew. How good of you to join us.”

“The feeling is not mutual,” Nicholas snapped.

“Nick-lass?” With her free hand, Elva reached for Nicholas. He caught her hand in his and held it.

“I think it’s time you moved on, Terry,” Nicholas said, softer, with Elva was listening.

“A knight to the rescue. How charming.” Terry huffed a laugh. “Sometimes I think a suit of armor would

serve you better than a crown.”

Nicholas handled Terry’s prodding better than I had done. He didn’t even bat an eye, just continued to

glare unwaveringly.

Terry picked at his nails. “Unfortunately for you, Piper is also under obligations to speak with me. I am to hear her pitch, after all. If I do not hear it, why, that would be in disregard of the rules. We wouldn’t want that, would we? I’m sure Piper wouldn’t want to be disqualified from the entire competition.”

“You wouldn’t,” I gasped, though I had tried hard not to.

His piercing gaze found mine, and I felt as if he’d stabbed me. “I only ask for one dance, Piper. One chance to talk to you. Do this, and there’s no reason to cause a fuss. No rules are broken, and who knows? Perhaps I will even donate to your charity. It’s only money.”

Only money. Like my life wouldn’t fundamentally change with just a few thousand dollars in the bank.

I frowned down at myself. The dress I had earlier loved now seemed too tight. His hands would be practically right on my hips, with such thin fabric. I should have asked Charlotte to make it a turtleneck, to

totally hide my cleavage.

“Mommy?” Elva asked.

I looked at Nicholas.

“You don’t have to,” Nicholas said. “I don’t care what the rules say.”

My heart warmed for him, and I desperately clung to that little glowing flame. It would see me through

whatever happened next.

“Please watch Elva.”

1/2

“You don’t have to ask,” he said. At once, he returned his glare to Terry. “If you threaten or try to hurt her in any way –”

“Such unusual zest from my typically level-headed nephew. I’m pleased to see a woman has finally brought it cut in you, though saddened that the woman is one you will never possess.”

Nicholas’s mouth snapped closed. A muscle ticked in his jaw.

“Besides,” Terry smiled wider. He knew he had gotten under Nicholas’s skin.

“What could I possibly do In novelbin

the middle of a crowded room?”

Nicholas turned to me. “Piper...”

“I’ll be okay,” I whispered to him. I swiveled to face Elva. “I’ll be right back, honey. You stay with Prince

Nicholas.”

“But, Mommy...” She clung to my skirt. “Don’t go with the bad man. He’s scary.”

My bleeding heart ached like an open wound. Slowly, I pried her tiny fingers away from the fabric of my dress, one by one. Each broke my heart more than the last. She even held on with her pinky.

I gave her hand to Nicholas, who then lifted Elva up into his arms to hold her closer. She seemed to try

to burrow into him.

“Clock’s ticking, Piper,” Terry said. He held out his hand for me to take.

Not all that long ago, I had seen that hand wrapped around my sister. I didn't understand how she could

want to be with someone so vile.

I shook the thoughts away. They were pointless. My sister was a stranger.

I inhaled one more deep breath of freedom. Then I placed my hand in Terry's.

His fingers snatched closed around mine like a trap.

"You've made the correct choice."

Chapter 244

Chapter 0244

As Terry pulled me out onto the dance floor, I at least felt the relief of knowing Elva wouldn't overhear

whatever terrible things Terry was sure to say to me. About me, or about my sister. This worked for me,

because I wanted answers.

Terry placed his hand on my waist. His other gripped my hand firmly.

I pushed my free hand to his shoulder, using my arm like a wedge to maintain distance between us.

Anytime Terry would try to tug me closer, I would push him back. It was a never-ending, exhausting little

game.

"What have you done to my sister?" I demanded.

He laughed. "What makes you think I've done anything to her?"

"She would never be with you."

"Oh, darling Piper. So naïve. I assure you that Jane is my willing mistress. Never once have I forced her

to do anything against her will.”

Remembering the drug in my champagne, I severely doubted the truth to his words. Although, Jane had

been so hateful to me, maybe she didn't care who else Terry hurt. Maybe she even liked that about him.

My stomach twisted in disgust.

“Never fear, darling. Soon you will see for yourself,” Terry said. He was a good dancer, leading me in a

perfect waltz around the room. I hated that about him. I didn't want him to be good at anything. “I'll win

you over, and you can join us.”

“Never,” I snapped.

He shrugged like my vehement rejection mattered little to him.

“It will happen. Then I'll finally have the completed set.” He smiled to himself, a vile and twisted thing.”

I've always wondered what it would be like, laying with twins.”

Bile rose in my mouth. “I will never be yours. I'll die first.”

“Piper, not only will you be mine, but you will be begging me to take you in.”

“No.”

“We all know you are not meant to be Luna. Sooner or later, by the King's direct command or otherwise,

you will be forced out of this competition. Then, when you have nowhere to go, you'll get desperate. And

“I would never turn to you for help.”

“You say that now, but what happens the next time Elva is sick? Without the palace's protection. Without

the benefits of a live-in doctor. How will little Elva survive?”

He says Elva’s name like a mockery. I hate the way his voice curls around it, cutting into it with its

venomous baritone.

What I hated worse was the fear he might be right. I would do anything to save my daughter. I didn’t know where the line was. I likely wouldn’t, until I was in the position. Until Elva was so sick she might die,

and I would have to make a choice: her life or my body.

I shuddered thinking of what my surrender would mean. It wouldn’t be enough for him to sleep with me.

He wanted to own me. Possess me.

He wanted the set. Twins. novelbin

He whisked me around the room once more, then led me to Nicholas.

I was stunned into silence. I couldn’t say more, not even to defend myself. He could tell. He smirked the entire time. He kissed my hand and then deposited me at Nicholas’s side.

Nicholas immediately placed his hand under my elbow.

I felt light-headed, like I might fall.

“What did he say?” Nicholas asked me.

Nicholas’s other hand was holding Elva’s. She looked up at us both with curious eyes. I didn’t dare repeat the terrible things he had said, not with Elva listening.

I glanced at her, then up to Nicholas and hoped he could see the reason for my hesitation. He seemed to. “I can have him removed.”

Chapter 245

Chapter 0245 novelbin

“You can’t,” I said. “He’s one of the benefactors.”

“To hell with it. With all of it. If it keeps you safe, I’ll drag him from the grounds myself.”

“And then what? The Luna brings him back. Or the King? And you are on the outs with them. There’s

nothing you can do, Nicholas,” I said.

“But, Piper.”

I shook my head. “Nothing...”

He stepped closer to me. He couldn’t hold me here, with so many eyes on us, but with the way his hand

slid around my arm, I could tell he wanted to.

“You’re trembling,” he whispered.

I closed my eyes and tried to gather myself. He was right. I’d been shaken to my core and my whole

body felt like it was trying to clatter apart.

“Let me take you back to your room,” Nicholas said.

“I can’t give up.”

“Just for tonight,” he said.

God, it was tempting. To just throw in the towel for now. Regather myself. And try again tomorrow. And

if Nicholas was offering to go with me? If I could feel the comfort of his embrace away from prying eyes?

I opened my mouth to agree, only to close it immediately as Lilliana and Olivia came into earshot. Their

greedy gazes pivoted directly to Nicholas. Olivia slid her way directly between Nicolas and me. I had to

step back to accommodate her, or she likely would have pushed me over.

Lilliana at least, stepped around Elva without endangering her. Although that could have been because

of how tightly Nicholas was holding her hand.

“We were looking for you Prince Nicholas,” Olivia said. “There is a charming benefactor who I’m sure you

wouldn’t mind speaking with on my behalf.”

“Or mine,” Lilliana said, inching closer. Elva stepped into her path every time she tried to move closer to

Nicholas. When Nicholas turned his attention to Olivia, Lilliana openly glared at Elva. When Nicholas

glanced back, she changed her expression to her usual delicate grace.

What a phony.

“Come on, Elva,” I said and opened my arms.

“But...” She looked up at Lilliana again.

Poor kid. There was nothing we could do. Nicholas had to spend time with other people. That was the

nature of the competition.

“Come now, honey,” I said.

Elva pouted but she obliged. Nicholas released her hand and she walked into my waiting arms. I lifted

her

up against me, and she rested her head against my shoulder.

“Are you coming, Prince Nicholas?” Olivia said, all smiling confidence. She was beautiful in a low-cut

purple velvet gown. "We really shouldn't keep my benefactor waiting."

"Or mine," Lilliana said, chiming in.

"Yes. We'll go soon, but first I must

"Piper's fine. Aren't you, Piper?" Olivia asked.

"I'm sure Julian is around here somewhere," Lilliana said with false sweetness. "I'm sure he'd love to

spend time with you."

Julian, as I could see, was on the other side of the room, spending his hour with Tiffany, as the three of

us had previously agreed on. I wasn't about to steal him away now.

Especially when the one I wanted was Nicholas himself.

But I couldn't have him either.

"I'm sorry, Piper," Nicholas said.

Olivia laced her arm through one of his. Lilliana hooked her arm around his on the other side.

"It's fine," I said. "I understand."

And I did understand. Though that didn't make it easier to watch him walk away. A pang of loneliness

struck through my chest.

Elva yawned. She was falling asleep on my shoulder. I didn't want to jostle her too much, so I just stood

there, unsure where to go. What to do.

On the other side of the dance floor, Terry caught my eye. Holding my gaze, he lifted his drink as if

saluting me.

Chapter 246

Chapter 0246

For too long, I watched Nicholas across the room, as he greeted a benefactor and then introduced

Olivia. As it wasn't Lilliana's turn with the benefactor, she had been asked to stand back. She glared at

Olivia behind Nicholas's back.

Nicholas turned on the charisma for the elderly benefactor. Olivia, beside him, did the same. They looked like a matching pair, working together to charm the benefactor. With the way the benefactor

blushed and smiled, it was clearly working.

I didn't want to hate Olivia. Compared to Linda and some of the others, she had never physically done me or Elva harm. But watching the way she kept touching Nicholas's arm... Or how she smiled at him... Or

once, she winked....

My heart had emotions all its own that had little to do with logic or reason. My heart hated Olivia out of sheer jealousy. She had closeness to Nicholas now. She could smile and laugh and flirt, and might even

be successful.

I imagined Nicholas choosing Olivia as his Luna and my gut squeezed tight. She was a good choice.

She'd make a respectable Luna.

But I didn't want her to marry Nicholas. I didn't want anyone to marry Nicholas.

Except me.

I sighed. What a foolish notion. One I had to let go of, the sooner the better.

Nicholas might be the one for me, but I would never be the one for Nicholas. I had to accept that and

move on, for both our sakes.

“Mommy. I’m so sleepy,” Elva said, mumbling the words against my shoulder. “Can I go to bed now?”

I had other benefactors to talk to yet. I really shouldn’t leave. But my heart was sore and lonely, and I

worried Elva might be getting sick again. Her exhaustion didn’t entirely seem natural.

“Okay, honey. Let’s go back to our room.” At the very least, I could have the doctor check her out. Then I

could leave her in Mark’s care and hurry back to the party.

No one stopped me as I carried Elva out of the ballroom. The guards at the door didn’t even look at me novelbin

twice.

The hallways were empty, with the candidates at the gala, and the servants likely enjoying their free time

until the gala was done.

With all my sneaking down to the cellars, I was used to seeing the hallways so barren. Though typically, I would have Julian or Nicholas at my side. On my own, my nerves prickled on high alert.

When I turned the corner, I nearly jumped out of my skin seeing another woman standing in a purple, shimmering gown at the end of the hallway.

Odd, that dress was made of the fabric that Jane had stolen from my room.

The woman turned toward me, exposing her face. My breath caught in my throat.

The woman was Jane.

I stopped walking, feet planted firmly.

I was frozen at one end of the hallway and Jane at the other. We stared at each other across the

distance.

If I didn't have Elva in my arms, I would have moved closer. I would have confronted her and maybe even fought her.

But I did have Elva in my arms. She was vulnerable, sleeping and likely sick. I couldn't risk her, not for

Jane. Not for anyone.

Jane smirked at me. Then she turned again and disappeared around a corner.

My every instinct wanted me to give chase. Instead, I clutched Elva to me more fully and went my own

way.

Once I had reached the safety of my room, I roused Elva enough to change her into a pair of comfortable pajamas. Then I tucked her into bed. When she was resting, I walked to the door.

One of the guards looked back at me. "Please send for the doctor. I believe Elva might be sick."

Chapter 247

Chapter 0247

The guard nodded and went to carry out the task.

Back inside my room, I couldn't help but pace, worried about what Jane could possibly be doing in that

gown.

Did she decide to go to the gala? Was she pretending to be me? What could she possibly be saying to

the benefactors, or the candidates, or the cameras?

When I reached one end of the room, I swiveled on my heel and began walking the other way instead.

I wished I could go down to the gala and see for myself, but I would never abandon Elva. She could be

sick. She would always be my top priority. I only hoped that whatever Jane was doing, it wasn't so

egregious that I would be forcibly ejected from the contest.

I continued pacing until the doctor arrived a few minutes later with Mark following quickly behind.

The doctor, familiar by now of Elva's situation, nodded at me before immediately going to Elva's side.

Mark came to mine.

He looked at me for a moment, then said, "Elva's a tough girl, and the doctor is well trained. She'll be

okay."

I was worried about Elva, but thoughts of her illness weren't the only thing on my mind. Mark seemed to

notice, when his words didn't seem to soothe me.

"Did something else happen?"

I wrapped my arms around my waist. "I saw Jane."

Mark immediately straightened. "What? Where? When?"

"In the hallway just now, when I was bringing Elva back to the room." I described the location to him, and then gave him the description of her gown from what I could remember.

"You think she went to the gala?" he asked.

“I do,” I said. “God knows what she’s doing there. Likely trying to ruin my life.”

“We won’t let that happen.” Mark procured his phone from his pocket and began to text. His fingers flew across the screen. I’d never seen anyone text so quickly. “If Jane went to that gala, Nicholas will stop her.

before she does any true harm.” novelbin

Remembering how Olivia and Lilliana hung of his arms, claiming all of his attention, I doubted he would

An unpleasant tingling of pain burrowed deep down inside my chest. I hated to admit that I was jealous.

I knew Nicholas had other priorities than me. He was burdened with a crown, and someday he might be king. He would always have obligations bigger than his personal love life.

“Thank you, Mark.”

Lilliana or Olivia were more suited to be the Luna the kingdom needed. They didn’t have children yet, or debts, or a history tied with the underground organization, even if it was unwilling. They were free to fully

dedicate themselves to Nicholas and the kingdom.

I would never have such freedom.

“I’m also activating more of Nicholas’s personal guard,” Mark said. “They’ll patrol the grounds, starting

first at the ballroom. Don’t worry, Piper. If Jane is here, we’ll find her.”

I wanted to believe that, but I doubted. Jane had knowledge of hidden passageways. She had connections with Terry and whoever else. She wore my face, which had others let their guard down.

Pretending to be me, she wouldn’t seem out of place.

None of that was Mark’s fault, and I was grateful for his attempts at helping, even if I thought they were

foolhardy.

He continued to text, so I left his side to walk toward the bed. The doctor was checking Elva's pulse.

I didn't dare speak while she was working, but I watched. And I worried.

I prayed Jane wasn't in the ballroom trying to destroy what little I had left.

Chapter 248

Chapter 0248

Nicholas

I helped Olivia as best I could with one of the benefactors, though in truth, she hadn't need me to do

much but give her the initial introduction.

1

Olivia seemed like a natural at speaking with others – or at least, those she wanted something from. After introducing her, all I did was stand there and watch her work her magic. The benefactor seemed

enamored. I imagined he would do anything Olivia asked him to.

I wished I could return to Piper's side. I was still worried about her. When she had danced with Terry, he must have said some truly awful things to her for her to look so tired and stressed when she returned.

Knowing Terry, I could only imagine what vile fantasies he tried to place upon her.

She'd been shaking when I'd been pulled away. It had been my duty to escort all the candidates I had selected. I couldn't, by nature of the rules, drop everything just to stay at Piper's side.

I wanted to, though. And now, I deeply regretted upholding the rules and not following my heart. novelbin

Especially when I looked back to where Piper had been and found her missing. I stretched my searching gaze across the entire ballroom, but Piper nor Elva were anywhere in sight.

“Don’t you agree, Prince Nicholas?” Oliva said. She did that now and then, to try to include me in the

conversation. The benefactor seemed to enjoy the attention of a prince.

I hummed, not paying attention, and continued looking for Piper.

Elva had been tired. Perhaps Piper took her back to the room. But would she return afterwards? She still had to meet with several benefactors, and I had not helped her very much. Julian had spent a full hour

with her. I wanted at least that much.

Olivia continued talking, not missing a beat. As I suspected, she only needed me as a showpiece, and

not a person.

Suddenly, a flash of shimmering purple caught my attention. The gown was beautiful but the woman

wearing it was who truly claimed/my eye.

Piper? Had she changed when she’d taken Elva to bed?

That didn’t seem like something she would do, but perhaps she was trying to make a statement, or create some waves to make her the talk of the evening. None of the other candidates had left to change.

The cameras moved in close to her. She waved at them, and even blew them a kiss.

That wasn’t like Piper at all. Piper didn’t hate the cameras. She’d always given them attention and answered any of the producers’ questions. But to blow a kiss?

A sinking feeling pulled in my chest, the more I looked at this woman. The way she carried herself heavy on one hip while sticking out her ass and breasts. The way she laughed, her whole head thrown back, while the producer tried to talk to her. She was openly flirting with him.

This wasn’t Piper. This was Jane.

“If you’ll excuse me a moment,” I said to Olivia and her benefactor.

“But –” Olivia reached for my arm, but I sidestepped her.

I rushed across the room, but I still couldn’t stop Jane before she moved on from the producer to one of

the benefactors.

“Like I would want money from such a fat cow,” Jane said, laughing. The benefactor she’d been

speaking to went red in the face. “Maybe you should invest in a personal trainer before you think about any more charity work.”

“H–how dare...!” the benefactor sputtered.

I slid myself between Jane and the man, facing him.

“Please forgive Piper’s rudeness,” I said at once. “She’s hasn’t been feeling well, and it is effecting her

mood. I’m afraid she just isn’t herself right now.”

The benefactor shook his head. “No illness could possibly excuse that level of disrespect, Your Royal

Highness. If you will excuse me for saying so.”

“I understand,” I said. “Though I hope you can consider forgiveness.”

“Maybe I can.” The benefactor tilted his head to something occurring behind me. “But Mrs. Marble will

not.”

Mrs. Marble, the old widow, had enough wealth to rival the royal family. Her importance, therefore, in

terms of charity and support, was paramount to the kingdom.

Chapter 249

I turned around in haste.

Jane had sneaked away from behind me and was pointing Mrs. Marble roughly in the collarbone.

“Old hags like you are the reason this kingdom is in the shitter,” Jane sniped.

I rushed to intervene. This time, I snatched Jane’s wrist in a vice lock.

I forced a laugh. “What a joker. Mrs. Marble, you must know Miss Piper is only kidding you.”

“Must I?” Mrs. Marble lifted one lone brow high on her forehead. “I expect better of you, Prince Nicholas, than to choose someone of this... personality... to be Queen.”

Mrs. Marble never lost her patience. She simply said her peace, sneered once at Jane, then turned and walked away.

Jane laughed as she went.

I hissed, “You made a terrible mistake coming here, Jane.”

“It’s been delightfully fun so far. My perfect sister never lets herself have any fun. If anything, I’m doing

her a favor, putting these stuffed shirts in their places.” novelbin

“You are trying to ruin her life.”

Jane gave me a vicious kind of grin. “Do you think it’s working?”

It was so strange looking at Jane. She looked just like Piper in appearance and height, but she couldn’t

be more different in expression and mannerisms.

“You don’t deserve to have such a caring woman as your sister,” I said.

Jane snorted: “Perfect Piper. Spare me. You have no idea what it was like growing up in her shadow.

Never been good enough. Never being seen. Piper this, Piper that. What about Jane?"

"You've had many chances to improve your own life. You are the only one still clinging to Piper's

shadow."

"Worried about her, huh?" Jane leaned closer. "You should be. You can't watch her every second, Prince. Sooner or later, your kingly duties will pull you away and she'll be left behind in the dirt. Then, Terry and I.

will get our fun." 1

I squeezed her wrist. My heart thundered in my chest. My wolf prowled in the back of my mind, ready to

"I will never let you hurt Piper."

Jane watched me for a moment, her eyes widening at the ferocity in my tone. Yet, in the next moment,

her cocksure smirk slips back into place.

"Oh, I see. You are still in love with her." Jane laughed, loud and mocking. "You just can't say no to

heartache, can you? You think your little breakup last time was painful? Wait until you see what becomes

of Piper next."

A low, dangerous growl escaped my throat, and for a few seconds, fear returned to Jane's gaze.

"Keep your wolf in check, nephew. You are making a scene."

Jane's fear diminished the second Terry arrived beside us.

I could have torn both their heads off. But I restrained myself. Barely.

"Unless you want people to believe you are angry with Piper," Terry continued.

“This isn’t Piper.” Not even close.

“And who knows that but us, hm?” Terry asked. “Unless you want to reveal Piper’s secret to the whole

world. That it hasn’t happened yet makes me believe Piper wouldn’t want that. After all, what would Elva

think? Finding out her Mommy isn’t her Mommy after all.”

I hated that Terry was right. But Piper did want to keep her secrets. Elva finding out the truth would hurt

them both.

“What do you want?” I growled.

“Release my lover back into my care,” Terry said.

I wanted to arrest her, but how would I explain it? “She needs to leave. Now. And not return again.”

Terry looked at Jane, and she shrugged.

“I’ve probably done enough,” she said.

To me, Terry said, “Then we accept your terms.”

Cameras were coming closer. I couldn’t keep holding onto Jane without causing a scene.

I hated this. Hated everything at the moment. 2

But what choice did I have? (1)

I loosened my grip and Jane yanked her arm free. Terry touched her back, leading her away. Together, they walked out of the ballroom.

The producer shoved a microphone into my face.

“Prince Nicholas, did you have an argument with Piper?”

Chapter 250

“It doesn’t seem like this exhaustion is directly related to her illness,” the doctor told me. We stood a

few feet away from the bed where Elva rested, watching her. “She likely got so excited for tonight that she

simply wore herself out.”

“So she’ll be alright?” I asked.

The doctor nodded. “She just needs a good night’s rest. Let her sleep. In the morning, I’ll return and

check on her.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

The doctor saw herself out. When she’d gone, Mark approached me.

“I can watch her,” he said. “I’ll stay inside the room. No one will get past me.”

I was worried about what Jane might have been getting up to at the gala in my absence.

Mark checked his phone. He frowned.

“Something wrong?” I asked. My heart began to race.

“Still no reply from Prince Nicholas,” Mark said. “I’m wondering if he received my messages.”

“Maybe he hasn’t checked,” I said. “When I last saw him, he was busy talking with the benefactors. It

would be rude to check his phone at that time.”

“Maybe.” Mark didn’t seem convinced. “I tried to warn him about Jane...”

“You don’t think...?” No, surely Nicholas would be able to tell the difference between Jane and me?

“You’d better get down there,” Mark said, and I agreed.

I went to Elva’s bedside one last time, and brushed some hair away from her face. She was sleeping novelin

soundly, her chest steadily rising and falling with each breath.

“Sweet dreams, princess,” I whispered.

Then I stepped away.

When I walked into the ballroom, I felt the weight of many pairs of eyes all pressing down onto me.

One of the candidates hear me whispered to someone else. “She changed again. Who does she think she is? None of the rest of us got to change.”

I had no idea what they were talking about. I hadn’t changed. This was still my same gown.

Many of the candidates were glaring at me. Even Tiffany and Veronica were casting me dark looks. Only Susie waved when our eyes locked, though she looked more worried than pleased to see me.

I looked over the ballroom first for Jane, and then for Nicholas. Jane, I didn’t see. Nicholas was hurriedly

walking toward me.

When he stopped at my side, he asked at once. “What was today’s identifying answer?”

“Moon dust,” I answered as quickly.

He exhaled, but relaxed only marginally. His whole body seemed wired with tension. A muscle ticked at

the corner of his jaw.

“What’s going on?” I asked. “Why is everyone looking at me like they want to push me off a bridge?”

“Jane was here,” Nicholas said. “She pretended to be you. She... caused a stir.”

The fear that had taken root in my stomach blossomed now, spreading throughout the rest of my body.

“What did she do?”

“She purposefully insulted many of the benefactors while pretending to be you.”

Oh, no. To keep my hands from trembling, I worried them together.

Yet, as terrible as that was, I could tell Nicholas was holding something back. He seemed more upset

than seemed necessary, even for such an act.

“Did something else happen?”

He didn’t answer right away, so I pressed.

“Did she say something to you?”

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. But it clearly did matter. He looked like he wanted to tear the room apart. Even his hands were curled like he expected claws at any moment.

A shocking thought crossed my mind. “Are you close to shifting?”

He didn’t say anything, but that was answer enough.

I stepped closer to him and placed my hand on his chest. Beneath my palm, I felt the thunderous beat of his chest and the tense pull of his muscles.

He was struggling to keep himself in check.

Nicholas was typically so calm. I’d never seen him so near a shift before. The only other time might have

been when he had come to my rescue in Terry’s dungeon, but even then, he had emerged already in wolf

form. I'd never seen him actually struggle for control.