

The Luna Choosing Game #Chapter 251 - Read The Luna Choosing Game Chapter 251

Chapter 251

Whatever Jane had said to Nicholas must have been something horrific.

“I’m okay, and Elva’s okay,” I said, hoping to soothe him and his prowling wolf. “If the worst she’s done is tarnish my reputation, then we can recover from that.”

A storm raged in Nicholas’s eyes, the green flashing against the gold.

“She threatened you,” he said and it came out a growl.

“That’s nothing new.”

“What she said... cannot be allowed...”

“Whatever she said is just words. I’m here and I’m safe. She can’t touch me while I’m beside you.” 1

That, at last, finally seemed to bring him some measure of comfort. He breathed in deeply, held it, then released. Some of the tension bled away from his shoulders. He closed his eyes, and when he

opened them again, they were clearer.

Slowly, I lowered my hand away from his chest.

“I need to speak with the benefactors Jane insulted. If I apologize, then maybe...”

and

“I don’t think that will work,” Nicholas said. “Their pride won’t allow them to accept your apologize. At

least, not this soon.”

“But I can’t just sit around and do nothing. I have to repair what she’s done.” 1

“Even with me beside you, they will refuse to speak to you. The things she said to Mrs. Marble -”

“Mrs. Marble? The ultra-rich lady?”

Nicholas nodded, expression grim.

This past week, all the girls had been talking about the wealthiest of the benefactors, Mrs. Marble.

Everyone had her in their sights, deciding that whoever won her support, won the whole thing. I had never

heard of her before, never cared to, but now I understood her influence.

To insult her was to insult the whole of the nobility. The only thing worse would have been to insult the

Queen herself. 1

Blood drained from my face. “She didn’t talk to the royal family...?”

“No,” Nicholas said, and as bad as things were, that was at least somewhat of a relief.

I spoke with Nicholas a minute more, trying to come up with some kind of plan to improve my situation. As it was, we were coming up short. Everyone – the benefactors, the candidates, and the guests – glared

at me as they past.

The camera crews, however, were all too interested in capturing my every expression. The producers

meanwhile shouted out questions.

“Prince Nicholas! Did you and Piper make up?”

I glanced at Nicholas. “We were fighting?”

He nodded. “I had a few terse words for Jane. Before Terry intervened. Then I had to let her go.”

Ten minutes later, Nathan claimed everyone's attention. He stood beside the King and Queen on the lifted thrones at the middle edge of the room. He held a few papers in his hands.

"We will now announce the organizations that the benefactors have chosen to support tonight," Nathan said. We appreciate everyone's time and generosity. Many good causes will be receiving donations this evening."

Nathan lifted his list and began reading the names of the benefactors and the organization they have chosen to support. One by one, he ticked down his list.

Not once did I hear the name of the orphanage.

Not even from those that had promised me to my face to support me.

I supposed I couldn't blame them. Whatever goodwill I had garnered, Jane had taken apart in ten

minutes of rudeness and insults.

Tears welled in my eyes, unbidden, as Nathan continued down the list. Many of the names I didn't even

recognize. Had I truly missed talking to so many people?

I felt ashamed. I failed those kids at the orphanage. And I failed myself.

Chapter 252

I sniffed, but I wouldn't let the tears fall. By the end of Nathan's list, I had been the only person to have received zero support. The orphanage I supported would receive no donations from tonight, despite my

best efforts.

In her ten minute appearance, Jane had undone hours' worth of my efforts.

I'd been getting glares since I returned to the ballroom, but now, the whispers started too.

I wished the ground would open up and swallow me whole. Then I wouldn't feel so much

embarrassment and shame.

I'd hoped to gain enough donations to be able to give the orphanage at least some relief. They knew about my backing them. We had to submit the organizations we supported to Nathan and the producers

ahead of time. They likely made commercials and promos for the gala utilizing that information.

I could only imagine what the commentators were saying now.

"The orphanage will receive nothing. The children will go hungry tonight. And it's all Piper's fault!"

I wiped my eyes with the back of my hand. Nicholas, beside me, noticed.

"We congratulate all of our participants tonight," Nathan said. His speech was wrapping up. The event

was almost over.

"Wait!" Nicholas called out. He started walking toward the stage. The crowd parted for him, clearing his

way.

Julian appeared in the now empty space beside me. He handed me a handkerchief.

"Took him long enough to step forward," Julian said. "I thought I'd have to do it myself. It would have

totally ruin my reputation as the reckless, devil-may-care playboy." novelbin

I dabbed the handkerchief at the corners of my eyes. "Do what?"

"You'll see."

Nicholas stepped onto the lifted platform and approached Nathan. The King and Queen gave him

suspicious glances.

Nicholas held out his hand and Nathan passed him the microphone.

Nicholas cleared his throat. "In the spirit of tonight's generosity, I would like to offer my own donation of

\$20,000 to the orphanage that Piper is supporting tonight."

Many people oohed and awed. That gift was twice as much as the next highest donation tonight.

Everyone started to clap.

Suddenly, some of my shame lifted away, and I started crying for a new reason: gratitude. (1)

Julian wrapped his arm around my shoulders. "Chin up, Piper."

"I'm just so happy... Those kids... I failed them."

"No, you didn't. Jane stole from them."

I glanced at him. "Did you see her?"

Julian's smile twisted in disgust. At Jane or at himself, I couldn't tell. "I didn't notice."

"Nicholas did," I mentioned, hoping he wouldn't feel bad. So long as someone was there to interfere in

Jane's plans, did it matter who it was?

Yet my words seemed to have the opposite effect on Julian. He squared his jaw. "Yeah." He didn't sound

all that happy about it.

Nicholas slowly came down from the lifted platform. He was stopped several times as he walked, by

smiling people shaking his hands and complimenting his generosity.

“Ever the hero, my brother,” Julian said. I couldn’t read his tone.

“Julian...”

“It’s fine, Piper. Some of us work better from the shadows.” He lowered his head a little. “Though, for

what it’s worth, I’m sorry that I let Jane slip by me. It won’t happen again.”

“She fooled everyone,” I said.

Julian shook his head. “I don’t get fooled.”

He walked away before Nicholas reached me. I realized too late that I hadn’t returned his handkerchief. Nicholas glanced at it. Julian’s initials were embossed onto the corner.

Nicholas’s jaw clenched.

I didn’t know why he was upset, especially when I was so pleased.

“Thank you, Nicholas,” I said. My voice wavered. This evening had been a trial, but Nicholas’s actions had helped make it just a little better.

supposed, I was still in a bad place. My poor showing in this event would reflect in my standings among

certainly didn’t help either.

Chapter 253

Even now, standing as we were with the crowd around us dispersing, I was earning many passing glares.

Gratitude filled my heart for what Nicholas had done. But worry still harbored in the rest of me.

Jane had come here tonight to harm my reputation and she had succeeded in doing so. I didn’t know

what I could do now to repair it.

“Ignore them,” Nicholas said. “They have no idea who you are.” 1

“Does it matter who I am? If they think I am a disgrace, they will have the power to be rid of me.”

“They have no such power,” Nicholas said firmly. “Only the royal family can make those decisions.”

“But surely the nobility has the royal family’s ear.”

“We may listen. We may even consider. But they do not make the decisions for us.”

“Nicholas...” I didn’t know how to tell him that, though I was incredibly thankful for his defending me, I

knew it was only a matter of time until I was removed from the contest. It had always been this way. I

daily walked on the edge of a knife. That I had stayed this long was a miracle.
1

“Don’t give up yet, Piper. Please.”

Above all, I didn’t dare disappoint him. So I nodded. “I’ll keep trying.” 1

“Good.”

As far as I was concerned, this evening couldn’t end fast enough. I was ready to go to my room, put on

my comfortable pajamas, curl into bed, and forget everything for a while. Tomorrow, I could pull myself

back together and figure out how to restore my reputation.

Tonight, I just wanted to sleep. To unwind and forget.

The universe had other plans for me.

Nicholas had taken my arm and was escorting me to the door of the ballroom. I assumed he intended to

walk me all the way back to my room. Three feet from the exit, Nathan walked directly into our path.

“The King wishes to speak with you, Piper.” Nathan glanced at Nicholas.
“Alone.” 1 novelbin

“Absolutely not,” Nicholas said at once.

Nathan lifted both brows. “You would defy the King’s orders.”

Nicholas grit his teeth together

“It’s okay, Prince Nicholas. “I will speak with the King.”

“You aren’t going alone,” Nicholas said.

“That is what the King requested,” Nathan said.

“I’m going too,” Nicholas added. “My father can tell me to my face to get out,
but I won’t let you face him

alone.”

Nathan seemed resigned to the matter, like he had faced this argument in the
past. “You’ll have to

explain yourself.”

“I’m aware,” Nicholas said.

“Very well.” Nathan turned and began to walk. He expected us to follow.

Nicholas gripped my arm more firmly. “Whatever he says or commands, I will
not leave you alone to face

him.”

“He might try to kick me out for my behavior tonight.”

“Jane’s behavior,” Nicholas corrected. “I won’t let him.” 2

I trusted Nicholas, but I doubted that when push came to shove, he would be
able to overturn the

decision of the King himself.

It seemed very likely that tonight, I would be headed back to my small apartment.

How long would it take before Elva got sick again? How long until I was desperate enough to seek out

help to save her?

How long until I ended up in front of Terry's door?

I cold shiver ran up my spine.

Nicholas squeezed me a little, in support. "I'll stay by your side. Don't be afraid."

But he couldn't stay with me forever. He couldn't protect me from what I truly feared.

Maybe we could face his father together. But sooner or later, I would have to face the rest of the world

on my own.

Chapter 254

Chapter 0254

Nathan led Nicholas and me into a sitting room where the King sat upon a chair. All other chairs had

been pushed to the back of the room. It was clear he meant for the rest of us to stand.

As we entered, the King narrowed his eyes in Nicholas's direction. Nicholas lifted his chin.

"Nathan, I believe I was clear in my orders that Piper arrive alone," the King said.

Nathan bowed his head. "My apologies, Your Majesty."

"It's my fault," Nicholas said. "I refused to allow Piper to face you on her own."

The King frowned deeper. "And if I ordered you to leave?"

Nicholas squared his shoulders. "You would have to have be forcibly taken from this room." (1

The King and Nicholas stared at each other for a moment, as if in silent conversation. Then the King

sighed, long-suffering.

"Stay then," the King said. "I will be amused to hear how either of you can defend Piper's actions from

tonight."

I spoke at once, "I deeply apologize —"

"Apologize?" the King scoffed, cutting me off. "You honestly believe that a mere apology will fix all that you've done? You called one of our benefactors tonight a 'fat cow. And I won't dare repeat the things you

said to Mrs. Maple."novelbin

"I'll do whatever it takes to redeem myself," I said.

"I don't care about your redemption! I want to know what possessed you to speak and act as you did to

start with! Did you temporarily lose your mind? Has the pressure of the contest addled your senses?" The

King's voice slowly rose.

I lowered my chin down to my chest. "I have no excuses, Your Majesty. I surrender myself to your

punishment."

"No, she doesn't," Nicholas snapped. He stepped forward and half in front of me, shielding me from

some of the King's glare.

“Nicholas, you are treading on thin ice,” the King said through his teeth.

“I will not allow punishment to fall on her when she has done nothing to deserve it.”

“You don’t believe her actions are worthy of punishment?”

“No.”

The King was flabbergasted. “Why ever not?”

“Nicholas, please,” I whispered. Was he planning on revealing the truth about Jane? He couldn’t do that!

Nicholas hesitated.

“Answer me, Nicholas. Explain to me why she does not deserve punishment.”

“She just doesn’t,” he said, haltingly, like each word pained him.

“Your Majesty, if I may.” I sidestepped around Nicholas. “If I may ask, Sir, please allow me a list of everyone who I offended so that I may personally apologize through letters.”

“That won’t be enough. Many of the nobility are fiercely angered. Even those you did not directly insult.”

“I understand, Sir. But I would like to try anyway. My behavior tonight was truly out of line, and I will

make amends. This I promise to you.

The King considered me a moment. “That’s very good of you, Piper, but this should never have been

necessary.”

“I understand and agree,” I said.

Silence filled the room for a long moment.

“I still require a reason. Despite the misunderstandings you’ve created, Piper, you have generally been harmless. I would know what drove you to make such a fool of yourself, and of me, for hosting you.”

I swallowed hard. I did not want to lie to the King, but I couldn’t tell him the truth. I searched through my thoughts and feelings, and pulled out the most logical, honesty-adjacent reason I could find.

“Elva wasn’t feeling well again,” I said. “I fear my worry for her drove me to act irrationally.”

The King watched me with a hard expression. I stood tall and proud, accepting his judgement. Then he

shook his head.

“I can understand your concern over your ailing child. But a Luna would never allow her personal worries to interfere with her royal duties. Tonight has displayed your weak character not just to me and

my Queen, but to the entire Kingdom through the television.”

Chapter 255

Chapter 0255

I nodded, grim.

“I should send you home tonight,” the King said.

“But, father” Nicholas began.

The King held up his hand, stopping him. “But I will wait for the public’s reaction. They have protected you thus far, Piper. Tonight you showed them your true colors. We’ll see if their love for you persists.”

I bowed. “Thank you for your leniency, Your Majesty.”

“Nathan will procure you a list for your apology letters,” the King said.

“Right away,” Nathan agreed.

“Don’t let this happen again, Piper. There will be no leniency a second time.”

“I understand. Thank you, Sir.”

The King waved his hand, dismissing us.

Nicholas offered me his arm and then led me from the room.

When we were safe down a lonely hallway, Nicholas stopped, released my arm, and turned to face me.

“We could have told him the truth.”

“No,” I said.

“He’s the King. If anyone could help us-

“Remember what Julian said? We don’t know who to trust! And even if the King himself isn’t in on it,

who knows what lies Terry has been feeding him over the years?”

“Then let’s go to the public instead,” Nicholas said. “They’ve always supported you before. If they knew

the truth –

“And what of Elva? If the whole world knows the truth, how would we keep it from her?” 4

Nicholas crossed his arms but fell silent. He didn’t have an answer.

After a long moment, he spoke again. “If we don’t do something, you will become a victim in the court

of public opinion, Piper. My father did not expel you from the contest simply because he believes he doesn’t have to. He expects the public to come for your head.”

“I know that.” Of course I knew that. The King has always made his disdain for me clear. Even from the beginning, Julian had told me I was only here as a publicity stunt. I’d always only been here by the grace of the public. If they were to turn on me, I would be out the next hour, if not the next minute.

Nicholas exhaled. “Piper, I want to protect you.”

His words made me soften. “I know, Nicholas. But I’m trapped. Don’t you see? Jane has me cornered and she knows it. And once I’m gone from the palace...”

“Is that what Terry talked to you about? Did he threaten you?”

“It was less a threat than a promise. He made clear I’d come crawling to him.”

“That bastard.” Nicholas’s voice took on a dangerous growl. “As if you would ever.”

“But I might have to...” When I spoke, I taste bile. “When I’m out on the street, who else will help me with

Elva?”

“Not him.” Nicholas gripped me by the upper arms. “Never him. He takes things, Piper. He doesn’t give back. You’re worried the underground organization will come for her? If you go to him, he will deliver her

straight to them.”

I worried about that too. But what else could I do? If no one would help, she could die. “Maybe I’ll be able to convince him... If I’m compliant enough...”

Nicholas pulled me into his hard chest and wrapped his arms securely around me. 1

“I won’t let that happen. I don’t care what I have to do. I will never let him have his way with you or with

Elva.”

I clung onto Nicholas’s shirt. I wanted to believe him so badly, but what could he do? His parents trusted Terry implicitly. If he betrayed his uncle, it wouldn’t go unnoticed by the crown.

“Give me time. I’ll think of something,” he said.

I didn’t have much time to give, but... “Whatever time I have left here, it’s all yours.” (4 novelbin

Nicholas kissed the top of my head. The anchor of his embrace was the only thing keeping me from

washing away in despair.

Chapter 256

Chapter 0256

The next morning, Elva was still resting peacefully after I awoke and changed, so I left her in the care of

Charlotte, the Nanny, and Mark, and went down to breakfast alone.

I was nearly there, when both Veronica and Tiffany blocked my path.

“We want to talk to you,” Veronica said.

We were about to have breakfast beside each other. “Could it wait until breakfast?” If they were going to

yell at me about ‘my’ behavior last night, I’d prefer it not to happen on my empty stomach.

“No,” Veronica said.

Okay, then. I sighed in resignation and followed them to a quieter spot away from the doorway to the

dining room.

Tiffany crossed her arms. “We talked to the other—you last night at the gala.”

“She looked like you and spoke like you, but it was clear to us both that she was not you,” Veronica said.

“Yeah, plus... why would you change clothes? That’s not like you at all. And then change back?” Tiffany

shook her head. “It doesn’t add up, Piper. So spill. Tell us what’s really going on.”

My heart pounded. Of all people that didn't know the difference, why were these two so observant?

Even the King had been willing to believe the worst of me.

"It was me... I was just having a bad night," I said. I didn't want to lie, but I couldn't tell anyone the truth,

not even them. Too many people knew it already, from Nicholas's guards to some of the servants. It was

a miracle the truth hadn't leaked yet.

That it hadn't was a compliment to the strong character of everyone on Nicholas's payroll.

"That was not a bad night," Tiffany said.

"That wasn't you," Veronica added.

"Did

you

lose a bet or something?" Tiffany said. "Someone extorting you?"

Veronica gave Tiffany sideways look. "It wasn't her."

Tiffany looked back. "Who else could it be?"

They both looked at me expectantly.

I closed my eyes. "I wish I could tell you, but I just can't." If it were only me that could be hurt, I would

reputation.

Elva. The underground organization. This ran so much deeper than just me and Jane.

"It's alright, Piper," Julian said. Appearing beside me, he placed a gentle hand on my shoulder. "You can

trust these two.”

I frowned at him. He was the one who was so adamant about not trusting anyone.

Julian grinned at my upset. “There’s a reason I picked these two. Well, other than their great senses of

humor.” He laughed. “They’re trustworthy.” He shrugs. “And they hate the underground.”

“The underground is behind this?” Tiffany asked, her voice taking on a sharp edge.

“I should have known,” Veronica said. At her sides, her hands clenched into fists. “Those bastards.”

Julian nudged me. “You can tell them.”

So I did. Not everything, of course. Not about my wolf, or Elva’s involvement. But I did explain that I had a twin sister who was caught up with the organization. I said Jane wanted to ruin my life to get me

desperate enough to fall into the underground’s web.

As I spoke, their gazes became more pitying than judgmental. By the end, they were outright angry on

my behalf.

It was something of a relief, to finally be able to tell someone the truth and to not have to bear the

weight of their misguided judgement anymore.

“So this bitch of a sister of yours is running around pretending to be you?” Tiffany asked. “And that was

her last night, being terrible to everyone?”

“Yes,” I said. “And yes.”

Tiffany whistled. “I thought my family was messed up.”

“We won’t be fooled again,” Veronica said.

“Yeah, for sure.” Tiffany sighed. “Sorry if we were jerks to you last night. It took a minute for us to put

two and two together.”

“You don’t have to apologize...”

“We do,” Veronica said. “The underground organization has taken from us both.”

Veronica and Tiffany glanced at each other. Julian lowered his hand from my shoulder to my lower back.

“Then we’re all in this together now,” Julian said. “We’ll have to work to take them down, but

“I’m in,” Veronica said.

“Me, too!” Tiffany added with a fist pump.

We all smiled at each other. It felt good, like I had just gained two more friends.

“Please keep it a secret though,” I said. “It’s a secret I can’t afford to have revealed yet.”

“You must have your reasons,” Veronica said.

”

—

“Man, that’s got to suck, not being able to tell anyone. Your sister must be getting you in a world of

trouble.”

After I nodded, they both agreed.

“Your secret is safe with us,” Veronica said. She always spoke definitively, so this gave me comfort.

Veronica and Tiffany then excused themselves to go to breakfast. I nearly joined them, when a good

look at Julian gave me pause. I waved them ahead without me.

“Julian.”

“Hm?”

His eyes were red, bloodshot, with heavy bags hanging underneath them. He wavered unsteadily as he

stood, swaying back and forth. He looked terrible.

He looked exhausted.

“Did something happen?” I asked him.

“What do you mean?” He could barely keep his eyes open.

I gripped his arm to keep him from swaying too far in one direction.

“You are dead on your feet.”

“Oh, that? I just need some coffee and I’ll be fine.” He yawned. “Nicholas kept me up all night. We kept trying to think up ways to trap Jane.”

Julian and Nicholas stayed up all night?

“We’re not any closer, though,” Julian said with regret. “Trying to keep your secret. Trying to capture Jane without killing her. We’re running out of options, especially with you under fire now.”

“She hasn’t hurt me.”

“Did you already forget the knife she held to your throat? Nicholas hasn’t, I can tell you that much. And after last night? We can’t decide if Jane wants to kill you or damage you beyond the point of return.

Neither option is ideal, obviously.”

I hadn’t forgotten the knife to my throat, or the cold look in Jane’s eye. Nor had I forgotten all of Terry’s

dark promises.

Nicholas had a right to be worried about me.

“Nicholas wants to tell the King the truth,” Julian said.

“I know.” I worried my bottom lip with my teeth. “What do you think?”

—

“He’s too close to Terry. He’d never believe us – you over his brother-in-law. His trust with Nicholas

and I goes a bit further, but even that has limits. If we don’t have definitive proof that your sister exists,

and Terry’s involvement, the King will never believe us.”

“Nicholas thinks otherwise?”

“He wants to believe in our father. His dedication often renders him blind.” Julian yawned again. “Up all

night, and we have nothing to show for ourselves.”

“Maybe a nap would help,” I suggested. Fear gripped at my chest, but everyone needed rest. No great

plans were ever thought of in a sleepless delirium.

“Coffee,” he said. He patted my back in a comforting way. “Hang in there, Piper. We’re not down and out,

yet.”

“I don’t know...”

Julian lifted his hand to my shoulder, drawing my eyes back to his. He was tired, but he held my gaze with tight focus as he said, “Terry won’t have you, Piper. Nicholas and I would die first.”

Chapter 257

Chapter 0257

I entered the dining room and sat down for breakfast across from Tiffany and Veronica and beside

Susie. Susie gave me a supportive smile.

“How’s Elva?” she asked.

“She was just exhausted,” I replied. “I let her sleep in this morning.” 1

“Oh good. I was worried.” When Susie said something like that, I believed her.

Jessica sat on Susie’s other side. She quietly ate her breakfast without making much fuss. However,

further down the table from her, Olivia and Lilliana were both glaring at me.

“I’m surprised the King let her stay,” Olivia said loudly to Lilliana, who agreed.

Tiffany rolled her eyes. “I wasn’t aware that was any of your business, Olivia. Maybe you should focus on

yourself.” Softer, to only Veronica and me, she grumbled, “Like usual.”

“Did you say something, Tiffany?” Olivia called.

“Nothing to worry about,” Tiffany replied.

Olivia frowned. Everyone went back to their breakfast.

Lilliana, however, did not seem as willing to let things go. “Piper’s behavior from the gala is inexcusable,

no matter what you say. She doesn’t deserve to even be eating breakfast with us, let alone, to stay in the

competition.”

“Let it go,” Veronica said.

“No,” Lilliana snapped. Her wilting flower façade had been crumbling for a while now. I noticed at the

gala last night. She’d glared more than usual when Nicholas’s back was turned. Usually she’d hide it

better.

I wondered if it had to do with how Nicholas had been giving Olivia and me more attention than he had

to her, when she had been the supposed favorite for so long. Lately, it seemed, she had been falling out of

favor.

“Could you imagine someone like that as Luna? Our Kingdom would be the laughing stock of the entire

continent. She’s a disgrace, An embarrassment. Someone should show her the door before she makes

everything worse.”

“And that someone should be you, Lilliana?” said Nicholas from the doorway..

Lilliana instantly paled.

Tiffany snickered into her hand. Veronica smirked,

Lilliana pushed herself off her chair. “Oh, Prince Nicholas, you must have misheard me...” She pouted a

little, her eyes wide and vulnerable.

She’d used that look on him before. Usually he bought into it.

This time, he glowered.

“Are you also attempting to judge my hearing, as you have judged Piper?” he asked.

“N–no... Of course not...”

1

“Piper has earned her spot in this competition, and no one especially not you can say she does not

belong here. The King himself has allowed her to stay. Or perhaps you feel yourself above the King?”

“No!” Lilliana scrambled closer to him, desperation in her eyes. “Please, hear me out, Prince Nicholas.”

“There’s no need. Please, return to your breakfast.” Nicholas glared at her, until she wilted back down

into her chair and obeyed him. Then he turned to me. “I would escort you back to your room, Piper, if you

are ready to go.”

“I am.” I pushed my plate away and rose to my feet.

Susie, Veronica, and Tiffany waved goodbye to each other, then I accepted Nicholas’s arm and let him

lead me from the room.

When we were out in the hallway, I said, “Thank you.”

“She had no right saying that to you,” Nicholas replied.

“She was talking about Jane,” I said.

“I’m not so sure she was,” Nicholas replied. “From what I’ve been able to tell, she’s resented you for a

while.”

I tilted my head and looked at him sideways. I didn’t think he’d been able to see through Lilliana’s

vener.

“She doesn’t hide her disdain as well as she thinks she does,” Nicholas said.

I hummed my assent. "Is she still your favorite?"

I wasn't totally sure why I asked. I didn't want to know the answer if the answer was yes. Maybe it was

somewhat.

I knew it was all only temporary, and that I was playing with fire. But I still couldn't stay away. It didn't

matter how much it burned.

Nicholas looked at me. "She was never my favorite."

My heart began to race, the treacherous thing. I had no reason to think that meant I was his favorite instead, except the intense focus of his gaze, the way he stared down into my soul.

"Nick, I..." I didn't know what to say. novelbin

"It's okay, Piper," he said. I guessed I didn't need to know.

Nicholas was the kindest man I had ever met by fair. Brave and strong. Valiant, always upholding his

sense of justice.

He would make a great King. And a wonderful husband.

I wished I would be able to see him as both. I would have to settle for one.

When we walked closer to the staircase, Nicholas pulled me into an alcove. In the shadow of the

doorway, he tugged me into his arms and kissed me until I was breathless.

I smiled against his mouth. "What was that for?"

"I couldn't wait anymore," he said, like that was reason enough. Maybe it was.

"Then kiss me again," I said. "Make it last until next time."

One of these kisses would be our last, but I prayed it wasn't this one. Or the next. Or the next.

He cupped my cheek with his hand. Tilting me gently, he deepened our kiss, licking his way past the

seam of my lips.

I sighed against him and wrapped my arms around his neck. I combed my fingers through the hair on

the back of his head.

He pulled away, enough for us to breathe, then he repositioned and dove back in.

If I had the power to extend time, this was the moment I would have wanted to last forever. I could

have stayed just like this, tucked away from the world in this alcove, wrapped in his safety and warmth.

Here, my worries felt terribly far away. His soft, persistent mouth chased away every bad thought that meant to haunt my waking hours.

Here, there existed only me and him and the bond that connected us – the one we so often ignored.

It was a long time before we parted again. We held hands as we ascended the stairwell toward the guest wing. At the top of the stairs, we both stopped.

A pair of paramedics were standing at my door.

“Elva!” I gasped and rushed forward. Nicholas was hot on my heels.

As we came closer to the room, we found one of the guards on the ground, a knife-wound across his

stomach. The other guard raised his sword against me.

“Hold!” Nicholas shouted. He pulled me behind him.

The guard immediately lowered the sword. "Forgive me, Prince Nicholas." To raise a weapon against

one of the royal family was akin to treason.

"Forget that. Tell me what's happening."

"She..." The guard motioned towards me. "She stabbed him!"

!

Nicholas glanced back at me. Then he returned his gaze to the guard. "We've gone over this. You mean

her sister. Did you ask the identifying question? Where's Mark?"

"Where's Elva?!" I chimed in.

The guard motioned toward the door. The paramedics continued to work on the other guard.

Nicholas opened the door and I rushed inside. I skidded to a stop as I came face to face with the barrel

of a handgun.

"What is today's identifying answer," Mark asked. His hand was steady. His aim true. A fired shot would

kill me, straight through the heart. "Answer. Now."

Chapter 258

Chapter 0258 Nicholas walked into the room behind me. "Mark? What the hell?" "Protocol, Sir." Mark did not lower the gun away from me. "The answer, Piper. Please." "Morning glory." I said. Instantly, Mark lowered the gun. "I'm sorry." I shook my head. "Whatever it takes to keep Elva safe. Where is she?" Mark motioned toward the closet. I rushed over and opened the door. Elva, the Nanny, and Charlotte were playing dress up. Elva laughed when she saw me. "Mommy!" I rushed forward and pulled her into a tight hug. She was wearing a pair of my high heels. Her foot slipped right out of the shoe when I lifted her. "Play with us, Mommy!" "I will. Just give me a moment, okay?" I lowered Elva back to the ground, and she returned to the Nanny to play.

Charlotte met my eye across the closet. She gave me a nod. I understood: Elva was okay. They were able to keep her in the dark about what happened. But what exactly had happened? I excused myself from the closet and came to stand beside Nicholas and Mark. I'm sorry, Sir. I don't want to threaten Piper but the circumstances required it." "I was standing right behind her, Mark." You could have been fooled. You assigned me the task yourself. Protecting Elva is my first priority above anything else. Even Piper's safety. Even your own, Sir." Nicholas rubbed his hand over the back of his neck. "I'm not angry, Mark. I know your orders, and I'm glad you came them out. But my wolf. Seeing Piper in danger like that nearly made me shift. My apologies, Sir." Don't apologize." I said I would face ten thousand gun barrels if they were meant to keep Elva safe

+15 BONUS Nicholas startled like he hadn't noticed me approach. He recovered quickly enough though. "How's Elva?" he asked. "She's okay. From what I can tell, she has no idea anything bad happened." "At the first sound of a struggle, the Nanny and Charlotte relocated Elva into the closet," Mark said. We'd decided on that plan of action from the start. I'd hoped that we wouldn't have to put it into practice." "What exactly happened here, Mark?" I asked. "It's my understanding from what I've been able to gather, that Jane came to the room," Mark said. "The guards, as per protocol, asked her the identifying question. She didn't know it. We heard yelling from inside. She was demanding to see Elva." Suddenly chilled, I wrapped my arms around myself. "Then she had a knife. She stabbed one guard, went for the other. After securing Elva, I stepped into the hallway. Our numbers scared her off. We alerted the paramedics, then I came inside to secure from within." Jane had been here. She'd been so close. She'd tried to see Elva. "Why would she want to see Elva? What could she have hoped to gain from such a thing?" I asked. "My assumption, Miss Piper," Mark said, "is that she intended to kidnap her." "Oh my God." I was going to be sick. Nicholas immediately came to my side. He wrapped his arms around me. "Nicholas..." "Shhh." He held me tightly. I buried my face into the crux of his neck and shoulder, and felt my body shake apart. I was going into shock, from seeing the knife wound, from nearly being stabbed, and then nearly shot, to know hearing that Jane had been so close to stealing away my daughter. My body couldn't handle the stress. It was too much. It was all too much. I couldn't let Elva see me like this. I had to get it out of my system. novelbin

to fall apart. piece me back together was cholas, +15 BONUS "Give us a moment, Mark," Nicholas said. Mark nodded, and went into the closet. His gun was holstered now, like he had never held it all. I wished he hadn't of needed

to hold it. "Jane will be back. She'll just keep coming. She won't stop until she has what she wants." "We'll stop her." I shook my head. "I know you and Julian stayed up all night, trying to think of a plan. I know you couldn't decide anything." "Give us time," Nicholas said. "So we didn't plot anything last night. That doesn't mean we'll never have any ideas. I will find her and I will stop her, Piper. If I have to tear this entire palace apart, brick by brick." It was then that I noticed I wasn't the only one shaking. "She comes into my home and threatens the people I care about the most." A growl lined beneath his words, deepening his voice, low and dangerous. I looked up at him. His eyes were flashing, more green now than gold. Nicholas's wolf was struggling, clawing its way to the surface. I placed my hand flat against his face, hoping to soothe him. He leaned into my palm. "I can't let her take you and Elva," Nicholas said. Or maybe it was his wolf talking now. I couldn't be sure. "You are my family." The wolf, then. Nicholas would never call Elva and I that. With wolves, even friends were considered family. Pack. Of course, it would see Elva and me as part of that. I shushed him gently. "We are both still here. No one has taken us." He closed his eyes. When he opened them again, the gold had taken over once more and Nicholas had returned to himself. He inhaled a shaky breath. "I keep losing myself." I start to lower my hand, but he grabs it and places it right back where it was, on his cheek.

"I'm usually much more in control of my wolf," he said, "There likely hasn't been danger like this before. How many people threaten me," Nicholas said. "But when they come for you, or for Env goes out the window. I only know I have to protect you +15 BONUS You do protect us." "Not well enough." "Nicholas. It's only because of you and those you've selected to surround us that we remain safe. If I was on my own, I..." I didn't want to give voice to those thoughts. I well and truly knew the answer, however. If I had been on my own with Elva, and Terry and Jane had found us. We'd either be dead, or already part of their grand design. Regardless of whatever happened next, we'd only made it this far safely because of Nicholas. "I need to see Elva," Nicholas said. "I need to make sure she's safe." I understood that sentiment. I wanted to see her too. Together, we walked to the closet and opened the door. "Nick-lass!" Elva cried and rushed toward us. Nicholas scooped her up into his arms. "There's my princess," he said. He held her in a tight embrace for a moment, before opening up one arm to invite me. I moved closer. I draped one arm around Elva's waist and the other, I wrapped around Nicholas. For several long minutes, Nicholas, Elva, and I held each other. Elva giggled after a while, not understanding the purpose of the hug. She didn't know the danger she faced. She didn't need the affirmation that each of

us three were alive and present. But I understood. And Nicholas did too. So we kept holding on.

Chapter 259

Chapter 0259

That evening, I met with Nicholas and Julian in one of the sitting rooms. Julian had unfurled the

blueprints to the palace out on one of the small tables. Now, he was holding a cup of coffee in each hand.

He likely hadn't been to sleep yet.

Neither had Nicholas, though he was running on adrenaline instead of caffeine.

"With Jane escalating in violence, we have to move quicker as well," Nicholas said. "We need to put a

plan into action as soon as possible."

"We need a plan first," Julian said. "You are skipping steps."

Nicholas pushed a hand through his hair.

"There has to be something we can do," I said. "I'm tired of waiting around for Jane to make her move.

We're constantly on the back foot."

"Piper's right," Nicholas said. "We need to go on the offensive. Stop playing defense and go on offense

instead."

"Take the fight to them?" Julian asked with a smirk. "Surely you all haven't forgotten my initial plan from

weeks ago. Sneaking into Terry's mansion and snooping around."

"We barricaded the tunnel," I said.

“I’m not talking about a tunnel. I’m talking about holding an event in Terry’s mansion. Then snooping

around when their backs are turned.”

Nicholas and I glanced at each other.

I remembered Nicholas had been vehemently against this plan at the start. Now however, he seemed

less so.

Julian waited. I waited too. When Nicholas didn’t object to anyway, Julian prompted, “You’re going to let

me suggest it this time?”

What can I do? Nicholas crossed his arms.

He clearly wasn’t happy, but he was willing to go along with anything

too close. She very nearly sneaked past our defenses if Mark hadn’t been the

Five will always be in danger so long as Jarse and Terry have

ed to bring fan and Terry down as feet co

My heart was warm, listening to Nicholas so valiantly willing to protect Elva and me.

Julian smiled. “It’s about time you came around to this idea, brother. Even last night you said no.”

“That had been before Jane. Before the attack.”

Julian nodded, understanding.

“Great. I’ve been leaning on the producers for a while now, putting this idea in their ear,” Julian said. “So

it shouldn’t be too difficult to get them to line everything up and move quickly.”

“You’ve been pitching this idea to them, even though I opposed it?” Nicholas asked.

“Of course.” Julian shrugged. “Like I’m going to let your misguided orders get in the way of my best-laid plans. I knew you’d come around eventually. I wanted to be ready. Now, we’re ready.”

Julian was true to his word. The next afternoon, all of the candidates were called down into the parlor room for some announcements. Gossip was rampant among the girls. Many were whispering about how the next event would take them away from the palace grounds.

“I’m ready for a change of scenery,” Tiffany said.

“Careful,” Olivia replied. “If you make it to Luna, you will hardly ever leave.”

“The palace is beautiful, don’t get me wrong,” Tiffany amended. “But... surely the Luna gets to go to a party somewhere else once in a while?”

“She does,” Susie said, softly.

“I would be comfortable staying,” Olivia said. “Though, of course, I would go wherever the Luna is needed.”

“I will go wherever Nicholas decides,” Lilliana added.

Nearly everyone rolled their eyes.

Ever since Nicholas had overheard Lilliana be cruel to me and then called her out, Lilliana has fully reverted to her agreeable flower routine, even when Nicholas wasn’t around.

She was likely nervous now, like Nicholas might be hiding around the corner ready to hear her true self

and not the act she put on.

stepped onto the stage platform and tapped on his microphone, gaining our attention.

anticipating what our next event will be. Nathan said I’m st

esgerly awaiting the next on

+15 BONUS

At the sound of that name, all the blood drained from my face.

“Ladies, please welcome Terry among us.”

The girls politely clapped. I did too, even though I wanted to run up and kick him in the shins.

“Thank you. Thank you. You are very kind,” Terry said. He walked toward us and took turns placing his

hand on each of our shoulders. Only Susie and Tiffany visibly slunk away from his touch. I steeled myself,

counting the seconds until it was over. Even Olivia seemed tenser than normal.

I’m glad the other girls at least had the good sense to know something was wrong with this man, even if

he wasn’t actively trying to take control of their lives.

“Allow me to be the one to announce the event, Nathan,” Terry called out.

Nathan obliged with a nod.

“Ladies!” Terry stretched out his arms. He spoke louder than he needed to. There were only 8 of us.

You are each hereby cordially invited for as dinner guests to my mansion.” 1

The girls gasped. Some seemed delighted, others less so. Tiffany seemed happy enough just to get out

of the palace. Susie worried her bottom lip with her teeth. 1

While I wasn’t terribly surprised by the announcement – Julian had made it clear it would happen – the

involvement of Terry himself was a surprise. Julian couldn't have arranged that? Unless part of his ploy

was making Terry believe this had been his idea all along.

I resolved to ask Julian about it later.

For now, Nathan reclaimed everyone's attention. "At this dinner event, you will be judged based on your

etiquette, as well as your attire, and your ability to hold Terry's interest. Terry, the Luna's brother, will be

the primary judge for this event."

My stomach began to churn uncomfortably. Terry was the judge? That did not bode well for me. He was

likely to tank my score just to see me fail again. I didn't know the nature of the third elimination, but I

couldn't imagine bombing two events in a row would do me any favors.

Terry moved around the girls again, giving them each as a smile as they thanked him for his upcoming Hospitality. When he reached me, his smirk was as sharp as a dagger's edge,

idn't want to thank him I didn't want to talk to him at all. But I couldn't be the only one who had novelbin

is would talk, and I was already on thin ice due to Jane's behavior at the gala

rising lump in my stomach, and spoke

Terry's smile added teeth. "You are very welcome, of course, Miss Piper. I am looking forward to having

you in my home."

I thought of kicking him in the shins again, but held myself back – barely.

"I can guarantee you will have the time of your life," Terry continued. "Why, by the end of the evening, I doubt if you'd be able to pull yourself away."

He said the words pleasantly enough, but to me, it sounded like a threat.

Involuntarily, I shivered.

Chapter 260

Chapter 0260

I was not excited for this new event at Terry's mansion. While Julian had only helped arrange it so that we could sneak into Terry's office and snoop around, the problem, of course, was that now I would be

forced to interact with Terry.

A man who had some twisted fantasies about being with me and my twin. 1

Needless to say, selecting a dress for this event was proving to be somewhat of a challenge.

Charlotte had offered to sew me a new gown, but I refused. Terry was not going to see me in a dress

just for him. So we moved to the closet.

But then, Nicholas entered to help us decide. So far he had vetoed every single dress Charlotte held up

to my person.

"That dress is too tight," he said to a slim blue dress.

That one is too short," he said, later, to a black cocktail dress.

"You can't show your shoulders."

"That shows too much cleavage."

After a while, Charlotte gave up and left the room. I was down to two dresses. One was a black shapeless gown with a super-high neckline. The other was so baggy it looked like a circus tent.

The circus tent, I vetoed myself. The black dress had Nicholas shaking his head.

“Absolutely now,” he said.

I nearly threw it at him. “Why not? You can’t see my shoulders. It’s not too short. It has zero cleavage.”

I will hug your breasts too much.”

I sighed dramatically. “Nick, I have breasts. They are going to show no matter what I wear

Not in that one.” He pointed to the circus tent I’d discarded onto the floor. novelbin

Tot not wearing that one.” I lifted the black one again. This is modest and respectable.

Nothing about this is modest?

“This is ridiculous, Nick! You are being purposefully difficult!”

“No, I’m not! You’d be too sexy in this. Terry doesn’t get to see you like that!”

I stopped tugging. Nicholas ripped the hanger from my hands and tossed it onto the nope pile. The nope pile consisted of everything in my closet – except for the circus tent.

“I would not be sexy in that,” I said.

“You’re sexy in everything,” Nicholas grumbled.

I blinked. What did he just admit to?

No, I couldn’t let his flattery of me alter my decision making here. He was only trying to get me to wear

the circus tent. That wasn’t happening!

“I can’t wear a potato sack, Nick. I have to be somewhat in style. We know Terry’s going to give me low

points. I have to do the best I can.” The best I could, without stoking Terry’s ego or imagination too much.”

“I’m not asking you to wear a potato sack. I’m asking you to wear that!” He pointed to the circus tent.

“Same thing!”

“No, it isn’t.”

I threw my hands up in frustration. “You know what, fine. Maybe I’ll just go naked, huh? At this point, I

don’t even care anymore.”

“You wouldn’t,” Nicholas said. It came out a growl.

I wouldn’t, of course. But I really wanted to annoy him like he’d been annoying me.

“Maybe I would,” I snapped. “That would show you.” Show him what? I wasn’t even certain what I was

arguing anymore. I just wanted to have the last word.

No. Nicholas moved closer still. His eyes were fiery. His body tense as a bowstring. I inched.

backwards, recognizing an Alpha wolf storming my direction.

But then my back hit the wall and I had nowhere else to go.

Nick my voice was breathy. I barely recognized myself.

nt out to see you like that. Nicholas’s voice was rough. He didn’t sound like him

“Nick” said again, but this time, I said it differently. It came out a whine, near begging.

He didn’t make me actually beg. Instead, he just kissed me.

The kiss was feral, wild, all teeth and demanding tongue. His hands gripped my hips, fingers biting into

the meat of my ass.

I gasped against his mouth. He barely gave me time to breathe before he claimed my mouth in another

passionate kiss.

clutched at his shoulders, holding on for life.

“Only me. Piper.” His voice was all growls now. God, it was so sexy, I felt like I was losing my mind.

I leaned up, hoping to catch his mouth, but he pulled back before our lips could connect.

I whimpered, wanting him close. Closer. As close as I could have him.

“Say it.” That was his Alpha voice. A pleasant tingle ran up my spine.

In his right mind, he couldn’t have possibly thought that I was actually going to go to Terry’s mansion

naked, or that I wanted Terry to see me like that in any way.

But he wasn’t in his right mind at the moment. He was all Alpha instinct and lust, and I was the fortunate

object of his desire.

There was only correct response for this moment. At least, for me to get what I wanted, which in this case, was more kisses and possibly his hands under my shirt.

“Only you, Nick. I promise.”

“Good,” he said, so satisfied, so feral. Then he plunged his tongue back into mouth.

my

I lost myself to the feel of his insistent lips on mine. His hands circled around my hips, where he grabbed at my backside and yanked me forward. His dick was growing hard in his pants. I pressed

against it just to hear him gasp.

Don't tease," he said lowly, voice and breath hot on my ear. "Or I'll fuck you right here in this closet.

No you won't" I said with certainty.

Fite blazed in his eyes. "You shouldn't doubt me."

17

won't, I said. Because I'm a virgin

I'm sure I had told him before. Maybe he hadn't believed me then.

"Piper..."

"So, I doubt you will ravage me in this closet for my first time..."

Nicholas was too much of a gentleman for that. And I loved that about him. He wanted me desperately.

but he cared for me more.

"Fine," he said. "I won't fuck you, but don't think I won't taste you.

Now it was my turn to be surprised. My eyes went wide and my breath caught.

He dropped to his knees.

"Nick!"

His hand went to the buckle of my pants. He looked up at me through his lashes and it was the sexiest

thing I had ever seen in my entire life.

"I've been dying to feel you on my tongue, Piper. Let me. Please."

I was nodding before my brain even caught up to the words he was saying. Fortunately, my brain agreed

with my instinct.

Nicholas unbuckled my pants. He slid the zipper down.

His eyes on mine, he hooked his fingers around the waist of my pants and slowly started to tug.

“Prince Nicholas, you have been...”

Everyone froze. Nicholas, me, and Mark, who had just walked into the closet.

“Um.” Mark said.

My face burned so much, I felt it could catch fire at any moment.