

The Luna Choosing Game #Chapter 271 - Read The Luna Choosing Game Chapter 271

Chapter 271

Chapter 0271

Terry narrowed his eyes a small margin. Julian had put him in a corner now. It would seem almost cruel to deny Piper, especially with Julian himself defending her.

“Hurry back,” Terry said, voice silky smooth for the watching cameras.

“I will,” I promised, a blatant lie, and hurried away from the table.

Outside the dining room, I turned to a lingering servant.

“Excuse me, can you direct me to the bathroom?”

But the servant, eyes downcast, gave no indication that he even heard me. This place was a hell–scape. God knew what these poor people endured on the regular.

I left the servant without a word and sought out the bathroom on my own.

After a few minutes, I easily found Nicholas. All I really had to do was follow the sound of his cursing.

The bathroom door was halfway open. He sat on top of the closed toilet lid with a small waste bin between his knees, as he callously plucked the shards of glass from his hand and dropped them into the trash.

As I neared, I felt a sudden tapping on my shoulder. I turned, and it had been a servant. They held out a basket for me. Inside was cleaning wipes and bandages.

I accepted the gift quickly. “Thank you,” I said, heartfelt. With the way they had obviously been trained to be obedient only to Terry, I knew this offering came with a risk to them.

They nodded. Not once in the entire encounter did they look at me. Instead, they turned and scurried away.

Approaching the door, I knocked on the wood and pushed it open.

Nicholas was on his feet in a second, body suddenly tense. When he saw it was me, he exhaled long and slow, and his whole body relaxed again.

“Sit,” I said, coming into the room.

He plopped back down on the closed toilet lid. I dropped my gift basket onto the edge of the sink and came near him.

“Let me see,” I said.

He lifted his bloody hand toward me. “I got most of the glass out, but I can’t see the underside as well. There’s one piece stuck in there, I can feel it.”

“I’ll get it.” I set to work. The shard was clearly visible.

He clenched his teeth but didn’t otherwise react as I quickly removed the glass and dropped it into the wastebasket.

“Better?”

He sighed in relief. “Yes. Thank you.”

“Come over to the sink. We’ll clean you up.”

He smirked at me a little. “Yes, ma’am.”

I blushed, realizing how demanding I had sounded. “I didn’t mean...”

“It’s fine.” He rose to his feet and followed my instruction, moving to the sink. “I like when you tell me what you want. It saves time.”

My blush burned hotter. “Nick!” I scolded lightly.

He smiled wider. He’d been purposefully teasing me, of course.

“I wanted to see you smile,” he said. “I know this evening has been... unpleasant.”

“That’s putting it mildly.” I turned on the facet, and touching Nicholas’s wrist, guided his hand under the water. Red filled the sink basin. “After you left, he was pawing at me like I was some kind of sex doll or something.”

Nicholas stilled. His whole body went tense again.

I realized my mistake too late. It wasn't that I didn't think Nicholas should know what happened after he left, but I certainly hadn't intended on telling him in such a blasé way, when he was already upset at our being here!

I should have waited until we were somewhere safe, like back in the palace, where Nicholas could lose his cool without endangering his reputation.

As it was, he was a well of barely-contained rage, nearly shaking from it.

"He did what?"

Chapter 272

Chapter 0272

"It's fine," I said. "I got away before anything truly bad happened." At his insistence, I then proceeded to explain exactly what Terry had done.

"He tried to touch you," Nicholas growled. "He did touch you."

"I left before anything could happen. I got myself out of that situation."

After cleaning his wounds, I wrapped his hand in a sanitized white bandage. He held himself very still for me, though I could feel the tension buzzing under his skin.

The moment I fastened the bandage, securing it, he pulled me against his chest and wrapped his arms around me.

"I should have been there," he said. "I'm sorry."

"You can't be there every minute. Besides he was so subtle about it, even Julian didn't notice."

Nicholas hummed, a deep rumble I felt in his chest against my ear.

"I'm worried," I said. "Stepping out like that was not the most tactful move. My standing is sure to suffer."

"You protected yourself," Nicholas said. "That is the most important thing."

To him, maybe it was. But I wasn't as sure about myself. Elva needed the medicine and treatment only the palace could provide. Any loss of standing, any risk of being removed, was a danger to her.

Still, I wrapped myself in the comfort of his worry for me, and let it help build my courage. I would protect Elva. I would do anything for her. But I didn't need to sacrifice myself to Terry.

At least, not yet.

"We should get back," I said. "We can't risk looking too suspicious."

Nicholas lowered his face down into my neck, where he breathed me in for a long moment. Then, reluctantly, he released me.

As we returned to the dining room, he stayed very near my side, not touching but never more than an inch away.

As we approached the table, I noticed that Julian had moved into my seat.

"You don't mind, do you, Piper?" Julian asked, eyes alight with mischief. "This makes it so much easier to talk to Joyce."

"Of course not,

," I said, and moved to Julian's old seat, which now placed me across the table

Nicholas pulled back my chair for me, then pushed me in as I sat. When I was comfortable, he lowered himself in the chair beside me.

Terry glared at both of us.

A small sense of victory filled me. It lasted only a moment, long enough for Terry to stretch out his arm and wrap it around the back of Susie's chair.

Susie instantly paled.

My heart leapt into my throat. Susie was quiet and self-conscious. I didn't know if she would have the confidence to stand up for herself against Terry's flirtatious onslaught.

Terry leaned into her and whispered something into Susie's ear. Susie tried to lean away, but Terry brought his arm around her and locked her into place.

Her eyes were wide and panicked. She stared at her empty plate like it might offer help.

I kept my gaze on Terry's hands. So far they were both visible. If one so much as slipped out of view for a second, I was going to jump across the table and throttle Terry, standings be damned.

I knew, deep down, that Terry was only flirting with Susie to get to me. This must have been his backup plan all along, if I showed any kind of resistance. He somehow knew we were friends and plotted to use that knowledge against me.

I hated him deeply, almost as much as I hated myself for getting Susie caught up in all this. novelbin

The empty entrée plates were taken away, and in their place, a desert was brought in. It was cheesecake, smothered in a rich-looking chocolate sauce. If I'd had any appetite at all, I would have gobbled it in a flash. As it was, I was struggling to keep my lunch down.

Chapter 273

Chapter 0273

Susie, apparently thrilled with the distraction, leaned forward to eat her cheesecake. After the first bite, Terry stopped her by raising his napkin.

"My dear, you have a touch of chocolate syrup right here..." He tabbed the napkin to the corner of her mouth. Susie went still as a statue.

I moved, ready to stand and do something, when Susie looked across the table at me and met my gaze. Subtly, she shook her head no. She was telling me to stop.

But why? To protect me? To protect us both if our standings should suffer?

Terry shouldn't be allowed to treat people this way.

I looked at Nick, and his face was grim. He wasn't eating either, simply glaring at his uncle.

Terry smirked. "Are you enjoying your dessert, dear?" Terry asked Susie in a low, sultry voice that made my skin crawl. "Go ahead and eat more. I'm right here, ready to help clean you up if you make a messy."

Susie's hand shook as she cut off another portion of cheesecake. She lifted it halfway to her mouth, but then lowered it instead.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm not hungry anymore."

"Is it not to your liking?" Terry asked. "You wouldn't want to upset my chef."

"I'm sorry," Susie said again. She offered no more explanation, even after Terry waited.

Eventually, though he looked disappointed, he said, "Suit yourself."

After dinner, the candidates and guests were brought into a sitting room to socialize. The princes were called in to give more interviews with the camera crews.

Coffee and tea were served, but I declined both.

I sought out Susie and found her alone in the far corner of the room, looking for all the world like she hoped she could disappear.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

She worried her bottom lip with her teeth. "He is vile."

"Did he touch you?"

She shook her head. "No more than you saw."

That, at least, was a small relief.

Nicholas pulled back my chair for me, then pushed me in as I sat. When I was comfortable, he lowered himself in the chair beside me.

Terry glared at both of us.

A small sense of victory filled me. It lasted only a moment, long enough for Terry to stretch out his arm and wrap it around the back of Susie's chair.

novelbin

Susie instantly paled.

My heart leapt into my throat. Susie was quiet and self-conscious. I didn't know if she would have the confidence to stand up for herself against Terry's flirtatious onslaught.

Terry leaned into her and whispered something into Susie's ear. Susie tried to lean away, but Terry brought his arm around her and locked her into place.

Her eyes were wide and panicked. She stared at her empty plate like it might offer help.

I kept my gaze on Terry's hands. So far they were both visible. If one so much as slipped out of view for a second, I was going to jump across the table and throttle Terry, standings be damned.

I knew, deep down, that Terry was only flirting with Susie to get to me. This must have been his backup plan all along, if I showed any kind of resistance. He somehow knew we were friends and plotted to use that knowledge against me.

I hated him deeply, almost as much as I hated myself for getting Susie caught up in all this.

The empty entrée plates were taken away, and in their place, a desert was brought in. It was cheesecake, smothered in a rich-looking chocolate sauce. If I'd had any appetite at all, I would have gobbled it in a flash. As it was, I was struggling to keep my lunch down.

Chapter 274

Susie was naïve to believe that Terry would take her on this private tour and not try to fool around with her. And, knowing her, she would likely be too shy and meek to properly defend herself from him.

I couldn't let that happen. I couldn't let her put herself in that position to start with.

Terry was only looking at her as a way to get to me. I wouldn't let anything bad happen to Susie for my sake.

I glanced around the room. The three princes were still nowhere in sight. Their interviews must have been long ones. I could try to delay but who knew how much longer it would take? And if I waited too long to answer Terry, he really might pull Susie into his web.

I had my training, both from Nicholas and Julian, and I had my necklace if I needed a rescue. I could do this. I could protect myself.

"I'll go with you," I said. I kept my voice carefully level, certain not to let it waver even once, despite how much I was shaking inside. 2)

"But, Piper" Susie began to protest at once. She didn't realize her own danger.

"Piper has made her choice," Terry said curtly, cutting her off.

I nodded.

"Shall we?" Terry extended his arm. I had no choice but to take it.

Terry led me away from the rest of the group and down a familiar hallway we had previously taken on our group tour. Yet all too soon, he veered from that path and took me down a hallway of closed doors.

The door at the very end was even more elaborate than all the rest, with sparkling clear gemstones pressed straight into the wood. The door seemed to shimmer under the crystal chandeliers that hung in the hallways.

He opened the door and guided me inside. Before I could even get my bearings, he closed the

door and locked it behind me.

A large bed sat in the very center of the room. On it, attached to each of the four posts was a cuff. Two, presumably for the wrists, and two for the ankles. Hanging on the wall behind were a series of items: whips of various sizes and types, ribbons and ropes, what looked like some type of harness... 2

My blood ran cold.

"We should head back," I said. I tried to turn toward the door, but he was suddenly behind

1/2 novelbin

+25 BONUS

“We are both more comfortable here.” It was a command of stay, even if he didn’t actually say the word. Fortunately, he wasn’t an Alpha. His orders didn’t hold as much mental sway. Unfortunately, without my wolf, he was still physically stronger than me so I still couldn’t

move.

Think of everything you could have, if you agreed to be mine,” Terry said, voice all honey and venom. “You could live in my palace. I would adorn you with gems and fine gifts. You’d be well cared for, without a single need unfulfilled.”

“You want me to be some dress–up doll more than a person.”

His grip tightened, fingers digging deeply into my skin. I’d likely have bruises on my arms to match the ones on my thighs he’d earlier left.

“Only I can fulfill your every need, Piper. Not just possessions, but sexually. My prowess is legendary. You will be crying for me.”

I shook my head. “And Jane? You would cheat on her?”

Terry laughed loud and cruel. “Your sister understands that I have certain desires that cannot be satiated with only one lover. I have dozens of women ready at my whim. Someday maybe they will join us. They all love this room the most.”

“Then maybe they can entertain you while I see myself out.”

I couldn’t be in this room a moment longer, thinking of him and those poor girls. Who knew if they’d been actually willing?

Did Terry imagine he would chain me up to the bed? Was he fantasizing about using those... items on me?

Fear coiled in my stomach, hot and acidic. I longed for Nicholas to be near, to burst through that door and save me.

Chapter 275

Chapter 0275

Terry laughed again. "Piper, did you truly believe that once I brought you to this room, I would ever give you the chance to leave it?"

"I can't stay here."

He pressed himself against my back. I felt his growing hardness along my backside.

In my ear, he whispered cruelly, "You don't have a choice."

At once, my body reacted on its own. Remembering the training I did with Nicholas, I lifted on leg, then slammed my foot down hard onto Terry's toes.

His leather shoes were expensive but flimsy. Everything he owned was built for appearance not durability. My heel crunched right down to his bones.

His hold on me loosened and I stumbled forward. I didn't make it far, before he grabbed the back of my dress in to handfuls and ripped it in half, pulling it from my body.

I stumbled forward in my bra and panties.

Terry tossed the ruined fabric aside and grabbed at me. I dodged, avoiding his first attempt, but I hadn't expected that he would anticipate the move.

He hooked his arm around my waist, then lifted me, and threw me down on the bed.

Panicking, I clutched at my necklace, squeezing it tightly. I kept my arms tight to my chest. But he was able to overpower me. He grabbed one of my wrists and yanked it upright.

With the quickness and ease that must have come from practice, Terry locked my hand into one of the cuffs. He moved slowly around me, locking me in, one cuff at a time, until both my

wrists and ankles were bound.

No amount of struggling seemed to make a difference. He had simply overpowered me. And now the chains did the work.

He stood by the bed, crossed his arms and smiled. "You look good like this. Although..." His eyes narrowed in on the pendent around my throat. "Did one of the princes give you that? Nicholas, I presume?"

It had been Julian's gift, but I wasn't going to tell him a damn thing.

He grabbed the pendent and tugged. The chain snapped at the back of my neck and the necklace pulled free.

He threw it on the ground and then smashed it under his heel for good measure.

"They don't own you anymore, Piper. I do."

1/2

+25 BONUS

"N-no one owns me!" I shouted, fear making my voice quake. Had the pendant worked? Or had Terry's smashing it disturbed the signal somehow?

I couldn't stand the thought of being trapped here at the mercy of Terry, without anyone knowing where I was. novelbin

Maybe no one was coming to my rescue.

I pulled at my bounds with renewed fervor. I had to save myself. I couldn't rot in here.

I couldn't let this vile man touch me!

I was still a virgin. If he... If...

No!

Terry kneeled on the edge of the bed. His gaze trailed down the length of me and then back up again. He traced his fingers along my panty line. I squirmed away as best I could but I couldn't go far enough.

He could look and touch his fill and there wasn't anything I could do about it.

“I will break you down to nothing and rebuild you into just how I want you,” Terry said. His smile twisted, vindictive. “I like the ones with fight in them. It makes it all the more satisfying when you come to heel.”

“I will never submit!” I said, as strong as I could.

He trailed one lone finger up my stomach to the valley between my breasts. “You will eventually, Piper. They always do.”

Tears welled in my eyes, but I refused to give into terror or doubt.

Nicholas and Julian would come. They would.

Suddenly, there was a loud pound against the door.

Both Terry and I snapped our gazes to look.

A half-second of silence followed, then a batch of hurried footsteps, and BAM.

The door broke open. Wood splintered in all directions. That beautiful, expensive door was totally trashed.

Good.

Standing over the wreckage, totally shifted into wolf form, was Nicholas

Chapter 276

Chapter 0276

Nicholas’s wolf eyes looked at me for only a moment, before turning to Terry. A growl erupted from the back of his throat. Then, all at once, he tore forward, pounced, and knocked Terry away from me and down onto the ground.

Julian, in human form, burst into the room behind Nicholas. He rushed to my side. When he saw the handcuffs, his eyes narrowed. He reached into his pocket and retrieved his lock picking tools. Only then did I notice his hands were shaking.

“Julian?” My voice was weak, fear making it small.

“Give me a minute,” Julian said. “We’ll get these things off of you.”

“Are you okay?” I asked.

He blinked, then glanced down at my face. “Am I...? How can you be asking that right now?” He returned to his work.

“You’re trembling...”

“I’m about to shift, Piper. I’m barely holding myself together. I want to rip that motherfucker’s throat out.” The last words came out in a snarl. He closed his eyes a moment, breathed deeply, then opened them again.

The first handcuff clicked open. I lowered my strained arm back down to my chest.

Julian moved to my ankles next. He moved quicker now, like he was focused. Both my ankles were free in no time.

Across the room, Terry shifted into his own wolf, to attempt to hold his own against Nicholas. His wolf, light brown in color, was small than Nicholas’s. He lacked both the speed and strength of Nicholas’s alpha, but he snapped back enough for Nicholas to not immediately bite his head off,

They circled each other, snapping and snarling.

The final handcuff clicked open. I brought it toward my chest to rub some of the pain away. Julian helped me to sit upright, Then he removed his jacket and draped it around my shoulders.

I gripped it with both hands and tightened it over my chest, attempting somewhat futilely to preserve my modesty.

Nicholas lunged toward Terry. The attack was obvious, but Terry, even prepared, wasn’t strong enough to hold back the sheer size and strength of Nicholas’s wolf. Nicholas pinned Terry down to the hard ground. He brought his sharp teeth down to Terry’s neck.

Nicholas was going to kill him.

+25 BONUS

I wanted to stop him, but I felt frozen in place. I couldn’t move or even speak.

Fortunately, Julian doesn’t have the same limitation.

“Nicholas!” Julian shouted. Nicholas stilled. “Don’t kill him.”

Nicholas growls, low and dangerous.

“I know he deserves it, but how the hell would we explain it? We have to focus on getting Piper out of here and to safety now.”

Those words seemed to convince Nicholas. He snarled once more in Julian’s ear, then, slowly, eased back from him. Terry stayed on the floor as Julian guided me from the room with a strong arm around my waist. Nicholas, in wolf form, stayed in our shadow.

We escaped through a servant’s entrance so others, including the cameras, wouldn’t see my state of undress. In the dark, we walked around the side of the mansion until we reached the driveway where all the cars were parked.

Nicholas’s car, since we had arrived last, was closest to the exit. Julian led me there, then helped me sit down in the passenger seat. He left the door open.

Near the hood of the car, Nicholas, shifted now back into human form, was pacing back and forth and back and forth. He was clearly agitated. I wanted to go to him, to assure him that I was okay, but I was still struggling to move.

My thoughts felt clear, yet somehow disconnected with the movements of my body. Every limb was sluggish. It wouldn’t listen to my brain’s commands.

I was in shock, most likely. I hated it. I wanted to move, to go to Nicholas so we could both feel the reassurance of knowing the other is okay.

“You should have let me kill him,” Nicholas said. “That asshole deserves to die.”

“He does, but what would that mean for you, huh? Or Piper? You think they’ll just let her walk out of a room where Terry’s dead? You think she’ll just be allowed back into the competition like nothing happened?” There was an unusual strain in Julian’s voice. It was tight with concern and rage.

Nicholas shook his head so hard, it looked painful. “We could have sorted it out.”

“You have to sort yourself out now,” Julian said. “Calm yourself down so you can drive Piper home. She’s out here in her underwear, you big oaf.”

Nicholas stopped pacing. His gaze shifted to me. I watched him through the windshield.

Something changed within him then. Some of the tension slipped away from his nearly-rampaging body. His eyes, wild only a moment before, settled into some of their usual

steadiness.

“Drive her home,” Julian said. “I’ll handle the rest here tonight. Got it?”
novelbin

Nicholas nodded.

Julian came around the car to my side again. He leaned his elbows over my door. “Go home and relax. There’s nothing to worry about. Nicholas and I will keep you safe. Just get some rest, okay?”

I looked at him with wide eyes. I couldn’t nod like Nicholas had, and I didn’t have my back yet. Instead I pressed my lips together and hoped that he could accept that as the semblance of agreement I intended it to be.

“Good,” he said, and I felt relief.

He made sure my limbs were clear of the car, then he closed the door.

voice

At the same time, Nicholas entered from the other side. He was still breathing heavy as he slid into the driver’s seat. He gripped the wheel tightly, like he was trying to suffocate it.

I looked at him. When his eyes met mine, he eased somewhat. “Piper, I... I don’t even begin to

express how sorry I am...

I continued to look at him, confused. He thought this was... his fault? How?

“If we had left that damn interview earlier... They kept asking us questions, keeping us there. It was so asinine. Maybe Terry arranged the whole thing to get you alone, I don’t know.”

He beat his palms against the steering wheel and I flinched.

He instantly stilled. He watched me a moment in silence, before saying, softer, "I'm sorry."

Reaching down to the side of the steering column, he started the car. He didn't say one more word as he pulled out of the driveway and onto the street.

"We'll be home soon," Nicholas said.

I knew exactly how close the mansion was to the palace. I knew he was telling the truth. Still, I couldn't keep my body from trembling.

How closely I had been to losing my virginity to Terry, that vile, vicious monster disguised as a man. He'd wanted to chain me up and break me, with his body and his whips, until I was broken enough that he himself could reshape me.

It hadn't mattered how hard I fought. The physical and mental defense training classes couldn't protect me from the sheer lack of strength I possessed without my wolf.

"Nicholas..." I managed to say. He had always meant safety to me. His name came easier than most other words. "Nicholas..."

"You'll be okay, Piper," Nicholas said. It sounded like a promise. I found comfort in that. "

Chapter 277

Chapter 0277 novelbin

When we returned to the palace, Nicholas pulled the car into the garage. As he turned off the engine, he said, "I'll walk you back to your room."

The words shot a volt of life through me. "No."

He looked at me. "No?"

Fear in my eyes, I returned his gaze. "I can't let Elva see me like this."

Nicholas pressed his lips hard together. He took in the sight of me, scantily clad, hiding in Julian's suit coat with my bare legs exposed.

“You can stay in my rooms,” he said. “I’ll stay nearby so you won’t be alone.” I nodded.

Nicholas texted Mark to let him know the plan. “Mark will stay and guard Elva through the night.”

“Thank you,” I said, and hoped he would convey my appreciation to Mark himself.

Nicholas sent another text, and then rounded the car and helped me from it.

Together, Nicholas and I moved slowly through the hallways of the palace. I was grateful they were mostly empty. I didn’t want anyone else to see me as I was.

Nicholas walked with me the entire way to his private rooms, and then saw me inside.

“The bedroom is this way,” he said, and guided me toward one of the side doors away from the entry room.

Nicholas had an elaborate and plush bed with four tall posts and a canopy. He guided me toward it, then left me lean against it as he crossed the room toward his closet. He returned a moment later with a pair of soft-looking pajamas: a button-up top and long pants. He handed them for me.

“The bathroom?” I asked.

He pointed toward a nearby door. “Take as long as you need.”

Holding the pajamas to my chest, I shuffled inside. I shucked off Julian’s coat, and then looked at myself in the mirror.

I looked harried, with my hair a mess and my eyes wide and red-rimmed. There were bruises on my upper arms and on my thighs, as well as ugly red rings around my wrists and ankles.

I was lucky to be free, to be standing here in Nicholas’s bathroom. But I still felt soiled and

I went to the bathtub and turned on the hot water. Slowly, I removed my bra and panties until I was naked. Then I stepped into the tub.

The water was a soothing balm. I sat and soaked for a long time, breathing in the steam so that the inside of me felt as clean as the outside. I stayed there until the water cooled. Then I exited and dressed in Nicholas's pajamas.

They were too big on me, hiding both hands and feet. But they were unbelievably soft. Maybe the softest fabric I'd ever worn in my life. And they carried Nicholas's calming scent. I lifted the shirt collar to my nose just to breathe

—

Nicholas knocked on the door. "Are you alright, Piper?"

"I'm coming," I said in reply. My voice felt stronger now. I wasn't quite as shaky. But I had no idea how I would sleep tonight.

When I opened the door, Nicholas was on the other side of it. He had changed as well, and now wore a pair of gray sweatpants and a plain white t-shirt. I had never seen him dress so casually as a prince. This look seemed much more like the boy I knew and loved three years before. Nostalgia curled around my heart, and I felt even more endeared. "I can leave if you want," he said. "I'll give you the bed." I shook my head. I knew what I wanted. "Stay, and hold me." He nodded. "Of course." We moved to the bed. Nicholas went in first. Then he rolled toward me and stretched out his arms. I fit comfortably into the space between them. I curled my back into his chest, so that we were facing the same direction. Placing our hands, palms together, I measured the lengths of our fingers. His hands were so much bigger and stronger than mine.

The cuff on my shirt sleeve slipped down to my elbow. The red rings around my wrists had started to bruise an ugly purple.

With them showing, a growl rumbled in Nicholas's chest. I understood his anger and felt it too. I had felt so powerless, so defenseless. "If I had my wolf, I would have been able to break free," I said, then relented. "No, I wouldn't have been in that position at all." Would have been able to rip out Terry's throat all on my own. I wouldn't have needed a rescue. "Terry destroyed the pendant necklace," I said. "We'll get you another one." I didn't want another one. I wanted the ability to defend myself. "I miss my wolf." "Maybe..." Nicholas sighed. "I'm not sure but maybe there's a way we can get it back." I shot upright in bed, and turned to face him. "You think so? How?" Nicholas seemed thoughtful. "If magic exists that can remove it, then there should be magic that can put it back." His expression hardened. "If that magic exists, we

will find it. I won't rest until your wolf is returned to you, Piper." My whole heart softened. "Nicholas..." "You should never be made to feel defenseless."

His words filled me with hope and comfort both. If Nicholas set his mind to something, he would see it done. Simple as that.

I lowered myself back into his embrace. He closed his arms around me and held me to him. With my ear to his chest, I listened to the steady beats of his heart.

"Do you think you will be able to sleep like this?" he asked.

"I don't know," I admitted. I wasn't sure, though this was the more relaxed than I thought I could have ever managed in this moment. When I had been shaking in the car, I thought I might keep shaking until the day I died.

He dropped a soft kiss into my hair. "Tell me what you need."

"Just hold me," I whispered. His shirt muffled my words. "Don't let me go."

His arms tightened around me. I felt safe there, rising and falling with his breath, lulled to sleep by his heartbeat.

"Stay with me..." I said quietly, hating how broken my voice still sounded.

I didn't want to beg, not over this.

I should have known that I didn't need to.

"I'm not going anywhere," Nicholas said.

When had he ever denied me what I needed?

With his assurances, surrounded by the warmth and comfort of the bed and his closeness, my eyes grew heavy and soon I drifted off into a peaceful dreamless sleep.

I slept soundly, not waking once until the early morning.

When I opened my eyes, the sun crept in through the windows, casting a strong beam of morning glow across the room.

My face was pressed into a pillow. I lifted my head.

I was alone in the bed. I reached out to Nicholas's side, where he'd been the night before. The bedsheet was still warm. He must have just left.

I pressed myself up to my elbows.

"Nicholas?" I called, but the room greeted me with silence.

Nicholas wasn't here.

Chapter 278

Chapter 0278

Nicholas

My mind would not let me rest at all that night. My body was at rest, finding comfort in knowing Piper was safe and within reach. But my thoughts constantly reminded me that soon, when the competition ended, Piper would be gone from my side.

Soon, I wouldn't be able to protect her.

Tonight had just been a shadow of that future. I had very nearly been too late. If Julian hadn't given Piper that pendant... If she hadn't been able to press it...

How close we came to disaster.

A pendant like that wouldn't matter soon enough. When Piper was gone from the palace, neither Julian nor I would be able to come to her rescue.

I had to make sure she was in a position to properly defend herself. I had promised to help restore her wolf to her, which would help her defend herself. But I had to do one better.

I had to take down Terry, to make sure he would never be able to hurt Piper or anyone else ever again.

All night, I stayed up and plotted. We had the letter that implicated Terry was directly connected to the underground organization. But that might not be enough.

Before I went to the King, I needed as much evidence as possible.

At the first sight of the approaching dawn, I carefully rolled Piper away from me and slipped out of bed. With luck, I would complete my task and be back before she would wake. She had a long day the day

before. I imagined she would sleep for a long time.

I quickly dressed then left my rooms. I walked down the hallways to where I knew the camera crews and producers gathered each morning. I asked Mark to meet me on the way.

Mark was exhausted, but obliged. He left Elva's protection in the hands of our most trusted guards and met me in the hallway.

I had text him updates sporadically the night before. From that, and our friendship, I had no doubt he could discern the seriousness of the situation.

When we met, he didn't say anything, didn't even greet me. He just nodded. I nodded in return, and we continued on together.

We entered the crew's room without knocking. Everyone startled, seeing me, and rushed to bow and show deference.

I waved away their concerns. "I'm looking for the footage from last night."

One of the producers helped me. They had set up a series of monitors in the corner of the room where they always reviewed the previous night's footage the next day. Most of the event was shown live to the public, but they were collecting the best moments to be released in a future compilation.

Unfortunately, they had not collected footage of Terry's private tour with Piper.

"Terry had very specific rules about what we were allowed to film," the producer said. "I felt we were walking on eggshells all night."

I understood. "I assume you have footage of the dinner."

"We do." The producer scrolled through the timeline, skipping back to the dinner, where there was direct evidence of Terry's excessive flirtations with both Piper and Susie.

Beside me, Mark suddenly tensed. I had told him about Terry's behavior toward Piper, but I had failed to mention Susie's involvement. A mistake, I know realized.

As the footage progressed, Mark began to growl low in his throat. Mark was usually quiet and reserved. I had never seen him lose his patience or his temper. With Susie, he seemed as protective as I was with Piper.

“We’ll bring him down,” I whispered to Mark. Mark looked at me, searching. Whatever he saw in me helped calm him down. My sincerity, perhaps. Or my determination.

To the producer, I said, “I need a copy of this footage. Now.”

The producer rushed to comply.

I saved a chunk of it to my phone, and the rest to a flash drive. Then I split with Mark and walked to the King’s personal chambers. Nathan opened the door for me.

The King and Queen were sitting at their table, eating breakfast.

“Nicholas?” the King said when he saw me. “You look like hell.”

“I have reason.” I walked to him and showed him the footage on my phone.

The King watched it all with a furrow in his brow.

“Terry’s behavior last night was beyond inappropriate,” I said. “He made Piper, Susie, and many of the other girls uncomfortable.”

My mother scoffed. “He’s always been a flirt, Nicholas. You know that. I’m sure those girls are being oversensitive.”

“He tried to feel up Piper under the table,” I said, trying to keep my voice steady and calm. Losing my temper never worked with my parents.

“And you have footage of that?” the Luna asked.

No, I didn’t. None of the camera angles caught Terry’s movements under the table. I grit my teeth, holding in my anger.

“Piper said ”

“And we accept the word of a commoner over that of nobility?” the Luna asked.

I gripped the back of the chair I stood behind. Anything to keep me from throwing something

across the room.

“There is merit to her concerns,” I said, gesturing to my cell phone still in the King’s hands. ” The footage shows – ”

“Piper is too sensitive. And this other girl, Susie, was it?” The Luna cut into her breakfast so hard her knife scraped across the plate. “She’s that quiet one, right? I imagine she’s much the same. A Luna would have to be able to reject men’s advances without becoming offended...”

“This wasn’t just advances,” I said, my voice lowering despite my best efforts. “Terry tried to her.”

The Luna lowered her cutlery abruptly, making a clatter. “Don’t you dare bring such vulgarities to my breakfast table.

“Dear,” the King said to her and she huffed out a breath. To me, he said, “That is quite the accusation, Nicholas. Do you have proof?”

“The shackle marks marring Piper’s wrists and ankles speak for themselves. And I saw for myself when I burst into the room...”

The Luna narrowed her gaze. “It was consensual, no doubt. But when you caught them in the act, she had to pretend otherwise, lest she be accused of breaking the rules.”

The wood of the chair under my hands began to splinter. “That is not true.”

“You have never liked your uncle,” the Luna said. “You are conspiring with that brat against him.”

“Dear,” the King said again, more forcefully.

She lowered her fiery gaze back to her breakfast.

“Nicholas,” the King said to me. “You must know that I need more than this to accuse my wife’s most admired brother.”

“This isn’t all he has done,” I said. “This is only the beginning.”

“Oh?”

I reached into my jacket pocket and produced the letter from Hawk to Terry. I passed it to him. My mother looked up from her breakfast again to track the movement.

My father opened the letter and read through it. His gaze darkened.

“What does it say?” the Luna asked.

When he had finished reading it, he passed it to my mother. She finished quickly.

In a panicked voice, she said, “This has to be faked.”

“How many excuses can you make for him?” the King asked her. “You are letting your love for him blind you, my dear wife.”

“But – ”

“We have been trying for years to bring down the underground organization, with limited to no results. Terry’s involvement could be the very reason we’ve never been able to get the upper hand.”

My mother fell silent. Defiance shown on her face, but deep within her eyes was a touch of heartbreak. To herself, in a whisper, she said, “It has to be fake...”

With the King’s assurance to investigate the matter, I rushed out of his rooms to return to my own. I couldn’t wait to tell Piper about my success.

Yet when I entered my bedroom, Piper was gone.

Walling up in bind see, with bol nowhere wight, & Ball rejected adamanty Sought against the feeling, melting myself everything was fine, Nicholas won a very important and busy man. But the hurt war perditent, rooted deep within me

Worse, I was now also humiliated, it was early, but still late enough for the servants and other candidates to begin to rouse and wander the halle. I had none of my own clothes, only Nicholas’s pajamas or Julian’s jacket.

I kept on the pajamas, but pulled the jacket into my arms to return to Julian later.

Then, with my cheeks burning red, I began the long trek back to my room. I didn't want anyone to see me like this, so I checked around corners and hid in alcoves to avoid all people.

I was nearly caught once, by a pair of servants dusting the picture frames along the hallway, but I ducked into a dark closet until they moved past.
novelbin

Then, mortified, I rushed the rest of the way. The guards lifted a brow as they asked the identifying question, but they didn't say a word when I answered correctly. They merely stepped aside

I exhaled a loud, heavy breath. Finally I was safe.

Was what I thought

Until I saw Piper standing in the middle of my bedroom.

"Where's Elva?" I asked.

"The Nanny and a guard took her down to breakfast." Julian glanced at my attire. A mischievous smirk tugged at his lips. "Long night, Piper?"

I looked down at myself. My blush spread down my neck and over my chest, disappearing under the top of the pajamas.

"I slept well," I said.

"I bet you did," Julian said. "Those princely pajamas look rather comfortable."

I tugged at the cuff of one sleeve. "They are."

"That's good." He sauntered closer. "Is that my jacket?"

"Oh, yes." I held it out for him. Was this why he had come by room? To reclaim his jacket?

He didn't reach for the jacket right away. Instead, he just stared at me, but I couldn't quite discern the look in his eyes. There was an edge to his playfulness.

Chapter 279

Chapter 0279

The King and Queen were sitting at their table, eating breakfast.

“Nicholas?” the King said when he saw me. “You look like hell.”

“I have reason.” I walked to him and showed him the footage on my phone.

The King watched it all with a furrow in his brow.

“Terry’s behavior last night was beyond inappropriate,” I said. “He made Piper, Susie, and many of the other girls uncomfortable.”

My mother scoffed. “He’s always been a flirt, Nicholas. You know that. I’m sure those girls are being oversensitive.”

“He tried to feel up Piper under the table,” I said, trying to keep my voice steady and calm. Losing my temper never worked with my parents.

“And you have footage of that?” the Luna asked. novelbin

No, I didn’t. None of the camera angles caught Terry’s movements under the table. I grit my teeth, holding in my anger.

“Piper said ”

“And we accept the word of a commoner over that of nobility?” the Luna asked.

I gripped the back of the chair I stood behind. Anything to keep me from throwing something across the room.

“There is merit to her concerns,” I said, gesturing to my cell phone still in the King’s hands. ” The footage shows – ”

“Piper is too sensitive. And this other girl, Susie, was it?” The Luna cut into her breakfast so hard her knife scraped across the plate. “She’s that quiet one, right? I imagine she’s much the same. A Luna would have to be able to reject men’s advances without becoming offended...”

“This wasn’t just advances,” I said, my voice lowering despite my best efforts. “Terry tried to her.”

The Luna lowered her cutlery abruptly, making a clatter. “Don’t you dare bring such vulgarities to my breakfast table.

“Dear,” the King said to her and she huffed out a breath. To me, he said, “That is quite the accusation, Nicholas. Do you have proof?”

“The shackle marks marring Piper’s wrists and ankles speak for themselves. And I saw for myself when I burst into the room...”

The Luna narrowed her gaze. “It was consensual, no doubt. But when you caught them in the act, she had to pretend otherwise, lest she be accused of breaking the rules.”

The wood of the chair under my hands began to splinter. “That is not true.”

“You have never liked your uncle,” the Luna said. “You are conspiring with that brat against him.”

“Dear,” the King said again, more forcefully.

She lowered her fiery gaze back to her breakfast.

“Nicholas,” the King said to me. “You must know that I need more than this to accuse my wife’s most admired brother.”

“This isn’t all he has done,” I said. “This is only the beginning.”

“Oh?”

I reached into my jacket pocket and produced the letter from Hawk to Terry. I passed it to him. My mother looked up from her breakfast again to track the movement.

My father opened the letter and read through it. His gaze darkened.

“What does it say?” the Luna asked.

When he had finished reading it, he passed it to my mother. She finished quickly.

In a panicked voice, she said, "This has to be faked."

"How many excuses can you make for him?" the King asked her. "You are letting your love for him blind you, my dear wife."

"But –"

"We have been trying for years to bring down the underground organization, with limited to no results. Terry's involvement could be the very reason we've never been able to get the upper hand."

My mother fell silent. Defiance shown on her face, but deep within her eyes was a touch of heartbreak. To herself, in a whisper, she said, "It has to be fake..."

With the King's assurance to investigate the matter, I rushed out of his rooms to return to my own. I couldn't wait to tell Piper about my success.

Yet when I entered my bedroom, Piper was gone.

Walling up in bind see, with bol nowhere wight, & Ball rejected adamanty Sought against the feeling, melting myself everything was fine, Nicholas won a very important and busy man. But the hurt war perditent, rooted deep within me

Worse, I was now also humiliated, it was early, but still late enough for the servants and other candidates to begin to rouse and wander the halle. I had none of my own clothes, only Nicho la s's pajamas or Julian's jacket.

I kept on the pajamas, but polled the jacket into my arms to return to Julian later.

Then, with my cheeks burning red, I began the long trek back to my room. I didn't want anyone to see me like this, so I checked around corners and hid in alcoves to avoid all people.

I was nearly caught once, by a pair of servants dusting the picture frames along the hallway, but I ducked into a dark closet until they moved past.

Then, mortified, I rushed the rest of the way. The guards lifted a brow as they asked the identifying question, but they didn't say a word when I answered correctly. They merely stepped aside

I exhaled a loud, heavy breath. Finally I was safe.

Was what I thought

Until I saw Piper standing in the middle of my bedroom.

“Where’s Elva?” I asked.

“The Nanny and a guard took her down to breakfast.” Julian glanced at my attire. A mischievous smirk tugged at his lips. “Long night, Piper?”

I looked down at myself. My blush spread down my neck and over my chest, disappearing under the top of the pajamas.

“I slept well,” I said.

“I bet you did,” Julian said. “Those princely pajamas look rather comfortable.”

I tugged at the cuff of one sleeve. “They are.”

“That’s good.” He sauntered closer. “Is that my jacket?”

“Oh, yes.” I held it out for him. Was this why he had come by room? To reclaim his jacket?

He didn’t reach for the jacket right away. Instead, he just stared at me, but I couldn’t quite discern the look in his eyes. There was an edge to his playfulness.

Chapter 280

Chapter 0280

Waking up in bed alone, with Nicholas nowhere in sight, I felt rejected.

I adamantly fought against the feeling, telling myself everything was fine, Nicholas was a very important and busy man. But the hurt was persistent, rooted deep within me.

Worse, I was now also humiliated. It was early, but still late enough for the servants and other candidates to begin to rouse and wander the halls. I had none of my own clothes, only Nicholas’s pajamas or Julian’s jacket.

I kept on the pajamas, but pulled the jacket into my arms to return to Julian later.

Then, with my cheeks burning red, I began the long trek back to my room. I didn't want anyone to see me like this, so I checked around corners and hid in alcoves to avoid all people.

I was nearly caught once, by a pair of servants dusting the picture frames along the hallway, but I ducked into a dark closet until they moved past.

Then, mortified, I rushed the rest of the way. The guards lifted a brow as they asked the identifying question, but they didn't say a word when I answered correctly. They merely stepped aside.

I exhaled a loud, heavy breath. Finally I was safe.

Was what I thought...

Until I saw Piper standing in the middle of my bedroom.

"Where's Elva?" I asked.

"The Nanny and a guard took her down to breakfast." Julian glanced at my attire. A mischievous smirk tugged at his lips. "Long night, Piper?"

I looked down at myself. My blush spread down my neck and over my chest, disappearing under the top of the pajamas.

"I slept well," I said.

"I bet you did," Julian said. "Those princely pajamas look rather comfortable."

I tugged at the cuff of one sleeve. "They are."

"That's good." He sauntered closer. "Is that my jacket?"

"Oh, yes." I held it out for him. Was this why he had come by room? To reclaim his jacket?

He didn't reach for the jacket right away. Instead, he just stared at me, but I couldn't quite discern the look in his eyes. There was an edge to his playfulness. "Maybe you'd be happier if it was Nicholas's jacket," he said.

I blinked.

He looked away. "Never mind. Sorry." He grabbed the jacket.

"Julian...?"

"I'm glad you are okay, Piper."

Oh. So that was why he was here. Under the jealous and the teasing, he had just been worried about me.

"If you'll excuse me," he said, and sidestepped me.

"Julian, wait."

He stilled.

I walked up to him, put my arms over his shoulders, and pulled him into a hug.

I hadn't forgotten his part in saving me last night.

His gift was the only reason I had been found in time. His skill at picking locks had freed me from those terrible handcuffs. His jacket had protected me from watchful eyes. And his levelheadedness had helped snap Nicholas back to the present enough to take me home.

"Thank you, Julian. I mean it."

Slowly, his arms came around my waist and he gently returned the hug.

"Don't scare Nicholas and I like that again," he said.

"I didn't think you could get scared," I said, teasing lightly.

His arms tightened around me, a reply on its own. novelbin

"I'll need another necklace," I said: "Terry destroyed the last one."

"I'll gift you a hundred of them."

After another quick squeeze, Julian pulled back, ending our hug. He winked at me. "Better get dressed, Piper. If people see you like that, they might make assumptions." 2

I rolled my eyes. "Get out of here."

He laughed all the way through the door.

When he was gone, I hurried to change clothes.

Down at breakfast, I was reunited with Elva.

"Mommy!" she cried and rushed into my waiting arms, abandoning her chair and her half-eaten waffle.