

The Luna Choosing Game #Chapter 291 - Read The Luna Choosing Game Chapter 291

Chapter 291

Chapter 0291

“Stop this at once,” the King said.

It was then that I noticed, Julian had swiftly moved around the stage without catching his mother’s attention. I hadn’t seen him move either.

Yet there he was, standing behind the King like he had been there all along. Like he had just been whispering in the King’s ear.

The Luna turned toward the King, frowning. “What is the meaning of this?” She spoke with indignation, but in a reserved, demure kind of way that kept her from raising her voice to her husband.

The King ignored her. To the guard that was holding me down by the shoulder, he said, Remove Terry’s shirt.”

Terry, who had been standing stoic, suddenly took a step backwards. His eyes widened for a half- second before narrowing. “What are you talking about?” He smiled but his voice was too tight for any calm to seem genuine. “You can’t be serious?”

The guard looked to the King. The King waved him forward.

The guard moved his hand from me and walked toward Terry instead. Terry started to pale.

“But,” the Luna began to say, but a quick, sharp look from the King silenced her.

“You can’t do this to me,” Terry said. “D-don’t you know who I am?”

Nicholas came up onto the stage, to my side. He gently eased me up onto my feet.

Terry stood ramrod straight, facing off against the guard. “Don’t you dare touch me!”

The guard lunged. Terry attempted to dodge but his pampered body moved slower than that of a trained soldier. The guard gripped the back of Terry's shirt and held fast. Terry himself pulled away and, the shirt tore away.

As he turned to face the crowd, whose eyes were wide watching the unexpected action unfold, his bare torso was on display. On the right side of his body, along his ribs, was a tattoo of an upside down wolf skull.

Someone gasped. A few of the candidates covered their mouths. I glanced at Nicholas for explanation.

He was stunned speechless for a moment. Then he spoke, "The upside down wolf skull is a symbol of the underground organization. I didn't know someone would... tattoo themselves with it."

The producers seemed uncertain. God knew what the camera feeds were actually capturing.

Julian cleared his throat as he stepped toward the center of the stage. With his confident swagger, he claimed the attention of everyone in the room, including the cameramen. "How odd, uncle," Julian said.

"Why in the world would you have a symbol of the underground organization tattooed on your chest? Surely you've heard that obtaining such a mark is a rite of passage for any new members of the organization..." "Oh, Terry," the Luna said, despair breaking her voice. "What have you done?" She must have felt terribly helpless. With Terry carrying such an obvious dark mark, the Queen could not hope to save him without tainting herself.

Terry must have realized the same. The blood drained from his face. The mischief vanished from his eyes. For once, he was the one trapped, backed into a corner, unable to escape the fate he laid for himself. Panic seemed to take hold of him. He tried to cover his chest with his hands, but the damage was done. Everyone had seen. He had nowhere to hide. "I was forced to get this!" Terry cried out. "They forced me. I had no choice! You have to believe me, sister. Brother." "You are no brother of mine," the King said, voice cold as ice. There were more guards heading onto the stage. The King spoke to them, "Put him in chains." The guards began to surround Terry. Terry backed up, perhaps thinking he might escape, but there was a guard behind him. Terry bumped into him and was immediately righted. The guards wasted no time clamping handcuffs onto Terry's wrists. The clack of the cuffs being tightened, seemed to snap something awake in him. The panic dimmed, replaced now

with hatred and brimstone. He straightened to his full height, lifted his chin in defiance, and spoke loudly. "You think you can hold me. You doubt my importance. When I am free, you all will suffer. I will see to it personally." "Get him out of here," the King snapped. The guards pushed Terry forward. Terry moved, but he did not silence himself. "The kingdom will fall!" The guards pushed Terry nearer to me, on their trek to remove him from the stage. Instinctively, I inched closer to Nicholas. Nicholas wrapped his arm around my waist. Nicholas glared at us both. "Piper will be mine."

Nicholas snarled.

Terry smirked. Softer, he said, "Enjoy this victory while you can, nephew. It will gut dat After Terry was removed from the ballroom, an uncomfortable silence settled over the The excitement had dimmed, but

the overall mood remained lense. No one seemed qui about to process what they had seen.

I was trembling like a leaf, even with Nichola s's arm around me. I knew Terry for where was. I wasn't surprised that he had been caught, but the overall suddenness of it left un feeling uncertain.

I could scarcely believe what had happened. It didn't feel real.

And Terry's warning left a chill deep down in my bones.

"He can say whatever he wants," the King said. "His words are empty.

The Queen stood nearby, her arms wrapped around herself. She stared at the floor. Herface was expressionless now, as if she were in shock. Her handmaidens began to offer her contur. urging her to move to the edge of the stage.

Behind them, I saw a familiar figure at one of the far doorways of the room. A figure that looked just like me.

Jane. "If you'll excuse me," I said, and slid away from Nichola s's side. "Piper?" He seemed hesitant to let me go. He followed me as I walked down off the st didn't have it in me to try and stop him. Instead, I picked up speed as Jane disappeared into the hallway. "Piper, wait!" Nicholas kept speed with me.

I rounded the corner of the hallway.

“Piper!”

Nicholas immediately tackled into me, pressing me down. He caught me in his arms, protecting me from the hard floor. His body entirely covered me.

I could feel the racing beat of his heart in his chest. It thundered as hard and loud as my n

Slowly, he eased off of me, and helped me up to my feet.

“Are you okay?” he asked me. His eyes were wild with worry.

I nodded. My attention was snagged immediately by a spot on the wall.

A spot level to where my head had been only a few mere seconds before.

And in that spot, was the sharp edge of a knife.

Had Jane thrown that? Had she meant it for me?

If Nicholas hadn’t been here... Would she have killed me?

My blood ran cold. I shivered.

Nicholas, seeing the knife, grabbed me around the waist and pulled me against his chest.

“Nick...”

“I’ve got you. You’re alive. You’re safe.”

I knew Jane hated me. I knew she wanted to do me harm.

But to... kill me? Like this?

“She won’t hurt you,” Nicholas said. “I won’t let her.”

I wanted to believe him but she had been so close this time.

Next time, Jane might be luckier.

Chapter 292

Chapter 0292

The next morning after the event, I went with Nicholas to speak with Julian. He was in a sitting room, sipping coffee while reading through a newspaper. Terry's face was plastered all over the front page, under the headline: Traitor.

It still didn't seem real. I expected him to pop out from any corner.

Though perhaps Terry wasn't the one to be afraid of anymore. After all, Jane was the one who had sent that knife flying for my face. I shuddered to think what might have happened if Nicholas hadn't been there with me.

"Julian, we need to talk," Nicholas said as we approached Julian at his small round table.

Julian motioned toward the two other chairs at his table. "Coffee?"

Nicholas and I glanced at each other, then sat down. A pair of servants immediately delivered two cups of coffee for us. Julian nudged the bowl of sugar closer to us.

"You'll feel better after some caffeine," Julian said.

"Forget coffee," Nicholas said. Things were tense between Julian and Nicholas. While Nicholas glared openly at Julian, Julian avoided looking back at him. "How did you know about the tattoo?"

Nicholas, I thought, was being too demanding to properly earn answers from Julian. For knowing Julian his whole life, I wasn't sure how he couldn't realize by now that kindness earned more favors from Julian than spewing orders ever could.

"Julian," I said, much softer and friendlier than Nicholas. "Why didn't you mention the tattoos before? We could have checked for that much sooner." Julian, ignoring Nicholas, smiled at me. "I only recently learned about it. We knew the symbol of the upside-down wolf skull was tied to the underground organization, but I had no idea they branded themselves... until I was told about it." "Told by whom?" Nicholas demanded. I asked, more gently, "Who told you?" Julian leaned back on his chair. It creaked with the new weight distribution. "I have a new informant. An ex-member of the underground.

They've been feeding me more information than I ever dreamed." "Who?" Nicholas asked.

Looking at me, Julian leaned forward again. He slid his hand across the table toward me. They worked directly with magic, Piper. They understand the ins and outs of it. They might My mouth fell open. "Truly?"

"I believe so," Julian said. "At the very least, they will know where to start."

I didn't want to get my hopes up. Having my wolf returned to me felt like such an impossibility that in my wildest dreams I could only barely imagine it.

Yet if Julian's informant did work with magic, then they would at least know if returning my wolf was even possible, or if searching for a way was a waste of time.

"I want to meet this informant," Nicholas said.

To me, Julian said, "They are skittish, and for good reason. They possess the kind of knowledge that makes them invaluable to our investigation, but dangerous to the underground. Though they are well protected, they are frightened."

"For good reason, it seems," I said. To be hunted by both sides sounded like an exhausting ordeal. "What made her finally come forward to you?" 1

"I'm not sure," he said. "You'll have to ask them."

I blinked. "You think they would speak with us?" novelbin

"Not all of us," Julian said.

Julian's gaze slid to Nicholas. Nicholas immediately straightened and crossed his arms. Julian shrugged.

"I'll have to clear it with them first," Julian said. "I wouldn't want them to disappear on me now,"

"I understand," I said. "While I hope they will agree to speak with me, I wouldn't want to risk the investigation either. If necessary, I trust you to ask the right questions."

Julian's eyes went wide for a blink or two. "You do?"

“I know your heart is in the right place,” I said.

Chapter 293

Chapter 0293 novelbin

Beside me,

Nicholas grunted.

We both ignored him now.

Julian smiled at me. “Thank you, Piper.”

As day turned into evening, and evening into night, I could not stop thinking about Jane’s knife and how closely I had come to being skewered.

If Nicholas had moved a half-second slower, and I could be dead.

If I had died..

I dreaded the thoughts, but I still forced myself to face them.

If I had died, I would have died as someone who held themselves back from the things they wanted. I had my reasons, and they were good ones. My needs had always been secondary to Elva’s. They always would be.

But, while we were here in the palace, keeping Elva safe, fed, and happy did not require my sacrifice. While we were here, I had the chance to pursue my own happiness, however briefly. And I was

squandering it. I waited until Elva was asleep, then sunk out of the room. The guards saw me leave, of course, ever watchful, but other than a passing glance, they did nothing to indicate interest in where I was going. No questions were asked, no answers were given. I hurried down the halls, moving down a now-familiar path to the royal family’s rooms. Life was too short. How many regrets I would have died with had that knife met its mark. And while I couldn’t resolve every single regret I’ve accumulated over the years, one at least felt within my power to change. Nicholas had offered to replace the memories that Terry had tainted with happier ones.

I hadn’t been ready when he first offered, or I’d been holding myself back for the sake of my wounded, lonely heart.

But now I knew better. I didn't want someone like Terry to steal my virginity from me. It wanted to give it willingly to someone that I admire. Someone I knew would be gentle with me, and treat me like a queen, even if only for the one night.

Someone who would still respect me in the morning, when we had to go our separate ways.

So I walked straight to Nicholas's door, lifted my hand, and knocked.

Then, with my breath in my throat, I waited. And waited. And waited.

Was he asleep?

I leaned closer to the door.

No, I definitely heard voices within. It almost sounded like he was arguing with someone, but in a more gentle than forceful kind of way.

I knocked again, a little louder. Some of my desire ebbed. Maybe Nicholas just actually needed help.

Footsteps came closer to the door from inside the room, and then it pulled open, revealing Nicholas.

Nicholas's clothes were slightly disheveled. His suit coat was missing. The buttons of his shirt had been undone down to the ribs. His hair was mussed like someone had run their fingers through it.

And worst of all, the thing my gaze zeroed into and could not look away from: he had lipstick on his collar.

"Nick?" I asked in disbelief. He wouldn't be as intimate with other girls as he would have with me... would he? Yes, we were in a competition, and yes, someday he would have to marry one of these other girls and start a family, but.

What we shared felt bigger than all this. Whatever was between us could only be temporary, but that didn't make it less special.

"Piper..." His voice was strained.

Behind him, a woman moved into sight. It was Lilliana, and she was wearing only a sheer nightgown and panties. Her bare breasts were on full display behind a thin veil of white.

The hurt started before I even recognized what it was, a sharp pain that sliced me between my ribs, plunging straight into my heart.

I had hoped to be with Nicholas.

Nicholas, it seemed, already had plans for tonight.

Chapter 294

Chapter 0294

Confronted with the scenario of the man I wanted to sleep with very clearly about to sleep with someone else, I did the only thing I could think to do.

I swiveled on my heel without a word and took off down the hallway. I fully intended on returning to my room, crying my eyes out, and then pretending this never happened.

I would never be such a fool again either. I didn't know how I could think that Nicholas would want only someone like me. He obviously had needs. Maybe he really had changed since I'd known him, but-

A hand caught my arm, stopping my body and my thoughts at once.

"Piper, wait."

We were in the hallway. We had to keep our voices soft. He might as well have shouted at me, because my entire body flinched.

Maybe he noticed. Maybe he didn't. Either way, he did not let me go..

"Piper, please. I need your help."

I looked back at him. novelbin

There was desperate, wild look in his eyes. He seemed utterly lost.

His hopelessness softened my demeanor, until I remembered the lipstick on his collar and I hardened again.

“Surely Lilliana can help you with whatever problem you have,” I snapped. “I have no intention of being involved.” “Lilliana is the problem,” Nicholas said. “I’m not going to give you love advice -” “She’s drunk,” Nicholas said.

I paused. My brow scrunched in confusion.

“I think it’s a last ditch effort from her to maintain her position as my favorite despite her poorer showing recently. I don’t know. I don’t care. I only know she came to my room dressed like that, and grabbed me by the cro tch as soon as I opened the door.”

His fingers on my arm held me with a gentle insistence. I could break free with enough force. He’d even let me.

But I stood still.

“I don’t know why she thought this would work,” he said, frowning. “Even if I wanted her, which I don’t, I would never bring someone drunk like this into my bed.”

“So if she was sober?” I asked.

“I would turn her away,” Nicholas said. He stepped closer to me, and I closed my eyes, feeling his warmth. “You know my heart and body desire another...”

I open my eyes and find him staring at me with such open fondness that it steals my breath away. It

makes me want to fall into him right here and now, forget everything, and just push forward with this man.

But that wouldn’t solve the current predicament of Lilliana mostly naked in Nichola s’s room.

“I don’t know if she needed to get this drunk to have the courage to approach me so blatantly, or if the alcohol is instead an excuse she could use as a cover if things went poorly for her,” he said. “I’m not fond of either possibility.

“If she’s that drunk,” I suggested, “maybe we can convince her to go to her own room, and in the morning she might forget any of this ever happened.”

“I hope so, Piper, because right now, she refuses to leave my rooms unless I sleep with her. I’ve spent the past ten minutes explaining to her why that can’t

and won't happen, but she refuses to listen. I fear being more forceful. I don't want to physically harm her."

"I'll speak with her," I said, surprising us both. Embarrassment and jealousy were beginning to fade from me as the truth of the situation became more and more clear. In their place, however, anger was taking root.

Nicholas was the one worried about taking advantage, but Lilliana was the one who wanted to take advantage of him and his kindness. She kept pushing after he declined. Would she have kept pushing him all night if I hadn't shown up?

I imagined Nicholas hiding behind a locked door as Lilliana continued to try to seduce him. Even that more amusing thought did little to quash the rage growing within me.

Chapter 295

Chapter 0295

Nodding at Nicholas, I moved past him and returned to his rooms. He released me at once and fell in step behind me instead.

Inside his rooms, I moved toward Lilliana, who was down on one of the ornate rugs. Her legs were kicked out of her, her nightgown drawn up to her hips. She peered up with a sultry look, likely expecting Nicholas.

She sighed when she saw it was me, but didn't move much otherwise.

"I should have known he'd invite you too. Well, it's all the same, really. I can do a three some if that's what he wants. What do I care anymore?"

"Uh, no," I said at once, taken aback both by the sudden and inappropriate offer, as well as her resignation to it. This had to be the worst seduction in the history of wolf-kind.

She clearly wasn't into any of this. Was this what she thought she had to do to maintain Nicholas's interest? Surrender her body without passion or desire for the sake of a crown?

My anger slowly dimmed and I felt pity instead.

What a sad life, to never be able to live for herself. To sacrifice so much for power alone. Did she even like Nicholas at all? Did she find him as sexy as I did? Did she gravitate toward his generous, caring

heart like me? novelbin

It sure didn't seem like it. Instead, it seemed like she wanted this to be over as fast as possible so she could sleep.

To me, it seemed the drunkenness had been a necessity for her, to do what needed done. How... tragic. "Lilliana... Is this even what you really want?" I asked. Lilliana shrugged, then stretched out more fully on the rug. "What I want doesn't matter. I will do anything to please my prince." Nicholas, meanwhile, was nearby but facing the wall, not looking at Lilliana at all. To Nicholas, I said, "Can you get a bathrobe? Something soft and fluffy?" He moved at once, rushing into the bathroom. To Lilliana, I said, "You can't be very comfortable on the floor? Perhaps you'd like to return to your own room, your own bed, and get some sleep? It's late."

"I am sleepy..." Lilliana yawned. She tried not to. "But I came here for a reason. I have to..." Another yawn, larger than the first. "I have to..."

Whatever she was going to say, she didn't finish it. I didn't press, not wanting her to remember why she came here. Nicholas returned with a white fuzzy bathrobe, exactly what I had been hoping for. I accepted the robe from him, and with effort, was able to convince Lilliana to pull it on. "Aren't you cold?" I asked. "Yes," she said.

It took longer still to convince her to stand off the ground.

"The prince might trip over you and hurt himself," I said.

"Oh, that's true," she said and let me help her up.

The sleepier she got, the more complacent she grew.

"I think the prince would be happier if you slept in your own bed," I said. "He wants you to be comfortable."

"Oh. Okay."

Nicholas started to open his mouth as if to say something of his own, but I cast him a sharp look, quieting him. If Lilliana heard his voice, who knew what would happen.

Out in the hallway, I propped Lilliana up against the wall and went back to the doorway to speak with Nicholas lightly.

“I’ll see her back to her room,” I whispered.

“Thank you, Piper. You are a lifesaver.” He paused a moment, but I knew he wanted to say more so I lingered. “You came here for a reason tonight. I never asked what it was.”

I looked away from him, back to Lilliana barely holding herself upright against the wall. “Maybe I was making my own reckless choices,” I said and left him to help Lilliana.

Chapter 296

Chapter 0296

The next morning at breakfast, Elva and I sat beside Susie and across from Veronica and Tiffany. The excitement with Terry’s capture seemed to be the popular topic for everyone else at the table, except for us. None of us seemed overly thrilled to ever mention Terry’s name ever again.

At least, I knew I wasn’t. I could take a guess about Susie, too. Tiffany and Veronica were likely being respectful of us.

We were half-way through eating, when Lilliana stumbled into the dining room. She was put together well enough, in a very simple sundress with matching cardigan. Though the buttons of the cardigan were fastened incorrectly, making it longer on one side.

She rubbed at her forehead with one hand, half covering her eyes. She shunned the bright lights, keeping her gaze firmly down.

All of the girls stopped to look at her as she stood there, miserable and oblivious. When she noticed, she blushed and hurried forward toward her usual empty seat near Olivia. The moment she sat down, Olivia stood up.

“I’ll eat the rest in my room,” she said. A servant quickly went behind her, grabbed her plate and followed Olivia out the door.

Lilliana sunk further down into her chair.

Elva was staring. I tapped at her plate. “Eat your food, honey. Be polite.”

“Sorry, Mommy,” she said and lifted her fork.

I did the same, trying to ignore Lilliana myself. It was difficult. Knowing what I knew, I wanted to make sure she was okay, at least health-wise, but staring would only make others stare too.

Unfortunately, the damage had seemed to already been done. Everyone was looking at Lilliana. Whispers were beginning to sound.

Even Tiffany whispered to Veronica, “She looks hungover.”

Veronica replied, “She is hungover.”

Elva was staring again. I tapped her plate.

She lowered her head. “Sorry, Mommy.”

Veronica and Tiffany returned to their own meals as if scolded too.

Susie gave me a sad sort of smile. I wondered how much she knew, if Nicholas had told Mark and Mark had told her. Whatever knowledge she had, she was keeping it to herself, so for that,

Though her pitying looks made my heart hurt. If Susie knew Lilliana went to Nicholas’s room last night, then she probably knew I had gone there too. Susie was smart. She could surely piece together what I had been doing there and how it had turned out, thanks to Lilliana’s presence.

I returned Susie’s smile as best I could. Her worry came from a place of friendship, I knew, not mockery. I had no reason to be rude, even if I wanted to forget the previous night had happened entirely.

After breakfast, Elva and I returned to our room. Elva took a small nap and then played with her toys. Charlotte and I chatted over coffee until a visitor walked through the door.

Nicholas.

I had known that I couldn't avoid him forever, certainly, but I had hoped for at least a few more hours before we would have to face the embarrassment that had happened last night.

"Piper. Charlotte. Elva."

"Nick-lass!" Elva bounced up from her spot on the floor and rushed toward him. He bent down and lifted her up into his arms. Her noodle arms threaded around his neck and they held each other in a tight hug. novelbin

"I missed you!" she said.

Nicholas teased a little. "I spent time with you two days ago."

"Not enough. I want to see Nick-lass every day."

He smiled as he leaned in and softly kissed her cheek.

Elva beamed with happiness.

My own heart melted at the sight. This wasn't the first time they had displayed such familial affection for each other, but every time it occurred felt like it was the first.

I hated that these moments couldn't last forever. But I would enjoy them for what they were while they lasted.

Chapter 297

Chapter 0297

Soon, Elva got squirmy and Nicholas lowered her down. She rushed back to her toys and Nicholas came toward Charlotte and me.

Charlotte immediately stood. "Please." She offered him her seat.

"I couldn't," he said.

"I have chores that need tending to," Charlotte said. That didn't seem entirely truthful, but gave Nicholas enough reason to sit down. Charlotte winked at me behind his back. "Would you like a cup of coffee, Your Royal Highness?"

“Yes, thank you. That would be lovely.”

Charlotte removed her own cup and walked toward the doorway where a pot of coffee and some cups had been set. As she worked, Nicholas inched his chair closer toward mine.

Even those few inches of closed distance sent my heart racing. His gentle smile set my skin on fire.

“I’m sorry about last night,” he said, and that cooled me somewhat, though not enough to want to be away from him. If anything, I only wanted to be closer, to feel his warmth ignite within me again.

“Don’t apologize,” I said. “You had no control over what happened.”

“I should have been more forceful.”

I shook my head. “You could have hurt her without even realizing it.” Lilliana had been so drunk, she would have just kept pushing without feeling any pain, no matter how Nicholas tried to push her away.

“I’m glad I came when I did,” I said. Maybe I saved the both of them. Saved myself too, from acting too rashly.

I was a virgin and had always wanted to stay one until I found either my perfect person or my fated mate. Nicholas, unfortunately, couldn’t be either of those things.

He was a prince. He wouldn’t marry for love. He’d marry whoever would fit him best on the throne beside his. This person wasn’t me. I had no idea how to sit on a throne, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to learn.

I had enough problems. So did the royal family.

Our problems didn’t mix well.

But that didn’t mean that our... attraction, or even our affection, was irrelevant. It just... wasn’t enough.

I wanted to be intimate with Nicholas, but I couldn’t cross that line. Last night I had been willing. This morning, I wasn’t so sure.

I was glad I didn't have to find out if I would have regretted giving my virginity to Nicholas. Nicholas leaned in closer. I leaned in too.

I wasn't ready to surrender my virginity, but everything else...? novelbin

"Piper," he whispered. "Why did you come to my room last night?"

"You know why," I said. I licked my lips. He watched and licked his own. "I'm not ready for everything."

"We'll do as little or as much as you want," he said. "I'd never press you..."

"But...?"

"No, but's," he said, and seemed earnest. His voice lowered. "I want you however you are willing..."

I swallowed hard. My nerves itched to be closer to him, to touch him, to wrap myself around him and never let him go.

Charlotte returned with Nicholas's cup of coffee, and he and I jumped apart.

"Sorry," Charlotte mouthed to me, when Nicholas wasn't looking.

I shook my head lightly. It was fine. It was good, actually. Every time I was near Nicholas, I was ready to throw almost everything away to be with him.

I needed to remember myself and my temporary place in his life.

I needed to protect my heart, that wanted so badly to reach out to his and make him my special person.

As Charlotte walked away, Nicholas smiled at me. A fire burned in his eyes.

"You should come back tonight," he said, and I knew I would before he'd even finished speaking.

Chapter 298

Chapter 0298

That night, I sneaked out of my room when everyone else was asleep. The guards pretended they didn't notice. Then I quietly walked down the hallway,

keeping my steps light as I wound my way through the palace until I stood before Nicholas's door.

I gently knocked, and it opened right away.

Nicholas stood behind in. He wasn't wearing a shirt. His muscles were on full display. He did wear a pair of thin lounge pants that hung low on his hips. His feet were bare.

"Piper," he said, voice low. A shiver ran down my spine.

"Were you expecting me?" I asked.

He smiled a little, sheepish. It was boyish on his face, making him appear much as he did back when we had dated three years ago. My heartbeat went into overdrive.

"I was hoping..." He stepped back from the door. "Come inside. Please."

I entered the room and he closed the door behind me.

Despite my trust and comfort around Nicholas, I was nervous in what I was doing here, in what was about to happen. So I continued to face the rest of the room, my back to Nicholas. If I looked at him, I might lose myself.

Maybe I came here for that. But I was afraid of it too.

Nicholas moved into the space behind me. He placed his hands on my shoulders.

"You're tense," he said. "Nervous?"

"I don't know..."

"You don't have to be with me. I know your boundaries and will never press you. You can trust me."

"I do trust you."

He began to give me a massage, pressing his thumbs deep into the strained muscles of my upper back. "Then trust me to take care of you..."

I relaxed at once, turning to putty in his hands.

“I’ll take care of you, Piper.”

“I know...” I sighed, happiness spreading through me.

He stepped closer to me, pressing his chest against the length of my back. His hands trailed from my shoulders, down the length of my arms. My nerves prickled pleasantly where his

He lowered his mouth to my ear. “Tell me what you want tonight, Piper.”

Deep within me; a fire sparked and burned. It spread out up into my heart and down, down into my core.

“You know what I want,” I said.

He hummed. “I want to hear you say it.”

My heart soared. He had such a way to make me feel safe and special. Even this, right here – his obvious consideration for me made me feel properly cared for.

—

“I want you...” I swallowed down my embarrassment. This was Nicholas, the man I trusted. The man I loved once. Maybe loved still, somewhere inside of me. I was afraid to think about that now.

“How do you want me?” he asked, voice so low, it was practically a growl.

“Touch me...” My cheeks burned. “Taste me...”

Slowly, he slid the sleeves of my dress off my shoulders and down the length of my arms. The top half of my dress fell down, catching on my hips and pooling at my waist.

Nicholas traced his knuckles down the length of my spine. He stopped when all he felt was bare skin.

“Piper...” He didn’t sound disapproving. More, surprised. “You are not wearing a bra.”

“I’m not,” I confirmed.

He slipped his fingers around my waist and teased my stomach.

“Such a bad girl,” he whispered into my ear. His breath was so hot on my skin. Slowly, he lifted his hands upward and cupped my bare breasts. His fingers were cold and I gasped. At the same time, my nipples hardened, peaking into his palms, searching for friction.

I moaned at the sensation.

For a time, he simply massaged me with his hands. I dropped my head back against his shoulder, enjoying his ministrations. Then, blessedly, like he could read my mind, he pulled his thumbs inward and brushed against my nipples.

“Nick,” I gasped.

“I’ve got you. Let yourself go, Piper. I swear I won’t let you fall.”

My mouth fell open. I could barely catch my breath as he teased, flicking and then rolling the nubs with his thumbs.

That night, I sneaked out of my room when everyone else was asleep. The guards pretended they didn’t notice. Then I quietly walked down the hallway, keeping my steps light as I wound my way through the palace until I stood before Nicholas’s door.

I gently knocked, and it opened right away.

Nicholas stood behind in. He wasn’t wearing a shirt. His muscles were on full display. He did wear a pair of thin lounge pants that hung low on his hips. His feet were bare.

“Piper,” he said, voice low. A shiver ran down my spine.

“Were you expecting me?” I asked.

He smiled a little, sheepish. It was boyish on his face, making him appear much as he did back when we had dated three years ago. My heartbeat went into overdrive.

“I was hoping…” He stepped back from the door. “Come inside. Please,”

I entered the room and he closed the door behind me.

Despite my trust and comfort around Nicholas, I was nervous in what I was doing here, in what was about to happen. So I continued to face the rest of the room, my back to Nicholas. If I looked at him, I might lose myself.

Maybe I came here for that. But I was afraid of it too.

Nicholas moved into the space behind me. He placed his hands on my shoulders.

“You’re tense,” he said. “Nervous?”

“I don’t know...”

“You don’t have to be with me. I know your boundaries and will never press you. You can trust me.”

“I do trust you.”

He began to give me a massage, pressing his thumbs deep into the strained muscles of my upper back. “Then trust me to fake care of you...”

I relaxed at once, turning to putty in his hands.

“I’ll take care of you, Piper.”

“I know...” I sighed, happiness spreading through me.

He stepped closer to me, pressing his chest against the length of my back. His hands trailed from my shoulders, down the length of my arms. My nerves prickled pleasantly where his

He lowered his mouth to my ear. “Tell me what you want tonight, Piper.”

Deep within me; a fire sparked and burned. It spread out up into my heart and down, down into my core.

“You know what I want,” I said.

He hummed. “I want to hear you say it.”

My heart soared. He had such a way to make me feel safe and special. Even this, right here – his obvious consideration for me made me feel properly cared for.

“I want you...” I swallowed down my embarrassment. This was Nicholas, the man I trusted. The man I loved once. Maybe loved still, somewhere inside of me. I was afraid to think about that now.

“How do you want me?” he asked, voice so low, it was practically a growl.

“Touch me...” My cheeks burned. “Taste me...”

Slowly, he slid the sleeves of my dress off my shoulders and down the length of my arms. The top half of my dress fell down, catching on my hips and pooling at my waist.

Nicholas traced his knuckles down the length of my spine. He stopped when all he felt was bare skin.

“Piper...” He didn’t sound disapproving. More, surprised. “You are not wearing a bra.” novelbin

“I’m not,” I confirmed.

He slipped his fingers around my waist and teased my stomach.

“Such a bad girl,” he whispered into my ear. His breath was so hot on my skin. Slowly, he lifted his hands upward and cupped my bare breasts. His fingers were cold and I gasped. At the same time, my nipples hardened, peaking into his palms, searching for friction.

I moaned at the sensation.

For a time, he simply massaged me with his hands. I dropped my head back against his shoulder, enjoying his ministrations. Then, blessedly, like he could read my mind, he pulled his thumbs inward and brushed against my nipples.

“Nick,” I gasped.

“I’ve got you. Let yourself go, Piper. I swear I won’t let you fall.”

My mouth fell open. I could barely catch my breath as he teased, flicking and then rolling the nubs with his thumbs.

Chapter 299

Chapter 0299

“Oh, Nick.”

“Does it feel good?”

I nodded.

“Good.” He continued to touch until it was nearly too much. I clutched at his upper arms with both my hands, squeezing.

“Maybe we should see what else you aren’t wearing,” Nicholas said, then. He held onto one breast with one hand, while his other lowered down to my hips. He tugged the dress down over my curves, and it dropped fully down to the floor.

His hand slipped around my backside, and traced the bare globe of my ass.

I had decided to forego my panties as well.

“You are a very bad girl, Piper,” he purred. “Let me see you.”

Stepping back, he came around to my front. His hooded gaze traced the expanse of my now- naked body. Heat and lust shimmered in the gold in his eyes, sparkling like coins under the candlelight I now realized we were surrounded with.

How easily he had distracted me from my surroundings.

How romantic he had wanted this moment to be for us. novelbin

“Nick...”

While I was appreciating the candlelight, Nicholas was appreciating me. His pants were now straining in the front. His fingers twitched, like he wanted to touch but didn’t know where to start.

He’d seen me naked before in the past, but this felt different somehow. I was standing here, in his room, bare and begging. We were different people than we had been three years ago, but we were the same too, in some ways.

Our lust for each other had a hair trigger.

Nicholas suddenly stepped forward and scooped me into his arms in a bridal carry. He struggled to walk, but he managed to hobble with me into the

bedroom. So softly, so tenderly, he lowered me down onto the soft cushion of the bed.

“Nick, please...”

He lowered his lips to mine and claimed my mouth with his kiss, licking his way inside. Gently, so as not to put too much weight onto me, he shifted over me, rested in the cradle of

His hands traced up and down my sides, starting tiny wildfires along my skin. Wherever he touched burned with my desire for him. I wanted more. So much more.

I whimpered against his mouth.

That was all the guidance he needed. He broke the kiss, and instead, dragged his open mouth down the side of my neck. He planted soft kiss after soft kiss down my chest, through the valley of my breasts, and over my flat stomach.

Eventually he lowered so far that he had to stretch my hips out further to rest his torso more comfortably between them.

He licked his lips, looking at my exposed core. With extreme softness, he reached forward and pulled back the hood from my clit.

I swallowed my nerves, suddenly feeling so exposed.”

This was Nicholas. He was safe. He was kind.

“You are so beautiful,” he said, then leaned forward and took me into his mouth.

I threw my head back against the pillows. My back arched up off the mattress, pressing my breasts out into the air. I wished he would touch my nipples again, but his hands were busy pinning my bucking hips in place while he lavished my most sensitive nub with his tongue.

The sensations were incredible, almost too much. His mouth was a hot, wet temple dedicated, in this moment, to my pleasure alone.

He was relentless in his attentions, quickly driving me into a begging, whimpering mess. Words had no meaning. Only his name sat on the tip of my tongue.

“Nick. Oh, God, Nick...”

My delirium was his encouragement, and somehow, he moved even faster, even more insistent, nudging and licking with his tongue, bringing me to the cusp of pleasure.

I clawed at the bedsheets, bunching them in my fists. It was almost too much, I was so close.

Then, without warning, he slipped a finger inside of my core. He slowly moved it in and out. He curled it, pressing into the bundle of nerves deep within me.

“Ah! Ah! Ah!”

My pleasure spiked impossibly high. It couldn't last. I toppled over the edge into bliss. “Nicholas!”

Chapter 300

Chapter 0300

I passed out from the intensity of the pleasure.

When I reawakened some time later, I was bundled up in Nicholas's arms, resting against his chest. I was entirely surrounded with warmth, and contentment swirled within me. Never in my life had I felt so satisfied and safe.

Nicholas kissed the top of my head. “How are you?” He must have felt me rousing.

“I'm good,” I said with a soft sigh. “Great, even.”

He hummed. “I'm glad.” He sounded quite satisfied with himself. Honestly, he should.

I started to turn toward him. “You need to let me return the favor.” novelbin

His arms tightened around me, keeping me still. “Another time. This time was all about you.”

“But – ”

“Piper,” he said gently. “I'm fine. I promise.”

He was so reassuring, that I immediately relaxed. "Next time," I said. "It's about you."

He kissed my cheek this time. "Whatever you want."

We stayed together in his room until just before dawn, holding and dozing, and trading soft kisses. Then, after we dressed, Nicholas led me back toward my room. In the hallway just around the corner, where the guards couldn't see, Nicholas pulled me into his arms again and soundly kissed me.

"Thank you for our night together," I whispered.

He shook his head. "You don't have to thank me."

"I'm pretty sure I do." I felt light all over. He had satisfied me so thoroughly. "I really, really think that I do."

He laughed a little, then kissed me again.

"Thank you for not pushing me," I said. I worried my bottom lip with my teeth. Maybe it wasn't in fashion to wait to have penetrative sex anymore, but I still wanted to wait.

"You definitely don't need to thank me for respect you, Piper." Nicholas hugged me tightly for a moment. "I know you want to wait for your true mate..."

His voice trailed off, and a bit of tension added into his shoulders. I could sense his jealousy, thinking about me with another person, but he didn't say a word. I combed my fingers through the short hairs at the back of his neck, offering what comfort I could.

I would never say so aloud but if I could so easily imagine a world where we were people of different circumstances. If we had met when we were both common or both nobles, maybe we could have mated with each other.

I could so easily imagine a life with Nicholas beside me for the rest of our lives.

But our compatibility was never our problem. Instead, what divided us was simply our birthrights. Nicholas was a prince, mostly likely to be the heir. And me? I was just some girl.

“I admire you for wanting to wait,” Nicholas said, his voice strained but earnest. “But in the meantime, I hope you will continue to allow me to give you pleasure when we can.”

“I would like that,” I said. “Very much.” I wanted Nicholas for as long as I could have him, even knowing it would end in tragic heartbreak. For now, I was filled with only affection and appreciation, and

occasionally desire.

He smiled and I smiled too. We kissed a few minutes more before we started to hear the footsteps of servants coming to work, and we begrudgingly had to separate.

The day continued as normal. I thought perhaps Nathan might collect us to let us know of the next event, but it seemed, after everything that had happened with Terry, the royal family needed time to get their own house in order before they would start worrying about the contest again.

This was fine with me. In the moments of respite, Elva and I went for long walks around the gardens. Or we played cards with Susie and Charlotte or Mark. We had tea parties and tag matches. It was great to see Elva laugh and play and enjoy simply being a kid.

Toward the end of the day, when Elva was napping, and I was coming down to the dining room for dinner, Julian stopped me and pulled me aside.

“I’ve spoken with...” His voice trailed as his gaze dripped down to my neck.

Without my wolf, I didn’t heal as fast as other shifters. So the line of love marks Nicholas had left the night before were still dotted along the column of my neck. I had tried to cover them with makeup but Julian was always so observant. His attention veered straight to them like he had a hickey tractor beam.

“I see you’ve had your fun,” Julian said. He smirked but it had a sharp edge. “My brother’s handiwork, no doubt.”

My face burned, likely beet red. I dipped my face down, hoping to hide my neck with my hair. But it was already too late. He had clearly seen and hiding it now would not change that.

Still, to stop my blush, I felt I had to do something.

“Well, I’m glad at least one of us is having some fun,” he said.

I lifted my gaze, a bit surprised. Julian had a playboy reputation, and though I knew that and breaking their hearts.

Not lately, then. Or perhaps I misjudged him?

His smirk added teeth, and he looked positively sinful. No, I definitely hadn’t misjudged him. He was a heartbreaker for sure.

I rolled my eyes at his scandalous look. “So go get a date. I’m not stopping you.”

“Maybe I will,” he said and laughed a bit too forcefully. When he stopped, he recovered quickly, returning to a more serious mood, even though his smile remained. “But this isn’t why I stopped you.”

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“I’ve spoken with my informant,” Julian said. “They are ready to talk to you. Right now, in fact, if you are up for it.”

I had been on my way to dinner. A moment ago, I had been hungry enough for my stomach to growl. But now, hearing this, that necessity seemed so far away that it was laughable.

“I’m up for it,” I said at once.

Julian nodded and beckoned me to follow him. I fell into step at his side. We didn’t go terribly far, just to a nearby sitting room.

Inside, Veronica was sitting in the middle of a sofa. She looked up as Julian and I entered. She seemed the same as always. Did the informant want to speak with her too?

I looked at Julian for an explanation.

He met my gaze, then dipped his head toward Veronica as if that explained everything.

It took a minute for everything to sink in with me. It all seemed so unbelievable. Veronica was someone who had been in the competition from the start.

He was now telling me that she was his informant? She was the one who was involved in the underground organization? She was the one with magical abilities?

Julian closed the door behind us.

Slowly, I made my way to Veronica, then sat beside her on the couch. Her eyes never left me the entire trek.

“You don’t believe it,” she said.

“I have questions,” I admitted.

She was wearing a solid blue sweater and gray slacks. Slowly, she began to lift up her sweater, revealing a tattoo along the side of her ribs: an upside down wolf skull.

“I was once a secret member of the underground organization,” Veronica said. “I’ll tell you whatever you want to know.”