

Chapter 341

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I knew it couldn't be as simple as all that, but I really did want to go out there. The gardens had been

one of our regular hangout spots for so long. To lose it now, felt most unfair.

My voice soft, afraid someone would overhear, I said, "I'd love to."

"Great," Julian said, and pushed open the door. "Let's go."

"Through this door?" It wasn't even locked?

There were guards on the other side, but when they saw Julian, they merely nodded. Their gazes were

heavier on me until Julian wrapped his arm around my shoulders. Then they politely looked away.

—

Maybe Julian really had that much power after all.

He led me further out into the gardens, then pulled his touch away. I stayed close to him though, not

wanting to abuse this kindness he was gifting me. I leaned down to smell the flowers, and he politely

stopped at my side.

"Good?" he asked.

"Wonderful," I replied. It was almost Heaven out here in the flowers. The sky was blue overhead, with

several puffy white clouds. It was so peaceful. It was –

What was that noise?

A small plane with a roaring engine flew high on the edge of the palace grounds. Julian reached out

and snatched my arm. He started yanking me back toward the palace.

“Julian? What’s happening?”

The plane’s door opened and suddenly a plethora of papers flew out from the opening. They scattered

as they dropped, flipping back and forth in the wind. Despite Julian’s tugging me, I still managed to

reach out and snatch one.

What I saw sent ice water into my veins.

It was a photocopy of the royal family’s portrait, but each member had red X’s where their eyes should

be. Along the bottom, scrawled in the same vibrant red, were written the words:

Liars wear the crown for now.

“Julian?” I held out the flyer for him.

He snatched it out of my hand and stuffed it into his pocket. If he meant to hide it, he was doing a poor

job of it. Many more flyers were scattered throughout the gardens.

1/2

+15 BONUS

Julian continued to tug me toward the entryway. I started going willingly now.

“Clean this up,” Julian said to the guards. His tone had shifted from before. Tighter now.

Strained.

“Thank you,” I said to them, adding politeness where he had forgotten his.

Fear was gripping my heart too, but everyone needed to remain calm. That’s what Nicholas would have

said.

“You can see for yourself now, how tumultuous things have become,” Julian said, as we walked back

into the safety of the palace hallway. “All the more reason to keep working hard for this fake

relationship. For this silly event. However you can, to save us all.”

“I’ll do what I can,” I promised. My hands trembled. When I closed my eyes, I could see the photo with

the x’ed out eyes.

The King. The Luna. Joyce. Julian. Nicholas.

None of them were safe.

And the threat in the letter. For now.

That implied a switch to come.

Julian continued to pull me. He was forceful now, and it was starting to hurt.

“Julian,” I said. It was like he couldn’t hear me. “Julian, please. You’re hurting me.’

That gave him pause. He stopped and looked down to where he was gripping my wrist with a tight fist.

“Sorry,” he said and released me.

“It’s fine,” I said. I understood his reaction. It was terrifying, seeing that threat.

How much worse must it have been for him?

This was his family. His future. His own life.

“Julian...”

“We’ll talk later, okay?” He hurried away from me. I’d never seen him so rattled. And I was powerless to

do anything but watch him go.

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Later, in the safety of my room, I asked Mark to summon Nicholas. Yet, just as he arrived, Veronica

arrived too. I wasn’t unhappy to see her, exactly, but there were things I had hoped to speak with

Nicholas about that I hadn’t wanted others to overhear.

When I heard Veronica’s reasons for visiting however, I quickly decided that what I wanted to

talk to Nicholas about could wait.

“I want to check on Elva,” Veronica said.

“She’s playing,” I said, and motioned where Elva played dolls with Charlotte and the nanny.

“I don’t need to interfere. I can observe from a distance.”

I waved her forward, and she moved closer to Elva and the rest. Nicholas stepped into the

room behind her.

“You alright?” he asked. He must have seen how shaken up I was. I’d been rattled since those flyers

dropped on Julian and I. But I couldn’t worry about that now.

“I’ll feel better if Veronica tells us Elva is okay.”

We both wait and watch while Veronica quietly studies Elva from a distance halfway into the room. She

watches only a few minutes before turning away and returning to us.

“She is okay for now,” Veronica said, and I exhaled the breath I hadn’t realized I’d been holding. “But…”

she added, and I sucked that breath straight back in.

“The curse is still a threat,” Veronica said. “I’ve pushed it down as far as I can, but it will continue to eat

away at her immune system until the curse wield is either killed or permanently removes it.”

My chest felt hollow. Jane wouldn’t remove the curse willingly. I sideways glanced at Nicholas. His face

was grim. He’d agreed to end Jane’s life if it came down to it. I hated having to make him do that, just

as I hated the thought of anyone killing my sister.

But she wasn’t my sister anymore, I reasoned. She was a monster who wanted to kill a child.

Her own child.

“One more reason for us to trap Jane, then,” Nicholas said. “The sooner the better.”

I agreed. Even dormant, the curse would eventually kill Elva. I couldn’t let that happen.

“Jane will likely attend the next event in an effort to wreak havoc,” I said. “That might be the best place

to lure her out.

Nicholas crossed his arms over his chest. He couldn’t make this easy. I knew he was about to

argue.

+15 BONUS

“Then you will sit this event out,” he said.

“Nick…”

“I will not have you endanger yourself, Piper. Not this time.’

“But it’s okay for you to endanger yourself?”

“I’m a prince. My life will always be in danger.”

That did not make me feel better. In fact, it only stoked the fires of my anger.

“Jane has been

purposefully targeting the people I care about. She came for you, and then came for Elva. I am not

going to sit on the sidelines and let her get away with it.”

“She came for us to get to you,” Nicholas said. “She wants you, Piper. You can’t just deliver yourself on

a platter for her.”

I lowered my voice, so we would not accidentally be overheard. “She is my twin. She has my wolf. If

anyone should trap her, it should be me.”

Nicholas lowered his brow. He frowned. But he did not argue further.

Veronica glanced between us impassively. “I’ll be prepared by then for the wolf exchange.” She waved

as she pushed through us on her way to the exit.

Nicholas looked after her until she was gone, then turned his attention back to me. He wasn’t done

arguing, I knew. Not by far. But for now, at least, he seemed to be letting the matter rest.

“Nick-lass?” Elva called.

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“I’m here.” Nicholas walked to her, hugged her, and then joined in her game. I followed, eager for any

moment of normalcy, no matter how fleeting.

Later, I followed Nicholas to the guest room he was using. We hadn’t finished our

conversation.

As we crossed the threshold and closed the door behind us, I expected him to start arguing again.

Instead, he pulled me into his arms and kissed me.

The kiss stole my breath, and my thoughts, away. For a long moment, I was in a land of bliss and

contentment, surrounded by warmth and the man I admired.

Too soon, it ended. Anything short of forever would have been too soon.

"I'm worried about you," he whispered.

My heart ached. "I'm worried about you, too."

"About me?"

"I saw the flyers. Even Julian was upset. Things are bad, Nick. You can't keep that from me."

"I don't mean to," Nicholas said. "But Piper, I wasn't lying before. As prince, my life is always in danger.

There are always threats."

"Not dropped from airplanes."

"No." Nicholas sighed. "That's not as common."

"Nick, if anything were to happen to you..."

"Stop that thought right there," he said. "I'm here." He took my wrist in his and brought my hand to his

chest, palm flat over his beating heart. "Feel that?"

I did. The steady, sure pulse of his heart.

"I'm alive, Piper. And so are you."

His eyes were earnest gold. The flecks of green within them shimmered in the red-orange light of

sunset outside the windows.

"The threats on my life don't scare me half so much as the thought that Jane might try to take you from

me," he said.

"She can try," I said, feeling braver now. Bolder. I could feel his heart, and mine fell into rhythm. "She

won't succeed."

Steady. Strong.

1/2

415 BONUS

One.

"Nick..."

Nicholas inched closer to me. He cupped one of my cheeks with his hand. Closing my eyes, I leaned into him.

"Tell me what you want from me, Piper. Whatever it is, I will give it to you."

I licked my lips. Fear ebbed, and in its place swelled a burning desire. I knew what I wanted. but I was

too nervous to voice it. I wanted to hear his thoughts. Hear his commands.

That always made everything so much easier.

"What do you want?" I asked.

He inched forward and simultaneously pushed me back until I bumped against the wall. Then he came

in closer, pinning me there.

"I want you, Piper, I want to taste you. And touch you." He lowered his mouth to my ear. His voice

dropped low, husky. "I want to have you writhing, beneath me. I want to have you beg for more, and

when I finally give it to you, I want you to scream."

I pressed my thighs hard together, to give some relief to the ache in my core.

God, that sounded so good. I wanted that too. All of that. Whatever he would give me.

I wanted him to meld into me until we were one person with one heart, one breath, one soul.

It couldn't last. I knew that. It would never last.

But for now... I wanted to be his.

“Your turn, Piper,” he said, and kissed the shell of my ear.

I shuddered. “Please,” I said. It was all I could manage in my current state. My knees shook, my legs

were sure to give out soon.

“Say it, Piper. Say the words.”

Desire was a wildfire under my skin. Any moment I might fully ignite.

God, I wanted to.

“I want... I-I...”

He held my earlobe with his teeth. He didn’t bite down but the touch sent a jolt of pleasure

through me.

“I want you, Nick.”

“Good,” he said and kissed me again.