

The Luna Choosing Game #Chapter 481 – 490

Read The Luna Choosing Game Chapter 481

Chapter 0481 Bridget watched me expectantly, waiting for an answer. An answer I was far too stunned to give.

Which brother did I love? Was there any way to answer that wouldn't implicate me? Veronica knew that my relationship with Julian was just for show, while my feelings leaned toward Nicholas. But neither Jessica nor Bridget did.

I supposed I should have lied and said Julian, but with his feelings for Bridget in the mix, I wasn't sure if that was the answer he would have wanted me to give her. And then there was Nicholas's feelings to consider.

I was trapped. There was no way out of the question without revealing myself

or hurting someone else. My hesitation only seemed to make Bridget more suspicious. Her brow lowered. Her frown deepened. Yet, just as she opened her mouth, presumably to speak, she was interrupted.

"Bridget, stop," Nicholas said, voice firm and strong. "You've had too much to drink." Softly, Jessica whispered, "I don't like this game very much." "It's a simple question, Nicholas," Bridget said.

"One you wouldn't have asked if you didn't have so much wine," Nicholas said. "You need to sleep this off. You'll be mortified in the morning, when you realize what you did here tonight." Bridget crossed her arms, but since she

was still holding her glass of wine, she spilt some of it down along her side. She immediately jumped. "Shit." "You should go get some sleep," Nicholas pressed.

Bridget dropped her drink down to the ground. "I don't need sleep!" She was belligerent as she pushed herself up to her shaky legs. "I just need a little walk to help wake up, that's all!" She turned from us and began walking in the opposite direction Julian had gone.

Nicholas sighed as he rubbed his forehead. He glanced at me. I looked back at him.

Veronica, perhaps noticing something between Nicholas and I, turned to Jessica and pulled her into a conversation.

"The game isn't always like this," Veronica said. "One time when I was..." She went on.

"Piper..." Nicholas said with a sigh. I stopped listening to Veronica to focus on him. "I have something to ask you." He was building to something important. My insides were twisted up.

He wasn't going to ask me more about Bridget's question, was he? Surely he already knew the answer? Did I need to explain my feelings to him once more? "Can you check on Julian?" Nicholas asked, and my thoughts came to a screeching halt. Nicholas sighed again.

His hands curled into fists. When he was sure Jessica wasn't listening to him, he added, "I hate to ask this of novel drama

you. The thought of you and he alone..." His fists clenched tighter "You don't have anything to worry about," I told him. Sometimes Julian and I had tension between us, and perhaps in another life where I hadn't been with Nicholas, perhaps Julian and I would have found each other instead.

But as it was, my heart was right here, sitting with this man beside me.

"I know that, deep down. That's why it has to be you. You're the only one he might actually talk to." I watched him a moment longer, seeing the tension in his body, the tightness of his straightened shoulders, the way every muscle was clenched. It took everything he had to ask me to do this. He must truly care for his brother, despite their many

arguments and differences "I speak with him," I said. As I moved to stand, I let my hand gently and subtly brush up the length of his arm. His eyes closed and he leaned into the touch. I hoped the motion was as reassuring as I meant it to be.

Then, I turned and followed the way Julian had gone, down the length of the beach.

I found Julian in a more secluded part of the island, a beach separated from the rest by a rocky outcrop. He had fished some shells from the damp beach and was tossing them back into the ocean as far as he could.

With only the starlight to brighten the view, it was difficult to see back here.

Sometimes a shimmer would highlight the crest of a wave. Even Julian was

only visible in hazy outlines.

He threw a shell and it plopped into the water. The sound was quickly swallowed by the crash of the ocean waves.

"Julian!" I called as I came nearer. I didn't want to startle him.

He didn't acknowledge me at all, just kept throwing the shells. He had a few more in his hand.

Bridget was the only person I knew who could render such a talkative man absolutely speechless. And I hated her for it. She always managed to dim his bright light. I wished he could see how unhealthy she was for him. Her very presence poisoned him.

[walked to his side and silently watched as he threw the last of his

shells. Then, as we stood there, both staring out into the darkness, I said, "Do you want to talk about it?" "What's there to talk about?" Julian demanded. "The lie was me. She never loved me. She never will love me. I've always known that. It's nothing new." He laughed a little, self-deprecatingly, and I hated how broken it sounded.

«It still hurt you to hear," I said, because it was obvious, and avoiding saying it aloud was helping no one.

Julian was quiet for a while. Between the crashes of the waves on the sand, I heard him utter a tiny, "Yeah." Then, he side-eyed me.

I didn't return his gaze, but I could feel his eyes trace down over my face.

"Piper," he said.

I finally turned to look at him. "Hm?" "Why couldn't it have been me and you?" he said.

Then, at once, he lifted his hands, cupped my face, and kissed me.

My brain short wired. I stood completely still, frozen in shock.

His touch was gentle. The kiss was soft, non-probing. He made no attempt to delve deeper. He simply let his lips rest against mine in a feather light touch.

My heart raced out of control. I felt shaky, like I might jump right out of my skin.

[didn't know what to do, what to

think. What did this mean? What did he want from me? But then, before I could pull myself together to have a reaction, the kiss was over. Julian pulled back. His hands fell away from my face.

He looked away from me, back to the ocean. I did the same. Like this, we were as we were before the kiss, yet something felt different, shifted. I felt as if I wasn't standing on solid ground anymore.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I shouldn’t have done that.” “No,” I agreed. What did the kiss mean? What would happen to our friendship? Was everything different now, or --? «We don’t have to ever talk about it

ever again,” Julian said.

“That might be for the best,” I said.

Yes, let me file the kiss into the back of my mind and never have to face what happened here today. That seemed the best way to save our friendship.

Tonight had been a wild night of alcohol and mistakes.

If Nicholas found out...

«I’m sorry,” Julian said. “I overstepped. It will never happen again.” I nodded, not trusting my voice anymore.

Julian turned then and walked straight by me, back toward the mansion. He didn’t say another word.

He didn’t even look back. I

Chapter 0482 I followed Julian back up the beach, but when he returned to the mansion, I veered back to the bonfire. By now, the fire was dying down. Veronica and Jessica were sitting with their backs to it, facing the ocean. They each had a glass of wine and a marshmallow in hand. The opened bag sat between them.

I walked over to them. “Where’s Nicholas?” “He went inside soon after you left,” Veronica said.

“He didn’t even say goodnight,” Jessica added.

“It’s been a long day today,” Veronica told her.

Jessica shrugged. “True.” “Why don’t you join us for a while, Piper?” Veronica added.

I looked back at the mansion, where Julian had just disappeared inside. I tried to imagine myself going to my room and trying to sleep. With the thought of that kiss in the front of my mind, sleep didn’t seem likely.

“Okay,” I said, and plopped myself down onto the soft sand on the other side of Veronica. She grabbed the bag of marshmallows and held it out for me. I accepted one and plopped it in my mouth. Ah, sugar! So sweet and delicious.

Jessica sipped at her wine. “What a night. I can’t believe Bridget got so drunk.”

"She's probably used to being on camera," I said. "It must have been somewhat freeing for her to not have to worry about that for a change." Although I wished she had used her new freedom in a way that didn't involve asking me such probing, unnecessary questions.

"Some people don't handle freedom well," Veronica said. "They are so unaccustomed to it, that once they have it, they have no idea what to do with it." "I don't think she behaved all that terribly," Jessica said. "I mean, sure, she probably should have switched to water for a bit there, but..." Jessica sipped at her own wine. Everyone was a little bit tipsy tonight. Maybe that made her bold. "Bridget was only asking aloud what we were all

thinking." "I wasn't thinking it," Veronica said. Jessica rolled her eyes dramatically.

"Come on, Veronica. You must wonder too." "Wonder what?" I asked, unsure.

Wait... she didn't mean...? "Which of the two princes do you actually love?" Jessica asked.

My body froze, while my heart began to pound wildly in my chest.

"Jessica," Veronica said in a warning kind of way.

"Well, okay, maybe love is a bit extreme," Jessica admitted. "That's probably where Bridget pushed too far.

But shouldn't we know which of the

two princes you are pursuing, Piper?" I didn't know how to answer that. My tongue felt too big for my mouth every time I tried to reply.

"They both selected you at the elimination ceremony," Jessica said. noveldrama

With my continued silence, she rambled. "And Bridget wasn't lying.

You say you are dating Julian, but you are wearing Nicholas's clothes. It just seems unfair to try to corner both at the same time. That's all I mean..." "She's not after Joyce," Veronica said, like that was all that should have mattered to Jessica. Maybe it was.

Jessica tilted her head. "True." Veronica gave me a questioning look. I knew what it meant. She was asking if I

needed a rescue. If I needed her to, she'd likely shift the conversation away from this question and to something else that would interest Jessica enough to forget it.

But, as I thought over Jessica's words, maybe I was being unfair to the other girls. To anyone on the outside, it certainly seemed like I was playing the field, instead of sticking in my own lane. From Jessica's point of view, she might have right to worry that I would try to steal her prince, too.

Of course, I knew that was nonsense.

Joyce was not someone I would ever want to date.

The others though...

The phantom touch of Julian's kiss still lingered on my lips. Our friendship had seemed to cross over into something

complicated, though he had said we'd never speak of it again. He was hurting tonight. Maybe in the morning, he would be back to normal and we could return to the way things were.

Chapter 0483 My feelings for Nicholas, however, were not likely to change any time soon. If I had free reign here, Nicholas was the one I would pursue. But the fact was, the cards were stacked against me from the start.

I was only in this competition to I increase the viewership. I never had a chance of actually winning.

I lower my head. I don't need Veronica to rescue me, not when the ultimate answer is so innocuous.

"None of it matters," I said. "You know who I am. Where I come from.

What I'm going back to. In the end, neither Nicholas nor Julian are going to pick me for their Luna. I imagine I'll be going home after the next elimination

ceremony." I was honestly surprised I had lasted this long. Jessica must have agreed, because she nodded sagely, as if I had imparted some great wisdom. Veronica continued to look at me. Though her face didn't show it, this time I knew she was offering me pity.

Before I could say anything else, a very drunken Bridget sauntered back toward our dwindling bonfire. She was carrying a near-empty bottle of white wine in her hand. She stopped at my side, looked at the three of us sitting there, and then promptly fell down sideways into the sand.

I rushed to help her, but she pushed off my hand.

"I'm fine," she grumbled.

"But Bridget," I started.

"I'm fine," she said more forcefully.

Then her eyes closed, and she began to loudly snore, all while clutching the wine bottle close like a child cuddling a teddy bear in her sleep. noveldrama

I lifted a brow, and looked at Veronica and Jessica.

Jessica started to laugh. "Should we draw a mustache on her face?" Veronica and I chuckled, but we decided against it. Bridget would feel bad enough on her own when she woke up with a hangover. She didn't need us to add to her embarrassment.

We stayed like that for a bit longer.

Veronica, Jessica, and I traded marshmallows until the bag was empty. Bridget snored from the sand

bed she'd made beside me.

Eventually I made my way inside. Most of the servants must have retired by now. The hallways were barren, except for a few here and there keeping watch.

The guard at my door smiled when I approached him. "Turning in for the night, Miss Piper?" "Yes, thank you," I said.

He started to step aside to let me enter, but then held up a gift bag into my path.

I tilted my head. "For me?" "Yes," he said. "Prince Nicholas left this for you. He said you would need it for a good night's sleep." Eagerly, I accepted the bag and peeked

inside. A change of clothes? Oh. Pajamas.

How thoughtful.

Nicholas could have just gone to sleep without thinking of me at all. I would have been comfortable enough sleeping in this shirt, even though it had some sand on it now, and was sticky with the salty sea air. But he had thought of me. And now I would sleep comfortably because of it.

"Thank you," I told the guard, who nodded politely.

I opened the door and entered my room. Elva was already sound asleep, so I slipped as quietly as I could into the bathroom to change.

Nicholas's pajamas were huge on me.

The elastic waistband of the pants was

not tight enough to keep them from falling down my hips, so I had to hold on to keep myself covered. But the clothes smelled like Nicholas. Wearing them almost felt like being hugged by him, safe and warm.

Everyone else may wonder, but I knew.

My heart belonged to Nicholas.

Chapter 0484 The next morning, I awoke to a knock on the door. Beside me Elva began to rub her eyes.

I hadn't indulged in too much alcohol, unlike some of the other girls, but I still felt a pressure in my head, probably from having stayed up too late.

I wanted to turn over in bed and ignore the knocking, but if Elva was already waking up, I knew any attempts to return to sleep would be futile.

With a groan, I rolled out of bed and headed to the door. Any annoyance I felt that morning immediately vanished the moment I opened the door and saw Charlotte standing there.

"Surprise?" she said, smiling.

"Charlotte!" I excitedly pulled her into a hug. We hadn't been apart all that long, but seeing another familiar face here warmed my heart. Charlotte had become such a good friend, I was always happy to see her. "What are you doing here?" I "Prince Nicholas asked me to come," she said. She gently returned my hug.

"To escort your new wardrobe." I pulled back from the hug, and noticed there were quite a few servants standing out in the hallway, each holding suitcases and bags.

I immediately stepped to the side, and like a parade, the servants brought in the suitcases and unpacked them until the drawers and closet were full of new dresses and shirts and pants. Even

underwear and swimsuits were included in the mix. €» Elva fully awoke in the excitement and rushed to give Charlotte a hug of her own. noveldrama

When the servants had gone, and all the clothes were in their place, Charlotte and I sat down to talk while Elva played with her toys.

"How are things back at the palace?" I asked her. There was a small table at the corner of the room with two chairs.

We sat there now, sipping from cups of coffee.

"Mostly quiet," Charlotte said.

"Though not without the usual drama." She sipped her coffee.

"Lilliana has been particularly vocal about your inclusion on this trip, while they are forced to stay behind. Olivia,

meanwhile, has been taking advantage of the absences by having daily tea with the Queen." &» - Of course she was. Olivia was ever the one to watch out for. She might have stood back while Bridget took the forefront of everyone's attention, but that woman would never give up. If she couldn't make headway with Nicholas himself, it made sense that she would attempt to sway his parents instead.

It was a solid plan, I supposed. I doubted how successful it would be, with how much favor the King and Queen regularly bestowed upon Bridget. But I couldn't fault Olivia for making the best of an awkward situation.

We continued talking.

"I received the call late last night, about putting together a new wardrobe for you. I thought to pack up your things from the palace, but the message said all new, to be delivered straight to the island. And I was to facilitate their delivery." "I didn't need all this," I said.

Charlotte smiled at me a little. "The message was clear. Prince Nicholas wanted the best for you." I knew Nicholas was behind all this, but to hear to what lengths he went to for me...

I lowered my head to hide my smile.

Charlotte yawned a little. "With all the excitement, I haven't been to sleep yet p »

This alarmed me. "You need to get some sleep!" Charlotte laughed a little. I could see now the bags under her eyes. "Maybe for a little while." We split ways then. Charlotte went to the servants quarters assigned to her to sleep. Elva went to make sandcastles with the nanny. I went searching for Nicholas, to thank him for such a generous gift.

It didn't take me long to find him. All I had to do was descend the staircase. He was standing in the hallway near the bottom, arguing with... Nathan? When had he gotten here? Standing behind Nathan was a camera crew. They weren't filming yet, but they were arranging their gear like they meant to soon.

"This is supposed to be a getaway, Nathan," Nicholas argued. "A reward for a job well done. There weren't supposed to be any cameras here." "The King has made the

decision, Prince Nicholas,” Nathan said. He was respectful enough, but his tone had an air of dismissal, like his words were enough to end all argument. Maybe they were. Or should have been.

But Nicholas continued to press. “It’s hardly a reward if we have to keep being on guard all the time.” “you expect the competition to simply... take a week off while you are here? And you believe the ratings would return after that break?” Nathan shook his head. “Be realistic, Nicholas.” “I am realistic,” Nicholas snapped.

«When you’ll know that the opportunity to see the princes and candidates in their swimsuits would only help to draw viewership to the competition,” Nathan said. “We cannot pass up this opportunity.” “I still don’t =” “What’s the harm?” said a chipper female voice. Bridget walked out of the kitchen, a coffee in hand and stepped nearer Nicholas. She wore a big charming smile, her eyes bright and full of life.

How was this the same woman who had passed out on the beach last night? Even I had a small hangover! How was Bridget immune? She seemed as cheery and energetic as she had the first day I met her! Bridget turned her smile on Nicholas.

“None of us have anything to hide.

What does it matter if the cameras are here?” She said the words kindly enough, but even I could hear the slight threat underneath. None of us have anything to hide. She suspected the opposite was true, if her outburst last night was anything to go by.

The tiny voice inside of me wondered if Bridget herself hadn’t helped influence the arrival of the cameras. Perhaps Nicholas hadn’t been the only one to have made the call home. Maybe Bridget herself called to suggest that the cameras would be welcomed here.

«She makes a good point,” Nathan said, and Nicholas grimaced slightly.

«It seems I have no choice,” Nicholas said. © Nathan nodded. “The King knows what’s best.” Realizing I had stopped on the stairs to blatantly eavesdrop, I tried to subtly begin walking again, descending the staircase.

At once, all three sets of eyes turned to look at me.

Nathan dismissed me at once, turning toward the camera crew, likely to direct them further.

Bridget lifted a brow at me, but otherwise didn’t react. Her smile remained unchanged, until she sipped at her coffee. Whatever had taken hold of her last night — likely the wine — had long left her, and she was fully in

control of herself once more. I wondered if I should be afraid of that.

Only Nicholas let his gaze linger. At first, his expression was as hard as it had been while talking to the others.

Yet, the longer we looked at each other, the closer I came down the stairs, the more his face shifted to one of...

apology.

I gave a small smile in return. He needed to know I didn't blame him.

None of this was his fault.

But any hopes I had about us pretending to be other people falling in Jove all over again flew right out the window.

Chapter 0485 "Excuse me," Nicholas said to Bridget and walked away from her. He met me at the base of the stairs.

Behind his back, Bridget narrowed her eyes slightly, but then shrugged and walked back into the kitchen. I still had no idea how she could be so bright.

Maybe she's slipped some liquor into her coffee to take the edge off. She didn't seem drunk though.

Was it possible she just had a natural sunny disposition, even after drinking a whole bottle of wine? How unfair.

"I'm sorry about this, Piper," Nicholas said. He nodded his head toward the front of the manor, and taking the

hint, I began walking beside him in the way he'd indicated.

He led us to a small sitting area near the front door of the mansion, where wicker furniture was arranged in a semi-circle. We didn't sit, though. We just stood there in the middle of it.

"I know this isn't what you envisioned about this week," Nicholas said. Softer, he added, "Me, either." We'd recently talked about playing out a fantasy. We had thought while we were here, we could pretend to be strangers and fall in love again. We knew we'd have to hide it from Jessica and Bridget, but we had thought in the moments alone that maybe we could have our chance.

Now, it seemed, even our moments alone would be monitored.

"It's not your fault," I said. "You had no way of knowing your father would want the cameras here." "I should have, though. He cares about appearances. I should have

known he wouldn't let us escape, even for such brief time." I glanced to make sure no one was looking, then I reached out and placed my hand on his arm.

"You can't predict everything," I told him.

He shook his head, unsatisfied.

Nicholas was always pushing himself to be the best. I always thought this quality would help make him a great king. He would settle for nothing less than excellence in himself. Now, however, I'm a bit worried about his blood pressure going up.

The man needs to relax.

"Listen," I started. "Maybe it won't be so bad? I mean, sure, we won't have as much privacy as we would have hoped, but that doesn't mean we can't have some fun, right?" It was harder for him. Being a prince, on camera, he couldn't show even a modicum of weakness. Even showing he could have fun might reveal too much.

«I suppose," he replied, but didn't seem convinced. I guessed I couldn't blame him.

What I could do was try to help him relax as much as possible however I could, in front of the cameras or not.

Yet before I could make an offer to help

him, the front door opened and we both instantly silenced.

Julian walked in, and new anxieties suddenly flooded my mind.

Julian had kissed me last night. noveldrama

It wasn't like I had forgotten. No one forgets getting kissed by a handsome prince, even if it isn't the handsome prince you have romantic feelings for. I had just put it into the back of my brain for now, filed it away for later.

Later, it seemed, was now.

When I saw Julian, my entire body went stiff. I hadn't told Nicholas about the kiss, hadn't had the chance. I didn't even know if I should.

Julian had said it was a mistake. He had said they should forget it, never talk about it again. Telling Nicholas would

only paint it into his mind forever, potentially forming an even larger rift between the two brothers. &% I didn't know what to do, or what to say, or how to act. So I stood there like the universe's most awkward statue, staring wide-eyed at the door.

Julian turned and spotted us.

“Morning,” he said with his typical smirk. He wasn’t quite as bright as Bridget. He winced at any over-loud noise like he had a headache. But he didn’t seem too unusual either. He just nodded his head at us and walked away.

Chapter 0486 He was entirely keeping his word when he’d promised to pretend the kiss never happened.

I needed to get better at doing the same.

I looked back to Nicholas, but a servant interrupted us next.

“please excuse me,” she said. “Nathan is calling everyone out onto the deck for a meeting.” «He’s not even wasting a moment,” Nicholas sighed.

«It will be okay,” I told him. “we’ll find a way to keep relaxing...

» somehow.

. . : 3) His expression was grim. He didn’t

believe me.

Together, Nicholas and I met the others out on the back deck. 4 The camera crew had finished preparing and were now ready to shoot. I thought maybe they were going to capture the meeting, but Nathan, after glancing at all of us in our breezy cottons and linens, sent the crew down to film the ocean for cutaway shots.

“As you can all see, I have arrived with a camera crew,” Nathan said, when he had all of our attention. “The King thought it best not to allow this opportunity to pass. This is your chance to have more intimate time with the camera, to let the folks at home know the real you.” [narrowed my eyes in suspicion. That

wasn’t the reason he’d given Nicholas.

“Of course, we want you to showcase your best selves,” Nathan said. “Which is why I must insist that you wear your swimsuits as much as possible.” Veronica and Jessica looked at each other. Both were wearing sensible floral dresses. Jessica had a wide-brimmed hat.

«Don’t have such worried looks, girls,” Bridget said, smiling wide. “This gives us a chance to show the princes what we are working with.” Jessica frowned. “My prince isn’t here.” “prince Joyce will see the footage,” Nathan said.

Jessica perked. That seemed enough to

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Jessica perked. That seemed enough to convince her.

Nathan spoke up once more, "The princes will also be expected to wear their swim trunks. No shirts, if you please. Our viewership will undoubtedly increase." Beside me, Nicholas sighed.

On the other side of Nathan, Julian tilted his head. "Guess I'm glad I've been working out." I knew, for fact, that neither prince had anything to worry about.

[wasn't necessarily worried about my own body either. With the return of my wolf, I'd gotten more toned than I'd been before, while still maintaining some of my curves. I didn't have anything to be ashamed of.

But... I didn't exactly want to run

around in a revealing swimsuit anyway. Wearing my two-piece felt too... intimate, like wearing underwear in public. And knowing how Nicholas had reacted... I imagined he wanted to keep me dressed like that all to himself, not share it with a camera and the entire kingdom.

Hopefully part of the King's mandate wasn't to allow Nathan the right to pick which swimsuits we wore. My entire body wanted to shrivel up imagining him going through my closet and picking out my skimpy two- piece.

«I expect you all will wish to return to your rooms and change for the day," Nathan said. "You'll want to look your best for your princes and your kingdom."

"thank you, Nathan," Bridget said.

«we're thankful you are giving us the opportunity to look our best." && No one agreed with that sentiment. We all just sort of begrudgingly made our way back inside.
noveldrama

Upstairs, as I was opening the door to my room, Nicholas caught me by the elbow and helped me inside. I looked at him, a question in my eyes.

«I'll help you change,” he said softly, warm breath hot on my ear.

My whole face went red.

Chapter 0487 I entered my bedroom with Nicholas right behind me. He placed his hand on the small of my back, helping lead me further inside. I was still blushing fiercely from his words.

With the door safely closed behind us, leaving us alone in my room, I turned back to look up at him. What I saw stole my breath away.

His face was a hard shell, slightly angry, with fiery eyes. He was all Alpha now. If he opened his mouth, I suspected a growl might come out of it.

“Nick...” I whispered.

The air between us suddenly felt charged and intimate.

«Don't wear that bikini, Piper,” he said, his voice low and rough. “I don't want anyone to see you in that but me.” Was that what he was worried about? “Nick, I wasn't going to,” I said, and flashed him a small smile. Surely he already knew that, with the way I had slunk around after having to wear it that first time. “I'm sure you provided a lot more options when you picked out my wardrobe.” Nicholas's lips twitched as he looked down at me, his frown lifting a little.

He kissed the tip of my nose. “I'd love to see you try them on.” Oh. The other real reason he wanted to help me change. My smile turned sheepish and I dipped my head to hide

it. I understood where he was coming from. This might be one of the last times we could find time to be alone together, what with the cameras here now. We'd have to be extra careful from now on. They might even decide to set up secret cameras in this hallway, to see who went where and when.

We had to steal these precious moments while we could.

So I lifted my face, turned my smile cheeky, and said, “Sit on the bed. I'll do a fashion show for you.” Nicholas wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me to him. He lowered his nose down to the corner of my neck and shoulder and breathed me in.

“Piper,” he said. “I intend to help you dress. And... undress.” My heart pounded in my chest, beating hard against my ribcage. The press of his hands to my waist, even over my clothes, began to feel so hot, it nearly seared my skin.

Then, those same hands, gripped my shirt and tugged it up from where it had tucked into my linen pants, pulling it free from under my waistband. In a blink, that shirt was up and over my head. He tossed his carelessly to the ground.

His eyes dropped hungrily to my chest, where my lacy white bra stretched to contain my bosom.

His hands returned to my waist and with a small tug, he pulled my pants down over my hips and dropped them

to the ground. I kicked them away.

The way he looked at me, fire simmering in his eyes, had me blushing all the way to my navel, I was sure of it. I knew if he removed my bra and panties next, that we'd likely forget all about the swimsuit.

I had to keep us on track. "Let's pick out a swimsuit before I get naked, okay?" He hummed, though with the hunger in my eyes, I wasn't sure he was truly agreeing. He held me like this, arms wrapped around my waist for along moment, before finally sighing and releasing me. "Very well." [walked to the drawer where I knew the swimsuits to be. It was the same drawer that contained my panties and bras.

Fortunately, Nicholas hadn't followed me over. He remained where he'd been standing, right there by the door, watching me like a hawk.

I dug into the dresser and pulled out the swimsuit on top. It was a one piece... sort of. The sides connected the tops to the bottoms but the midriff and the back were cut out. The color was a shimmering green, much like the flecks in Nicholas's eyes. noveldrama

I held it up to show him. "This one?" "Try it on," Nicholas said. "Then we'll decide." I rolled my eyes at him. I might be annoyed by his jealous tendencies if I wasn't so endeared to them. Or if I didn't understand them as well as I did.

There were so many times that I
wanted to keep Nicholas all to myself.

It was a daily struggle.

Holding the swimsuit, I turned back to face him. I knew, in my mind, now was the point where I should get naked and change, but a touch of nervousness shook through me.

It didn't make a lot of sense. I've been naked in front of Nicholas before.

Many times. Yet the act of undressing...

I don't know. It felt so intimate. I didn't know where to begin.

"Do you need help?" he asked. Before I could answer, he stepped closer. My breath caught as he came to stand right in front of me, so close I could lean forward and press my body to his. I didn't, but I could have. The heat radiated off of his body toward mine.

slowly, he reached his hands forward.

He slid them around my sides to my back and masterfully unclasped my bra. The tension released, my breasts spilled out from the lacy fabric. He avoided touching me there. Instead, he lifted his hands to my shoulders and pulled my bra off me by the straps.

With it free from my body, he tossed it to the pile behind him.

Then he dropped to his knees. I swallowed hard.

He brought his hands to my waist and lightly traced his thumbs along the waistband of my panties. His face near my navel, his gentle puffs of breath teased my sensitive skin.

Then, tenderly, he hooked his thumbs under the waistband and slow, slow, slowly pulled them down to my ankles,

exposing me bare for his eager eyes.

He tossed the panties behind him.

Then held up his hand. "The swimsuit." With shaky hands, I passed him the swimsuit. He scrunched it up and placed it at my feet. He tapped one ankle for me to lift that foot, and then the next, until he was stretching the fabric up over my knees and along the meet of my thighs. When he covered my sex, I could breathe again.

Then he stood up. He continued to tug the swimsuit, stretching the fabric along my sides. He held open the armholes for me to slide my arms through. Then he tugged them until the straps were secure on my shoulders.

My breasts were still bare, the swimsuit caught underneath them.

I held my breath as he reached forward . h - and urged the swimsuit free. His thumbs traced the curve of my breast as he lifted the top to fully cover them.

A pleasant shiver shook down my spine.

He didn't move back to take me in.

Didn't look away from my face, as he said, "Beautiful." "Nick..." I wanted him to kiss me. After everything, I needed him to. I wanted his closeness, like a bookend to this intimate moment.

So I reached my hand up, traced my fingers along the side of his cheek. He followed my touch with so much

eagerness, that when his lips finally pressed against mine, I wasn't sure which one of us had led the other.

It didn't really matter.

With his mouth covering mine, all other thoughts were lost for a while.

Chapter 0488 After a few kisses, Nicholas excused himself to change into his own swim trunks. I opted to stay behind, knowing if I went with him, we would be thoroughly distracted for so long that our absence would definitely be noticed.

No, it was better that we parted for now.

I went into the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror. The green swimsuit Nicholas had picked out for me was tasteful. It did show off my curves, but in a classy kind of way. My midriff and back were exposed, but not so much so that I felt naked, like I did when I was wearing the bikini.

Nicholas had good taste.

Comfortable, I headed downstairs and out onto the deck, looking for everyone else. I found them out on the sand, near where a volleyball net had been erected. Nathan was directing the camera crew nearby, setting them up for the best shots.

Veronica spotted me and waved me over. She had on a one-piece swimsuit with a halter top, covered in polka dots.

Her hair was up in a loose bun.

"The teams have already been picked," she said. "Do you know how to play?" "A little?" I hadn't played any team sports since my days at the academy.

"Good," Veronica said. "Because I've never played before in my life."

We waited a few minutes until Nicholas joined us. My thoughts fizzled out when I spotted him. His shorts were low on his hips and he wasn't wearing a shirt, revealing miles of hard muscle.

I could have stared at him for hours, drooling. Veronica elbowed me after a few seconds.

Bridget, who I had only given a passing glance to before, bounded over to Nicholas as he descended from the deck. Her tiny two-piece bikini barely covered her bouncing breasts or her ass. It was as if she was wearing two tiny strips of fabric, not an actual outfit.

She held out her arms and spun around, giving Nicholas the full view. noveldrama

Nicholas politely kept his glance the other way.

Inside of me, my wolf snarled, though outwardly, I tried to keep myself contained. Beside me, Julian was less subtle, crossing his arms and frowning.

The teams were split with Veronica, Julian and I on one team, and Nicholas, Bridget, and Jessica on the other.

Putting me in a position of being able to stare at Nicholas's bare chest through the mesh net was not a good idea, and I missed several of the early volleys that should have been easy.

Even Veronica, who had never played the game before, was making more plays than me.

It was so bad, that after a particularly terrible miss, courtesy of the sun reflecting off the shine of sweat on Nicholas's pecs, Julian came over to me

and said, "Get your head off of Nicholas's chest and into the game, please, Piper." I blushed fiercely. Of course, he would be the one to notice. Although, with the knowing look Veronica gave me, she probably noticed too.

I shook my head and focused. Julian was right. With the cameras watching, and showing the footage all across the kingdom, I couldn't embarrass myself and my team, even if we were just playing for fun.

Plus, if Julian was still playing his best, even with the distraction of Bridget's bare skin, then I could certainly do the same seeing Nicholas's.

From then out, I treated Nicholas's hotness like I couldn't even see it and focused fully on the ball. And that was

when I started to notice the obvious weakness on the other team.

Bridget, being so conscious of her image, focused only on where the cameras were and how to give herself the best angle in front of them. She smiled and posed. While she did

make the occasional volley, she only did so when the ball was close enough that she wouldn't have to exert herself.

Chapter 0489 If the save required her to dive for it, she adamantly refused.

Though Nicholas had no obvious outward reaction to her lack of commitment to the game, after her fifth time not making an effort, his muscles clearly tightened, likely in frustration. noveldrama

Jessica, meanwhile, gave the game her best effort, but she didn't have much skill. She wasn't afraid to dive and get herself sandy, but often when she did so, she would miss the ball entirely.

To be fair, most of the volleys were between Nicholas and Julian. They were both so competitive, and played their absolute best. Eventually the rest

of us shifted to the edges of the court, with those two doing most of the work.

I watched in awe at some of their moves. They dove and twisted and jumped, all while hitting the ball with expert precision.

One volley lasted so long, that I thought we might be here all night. No matter how much one tried to outdo the other, the other was always there to return the ball. I wondered how much werewolf strength they were tapping into, turning this friendly game into a fierce competition.

At each hit Julian made, I loudly cheered while Veronica clapped. At each return Nicholas made, Jessica cheered, while Bridget smiled at the camera.

But then, Bridget's attention shifted toward Julian. Something dangerous sparkled in her eye. She was definitely up to something, but what? She wasn't even really part of the play anymore.

None of us were. Everything now was between Nicholas and Julian.

Yet, Bridget still stumbled forward, tripping over a possible divot in the sand. As she fell forward, she shouted, "Oops!" Just like that her top fell down to her waist, exposing her two large breasts, nipples and all.

Nicholas, who hadn't noticed, returned the ball as he had for the past ten minutes. In fact, the ball had been hit so near the net, that Nicholas jumped up, put all of his effort in his arms, and spiked the ball straight back over.

Julian, however, completely froze. His eyes were wide and locked on Bridget's bare breasts.

The spiked ball, smashed straight into the top of his head. It bounced backwards, beyond the out of bounds line, where it bounced a few more times before rolling to a stop in the sand.

Julian was dazed, completely still for one long moment. Then he dropped.

“Julian!” I cried.

Veronica and I rushed toward him at once.

Meanwhile, Bridget adjusted her top.

“How careless of me,” she said with a nervous giggle that I wasn’t entirely sure wasn’t put on.

Julian was face down in the sand, so Veronica and I rolled him over. When we did, he blinked awake.

“Did I die?” he asked.

“No,” Veronica said.

I held up three fingers and asked him to count them.

“Three,” he said.

“Are you seeing two of me?” I asked.

“No » He knew the date and his name, so he likely wasn’t suffering from a concussion. He’d have a hell of a bruise though.

“We should get him out of the sun,” Veronica said.

By now, Nicholas came over. “Are you alright?” He held his hand out for Julian and then helped him up. Julian wobbled a minute. Nicholas placed his hand on Julian’s shoulder. “What happened?” “I, uh...” Julian rubbed the back of his neck. “I’d rather not say.” No wonder. Shaking my head, I said, “P’11 go get you some ice,” and started to walk away.

Behind me I heard Bridget’s soft, melodic laughter. “I’m glad I didn’t cause permanent damage.” Inside, my wolf growled. I might not have been sure if Bridget’s wardrobe malfunction had been an accident, but my wolf was very sure.

Bridget had flashed Julian on purpose.

Chapter 0490 Veronica and I sat on either side of Julian on the couch on the deck.

Veronica held the bag of ice I had retrieved from the kitchen to the top of Julian's head, even though he continually insisted it wasn't necessary.

"Your head could swell," I said.

"We don't need you growing a bigger head than you already have," Veronica said in a flat tone.

Julian laughed and didn't argue anymore.

After the good mood passed, I lightly scolded, "You worried us." "I can't believe you were so careless," Veronica said. "You warned Piper not

to get distracted, but then there you were, even more so. And for what? A pair of breasts." Julian hung his head a little.

"You've seen breasts before," Veronica said.

"Yeah, but..." Julian sighed. "It was Bridget." "So?" came Veronica's sharp response.

"So..." Julian let the word stretch.

"Bridget is special." Veronica narrowed her eyes. One minute, she was holding the ice to Julian's head, and in the next, that same ice was suddenly on Julian's lap.

Veronica had teleported it! "Why don't you cool down, Julian,"

she snapped.

Only wearing his swim trunks, Julian must have felt the cold instantly.

"Veronica!" he gasped, and jumped up.

The ice bag fell to the ground where it split open, and the ice cubes flung in all directions.

Then she abruptly stood and walked away. She didn't look back as she went into the mansion. I watched her go the entire way, trying to remember the last time I had seen her angry. Had I ever seen her angry? Julian flopped back down onto the seat.

"What was that all about?" I wasn't sure. Unless...

Veronica had told me before that she wouldn't have minded Julian dating someone, if that someone was me. I

was starting to see the truth in that now. When Julian and I were together, she was fine. But when Bridget was on the scene, Veronica went frigid. noveldrama

It seemed I wasn't the only one who absolutely detested the two of them ~ together. Bridget was toxic to Julian, and he seemed to love self- destructing.

"Do you have any idea?" Julian asked, glancing at me.

Of course I had ideas. I had several ideas, along with many, many choice words to say to both Julian and Bridget.

I restrained myself now. I didn't want to burn bridges. Julian was my friend, even if he continued to make the same stupid mistakes again and again.

For his sake, I had to explain why Veronica was frustrated with him

without continuing to dig too hard.

"The people who care about you want to see you move on from Bridget," I said. "We've talked before, many times, about how unhealthy your relationship is." "It wasn't a relationship that tripped me up," Julian said. He raised his hands in his defense. "It was her breasts." @ I rubbed my forehead.

"I'm not helping my case, am I?" he asked. "But you were checking out Nicholas..." "You know why that's different." He sighed then, and looked to the side.

"Yeah, I guess I do. Sorry, Piper. I'll apologize to Veronica too."

"We only care because we are tired of seeing you hurt," I said, certain that Veronica felt the same way.

"I know." He sighed again, deeper.

"Trust me, I'm tired of it myself. I wish I could turn my feelings on and off like - alight switch, but it's not possible. I loved her for years, Piper. That doesn't just go away, no matter how often I get hurt." He looked up at me, his sad eyes through his long lashes. "She still feels like the one that got away." I wanted to continue to argue with him, but the way he was looking at me... it took me back to last night, when Julian kissed me under the starlight. He looked like this then too, helpless and lost, trying to find any lighthouse in his storm of emotion.