

## The Luna Choosing Game #Chapter 491 -500

### Read The Luna Choosing Game Chapter 491

Chapter 0491 We hadn't been alone since the kiss.

While we weren't exactly alone now, with the others nearby, we were speaking privately. A faint heat began to rise in my cheeks. I didn't know what to say.

Julian blinked. He lifted his head and looked at me more critically. "Piper..." I he started but didn't finish. Maybe he didn't know what to say either.

The moment stretched out. I racked my brain for something else to talk about — literally anything else — but all I could think about was how we agreed never to talk about that kiss ever again.

Maybe... the weather? It was sunny again today.

Ug! Why did he have to kiss me? It took our perfectly healthy friendship and turned it into something awkward and uncertain. I didn't know how to react around him anymore.

Julian inhaled a great breath, as if he was preparing himself for something.

"Piper, I'm —" "How are you feeling, Julian?" Nicholas asked as he approached us.

Whatever Julian was going to say to me was instantly lost. We both looked at Nicholas instead.

Nicholas's expression was mostly neutral, but there was a kind of worry in his eyes.

"Much better, thanks," Julian said. He scratched at his head, where I'm sure a

nasty welt was forming. Though, with his werewolf abilities, any hurt shouldn't last for long. He'd likely be fully healed in a few hours. This was the only reason I hadn't insisted we rush him to the hospital after a head injury.

"Good," Nicholas said.

If I had thought things were awkward before with just Julian and me, they were triply so now.

I worried my bottom lip with my teeth.

Julian rubbed at his head. Nicholas stood there, looking at both of us.

"Was I interrupting something?" he asked.

"No," I said, just as Julian said, "Kind of." Nicholas narrowed his eyes a little. Yet

before he could ask anything else, Bridget bounced over to his side and clutched his arm. Seeing her closeness to him, while wearing that revealing bikini, made my jealousy rumble in my chest, but I quickly ~ patted it down, reminding myself that I was the one who had kissed another man. Well, he had kissed me, but still.

@ At any rate, I should have been grateful for Bridget's interruption. If Nicholas asked about the awkwardness between Julian and me... If either of us had told him the truth...

God, the two brothers might actually fight for real.

"You sure you're okay, Julian?" Bridget asked. Hanging off of Nicholas's arm, she leaned forward,

her breasts practically spilling out, Julian lifted his gaze straight up to the wooden ceiling over the deck. "I'm fine." Bridget laughed. "I'm so embarrassed about what happened. I swear it's never happened before. I guess I just got so excited in the heat of the moment. The match was so exciting, wasn't it, Piper?" "Yeah..." I certainly wasn't going to shame another woman for wearing whatever she wanted, but I feel like certain precautions could have been taken to keep from flashing the other team on the volleyball court.

Honestly, I still wasn't sure it was an accident. She could have flashed Julian on purpose, knowing it would distract him, so that Nicholas could clench the

winning victory. €» She probably hadn't intended for Julian to be hurt, though she could act a bit more apologetic and caring toward him. As it was, she only ever seemed to care about him just enough ~ to keep him on the hook.

I sighed a little. This was just how things were.

I wondered if Julian would ever be able to break the cycle.

Chapter 0492 Around late morning, I headed into the kitchen in search of a cold drink. The Servants were more than willing to help me, but as I was perfectly able to find the refrigerator in this house, I thanked them but sought it out on my own.

I filled a glass with ice, poured my lemonade, and was about to leave the room when I heard talking just outside the room, on the other side of the door.

"We got some good footage during the volleyball game," a man said. "But everyone just sitting around like this doesn't make for good television, even if they are in the swim suits. We need to at least get them in the water, or stir

LI Ree et ag up drama somehow.” “Don’t worry,” Nathan said. I realized then that the other person must have been with the camera crew. “I have another activity planned that will help boost the ratings.” My stomach sank. I didn’t like the sound of that.

This trip was supposed to have been a reward for those who performed well in the theater event. Yes, I piggybacked off of Veronica and Julian’s success, but even so, no one was supposed to be put on the spot here. This was supposed to be relaxing.

Yet somehow, Nathan and the camera crew wanted to extend the reach of the competition even to here, this place of supposed relaxation. Or was it the king to blame?

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It didn’t matter whose fault it was. It was happening regardless.

“Gather everyone on the deck,” Nathan said.

On the other side of the door, I sighed.

Out on the deck, I leaned against the railing beside Veronica. Everyone was there, gathered by Nathan’s command.

The camera crew were positioned across the deck, filming everyone and their reactions. I internally vowed to keep a straight face, no matter what activity Nathan was about to propose.

Nathan began, “Tomorrow, the four candidates present will be participating in a new event! One made especially for you here on the islands.”

BIE ala a I glanced around at everyone’s reactions. Veronica kept a straight face as always, though her eyes did narrow somewhat. Jessica openly frowned.

Julian seemed bored, picking at his fingernails. Nicholas appeared marginally concerned. Only Bridget truly seemed excited, clapping her hands together.

“How wonderful!” she exclaimed.

“What's the event?” Nathan smiled as if he was very pleased with himself. “A treasure hunt!” Like a scavenger hunt or something? That didn't seem so bad. Maybe this wouldn't be such a big deal after all. I began to relax. I could have been making a mountain out of a molehill.

Wy TO BONUS Nathan's smile grew wider. “Each candidate will be taken to a nearby deserted island and dropped along the shore at separate points. You will each be given a limited set of instructions on how to find the treasure that corresponds to your individual prince.” Veronica and I glanced at each other.

Nathan addressed us, “You two will be in direct competition, while the others will be racing against the clock.” I frowned. Veronica did not even twitch.

“The first to find a treasure will have a special romantic boat date with their prince,” Nathan said.

Jessica's hand went up.

“If you win, Jessica, you are promised to have a special future date with Prince Joyce, once he has recovered from his illness,” Nathan said. I ' Jessica's hand came down.

I wondered what the deserted island would be like. If it was nothing but a sandy hill, there wouldn't be much of a competition. I had noticed many of the nearby islands were covered in thick jungle trees and vines, tall grasses and shrubs.

Did Nathan intend us to walk into a jungle? I raised my hand.

Nathan gave me a withering look, which I knew was a warning, but I persisted. Eventually, he sighed. “Yes, Piper?”

“mar “What sort of supplies will we be given for this challenge?” I asked.

He laughed a little. “What supplies could you need? You'll have your basic instructions, your swimsuit, and you.” Swimsuit? Not even hiking boots or a rope, or even a compass? No. I had to be overthinking this. The royal family didn't want us dead, after all. They wouldn't send us into a jungle unprepared. It had to be as I initially I thought and dismissed: a barren island. Perhaps the treasure was buried in the sand and we'd need our hands to dig out.

Nathan took my silence as acceptance and moved on. “You'll be leaving in the morning at first light. Good luck!”

Bridget clapped. The cameramen came closer for their reaction shots. Maybe some of the others found what they needed, but the cameraman on Veronica and I was left wanting. We both just sort of stared at him until he gave up and moved away.

When I was certain we weren't being overheard, I leaned into Veronica and told her, "I'm not about to fight you."

"I'll help you find Julian's treasure." "You don't have to," Veronica said, straight faced.

"I insist." "Let Julian sit on a boat by himself."

"He's been such a mess since Bridget showed up," Veronica replied. "I don't care about any of this."

Oh.

I huffed a soft laugh. "So what do you ~~ { think we should do? Drink wine on the beach while the others fumble around looking for treasure?" "That's not a bad plan," Veronica said with a soft hum. "But no, I think we should search for a treasure. Just not Julian's." I lifted a brow in her direction. "Then who's?" She dipped her head toward where Bridget was clinging to Nicholas's arm.

"Isn't this so exciting, Nicholas?" Bridget said, beaming up at him. "You and me will have a romantic boat date soon?" Nicholas grunted and faced away from

- her. His expression was tight, not revealing much, but I knew him well enough to see the unhappiness I darkening his eyes.

"You want to rescue Nicholas," I said to Veronica.

"Don't you?" she asked.

Of course I did. But there seemed to be many problems with that plan. First and foremost, we wouldn't have access to the instructions on how to retrieve Nicholas's treasure. "I doubt Bridget's going to share her instructions with us." "Maybe not on purpose," Veronica said, tilting her head.

I looked at my friend. She'd been through so much in her life. Escaping the underground organization, where

— she had been forced to use her magic for ill. Now, she was bound and determined to use it for good. And she I so desperately wanted to help others escape their fate too, like Joyce.

And here she was, still trying to save people. Nicholas, from Bridget. And me, from the heartbreak of having to see Nicholas and Bridget together.

While her motives had shifted from her time in the underground organization, as I watched her, I could see the fierceness in her eyes that betrayed her unbridled desire to achieve her goals by any means possible.

I was incredibly grateful she was on my side. I could only imagine what it might be like to have her as an enemy I could hope to face a team of Bridget

and Olivia and Lilliana. But against Veronica? I wouldn't stand a chance.

{ "Don't worry," she said. "We'll get the instructions." And I believed her full-heartedly.

Chapter 0493 Veronica and I waited until cocktails after dinner that evening to enact our plan. The instructions toward each prince's treasure were handed out only a few minutes before. The instructions were written on notecards, and given discretely to each candidate.

Veronica, when given hers, ripped hers up and threw it in the garbage. I folded mine and tucked it into my pocket.

We waited until Bridget was on her second glass of white wine, and the cameras turned elsewhere, interviewing the princes, before we made our way over to her.

"Hi, Bridget!" I said, forcing myself to be happy to see her. My part of the plan Veronica and I had hastily pulled

together was clear: distraction. "What are you drinking?" ) Bridget's returning smile was friendly enough, but a hint of curiosity darkened her eyes. Perhaps I had overplayed my hand. I was no actress after all. Veronica was much more talented at deception than me.

But Veronica had a different role to play in this plan, and hers was not one I could even fumble my way through.

She meant to teleport the instructions away from Bridget's hand. Only Veronica was capable of that.

"Chardonnay," Bridget said. She tilted her head toward a nearby bottle, sitting atop the same railing she was leaning against. "Do you care to join me?" "I'd love to," I said.

Bridget slid her glance to Veronica, standing just beside her. "And you, Veronica?" "I prefer red wine," Veronica said.

"I'm sure we can get you a glass of that, too." Bridget waved at a servant with the same hand in which she held the instructions. I noticed but tried not to stare overmuch. "An empty glass for Piper, and for Veronica..." "Merlot," Veronica said.

"Merlot," Bridget said. She lowered her hand to her side, which placed the notecard at her hip near Veronica.

Veronica's eyes flitted down to it.

Bridget didn't seem to notice.

The servant nodded, and made her exit.

"Are you excited for the challenge

tomorrow?" I asked Bridget, hoping to fulfill my role in distracting her, so that Veronica could make her move.

"Tam," Bridget said. "Confident too.

I'm certain I have the best chance of winning the date with Nicholas. Ah, a romantic boat cruise. It will be so romantic. I can't wait!" "Right," I said. I had to grit my teeth a little, trying to maintain my smile. "Do you think the cruise will be during the day? Or at night? Which would be more romantic?" She hummed as she sipped at her wine.

Veronica inched closer on her other side, eyes locked on the notecard of instructions.

"Nighttime, of course." Bridget flashed me a grin. "There's something

about the night air that makes people feel... liberated. Wouldn't you agree, Piper?" A rush of panic surged through me.

Surely she didn't know about Julian and my kiss? Although, even if she did, it wouldn't matter, right? Julian and I were supposed to be dating. I needed to get my heart under control.

But once the panic had taken root, it was hard to get myself back under control. My concentration slipped, and I hesitated in replying. In my hesitation, Bridget had time to notice Veronica's closeness, just as Veronica was reaching out her hand toward the notecard.

"Something I can help you with, Veronica?" Bridget asked. She lifted the notecard and held it closer to her

chest. She was aware of its presence now, and our attention on it. No way would Veronica be able to get close enough now to whisk it away without notice.

Veronica lowered her hand without explanation. "No." The servant who had taken our drink order returned with Veronica's merlot and my empty glass. Veronica accepted her red wine and sipped deeply. I turned my empty glass away.

"I'm not thirsty anymore," I said.

Bridget's smile lifted higher on one side. "Pity."

Chapter 0494 She turned away from us then, toward the railing instead. She looked out over the water with a wine glass in one hand and the other up against her chest, tucking the notecard safely out of our reach.

Veronica tilted her head, and I followed her away. Together we retreated inside and toward the wicker seating area near the front door. Along the way, Veronica plucked a notepad and a pencil from a serving tray. She wrote as we walked.

When we reached the seating area, she placed down her wine.

"I'm so sorry, Veronica," I said at once. "I totally botched it."

"It's fine," Veronica said.

"But I ruined our plan. We won't even know where to start now." "I wouldn't go that far." Veronica finished writing. Then she turned the notepad to me and I saw her detailed, and well-penned, scribblings.

Her handwriting, even when writing quickly, was fantastic.

I read the first couple lines. "This is..." "I was able to quickly memorize some of what was on the notecard," Veronica said. "Unfortunately, I was unable to see the last two instructions because of her thumb in the way, but this should give us a starting place." "Veronica, you're incredible!" I said, and pulled her into a quick hug. "With

this, we'll find Nicholas's treasure in no time!" "My treasure?" said Nicholas, suddenly behind me. How long had he been there? Veronica did not seem surprised.

I turned toward him. "I... uh..." He looked at me curiously.

Veronica was the one who answered.

"Neither of us currently care to spend a romantic date with Julian, so we thought to spare you from Bridget instead." Nicholas smiled a little as he exhaled.

He was sighing, but it thankfully sounded endeared. "That's not in the rules." "No one said anything against it," Veronica said. "We can apologize once

it's done." Nicholas made a soft humming noise, not an agreement, but not a 5 disagreement either.

"You don't happen to know the last two steps of the instructions?" Veronica asked.

Nicholas lightly shook his head. "I'm not privy to the instructions. I don't even know what they are using as my supposed treasure." "I see." Veronica dipped her head. "If you'll excuse me." She tucked the notepad paper into her pocket, grabbed her wine, and moved toward the kitchen. This left Nicholas and I alone.

His disposition slowly changed, standing there alone beside me. His

good mood dissipated, and he seemed ill at ease.

"Are you alright?" I asked him.

He inched closer to me. Not close enough to touch, but near enough for me to feel the warmth radiating off of his strong body. He was still shirtless, as I was still in my swimsuit. I swallowed thickly, suddenly possessing a lump in my throat.

"I'm worried," he said, which stopped my lusty thoughts in their tracks.

"Worried?" "The island they are sending you to contains dense jungle," he said. I knew it! "They want you to go there in your swimsuits, without equipment, and expect you to return happy and healthy. A jungle, even a small one, can

be dangerous." He moved closer still. His arm brushed alongside mine.

"I don't care about the date, I just want you to come back to me unharmed." I closed my eyes and softly inhaled, soaking in his scent, mixed with the salty sea air. Both brought me comfort here.

"Please be careful." "Twill," I said. "Ill come back to you, I promise." His hand brushed across mine. His fingers interlaced with my own. It was brazen and dangerous, holding hands in this hallway where anyone could stumble upon us and see.

That was how I knew the true danger of what lied before me.

Nicholas was willing to risk it all for a chance to hold my hand.

"I'll be careful," I said.

Chapter 0495 Early the next morning, at first light, Jessica, Bridget, Veronica, and I were assigned four different boats. For a time, we could keep track of each other, four boats rushing toward the sunrise.

Then I saw the island. It was larger than I thought, circular, with a beach along the outside and dense jungle packed in the center.

The four boats veered off in widening directions, presumably to stop and drop off their candidates at different points on the beach. Soon, we lost sight of each other.

The boat carrying me pulled up toward the beach, and the servant indicated that I should hop out here. So I did, my

feet splashing in the shallow ocean water. As I sloshed my way toward the shore, the boat behind me drifted back and then disappeared the way it had come.

I felt exposed standing there in only a swimsuit. Fortunately, Nicholas with some measure of foresight had included a more conservative one- piece in my wardrobe. It was a navy in color with a modest neckline, and therefore covered most of my torso.

My bare feet, legs, and arms were bound to have some trouble in the thick brush, however.

I crossed my arms and frowned at the path ahead. Nathan had mentioned last night that the camera crews would be discreetly following us, yet no one had

exited the boat with me. Perhaps they thought me so unimportant that I wasn't worth following.

I could only hope Veronica was considered the same or the next part of our plan would make everything obvious.

I imagined, as ever, the cameras were likely following Bridget.

My suspicions were proved true when, as per our plan, I waited in spot while Veronica trudged around the beach until she found me. She had no cameramen following her.

She was wearing a black one-piece bikini with a white sham tied around her waist. Curiously, she was carrying a pair of shoes. I noticed then she had some on her feet as well.

I

When she reached me, she held out the spare pair of shoes for me.

"Is this allowed?" I asked as I accepted them.

"I'll take my chances," Veronica said, "Rather than step on some poisonous thing, or who knows what else." That seemed like sound logic to me, so I accepted the shoes and kicked them on. I didn't care about the sand in them. It was already a comfort knowing I wouldn't step on anything sharp, sticky, or dangerous without at least some measure of protection.

The shoes were simply tennis shoes, but it was a hell of a lot better than nothing.

Veronica retrieved her written instructions from inside of her bodice.

I glanced away as she did so, offering her some measure of privacy, though she didn't seem bothered either way: The instructions were a series of landmarks, natural or otherwise. The first on the list said that we needed to enter the jungle at a mark where three rocks stacked together looked like a stone snowman.

We didn't have to look far.

Surprisingly, the stone snowman was only a few yards left of where I was initially dropped. We walked to it, and yes, just as the instructions described, it was three progressively smaller stones stacked on top of each other.

"What's next?" I asked.

"Forty paces due west," Veronica said.

We both glanced back at the sun rising § behind us.

"Straight into the jungle then," I said, braver than I felt. Even this close, the dense coverage had most of the jungle floor in dark shadow. I felt unnerved.

Anything could be waiting in there.

Veronica peered into the jungle as well.

She didn't seem as frightened as I felt, but she still looked at me and asked, "What do you think?" There really wasn't anything to do but move forward. If we stayed here any longer, we'd likely run into Bridget herself soon. We had to keep moving.

"I'll go first," Veronica said, and I was grateful to her, even as I admonished my own cowardice.

She started walking, counting her paces. I followed along behind, counting my own.

We had to step over tree roots, fallen vines, and the overgrown brush of big- leafed plants, but eventually we made it to thirty-five paces.

Chapter 0496 That was when I spotted some strange divots in the earth, like lines, where the dirt was falling down into. A sinkhole? I didn't know.

Veronica didn't notice. She was looking at the notecard she'd made, likely reading off the next step. She stepped straight beyond the divot, and the ground started to slip beneath her.

Reacting quicker than I could think, I grabbed Veronica's arm and yanked her to the side, off to the safety of some nearby foliage. But in doing so, I had propelled myself into the danger. I searched for footing, but the ground totally collapsed beneath me.

I fell down, down, down — and then abruptly stopped with a thud. My arm

Sw 719 BONU ached something fierce, but I was otherwise unharmed.

"Piper? Oh my God, are you okay?" Veronica called down. It was unusual to hear such worry in her voice.

I opened my eyes and peered up. I had thought this might be sinkhole, but I could see now that while indeed a hole, this one is entirely manmade.

It was a trap. The net under my feet gave that away. Someone had dug a hole, strung a net overtop it and then covered the mesh with dirt and leaves to make it look like regular earth.

But why? "The rules never said there would be traps!" Veronica said.

The pit I was in was at least nine feet deep. I couldn't easily jump out. And if

-y TT BVIZWe Veronica tried to help me, she could just as easily fall in beside me.

"Can you climb out?" Veronica asked.

I tried, clawing at the dirt walls of my enclosure, but the dirt was soft and sandy. It kept collapsing under my fingers. I couldn't take hold. € "No!" I called back.

Veronica looked around. She grabbed one of the nearby vines and dropped it down into the hole for me. I grabbed it, and used it to start pulling my way out.

Halfway, it snapped in two, and I crashed back down into the hole.

It was useless then. We needed a rope.

Curse Nathan for insisting we didn't

need supplies.

"Ill go get help!" Veronica said. "With the marker, I'll be able to find you again!" "Okay," I said. I wasn't keen on being alone, but if Veronica stayed here with me, it would accomplish nothing. "Be careful." "I should say that to you." "I'm not going anywhere." Veronica gave me one last worried look before trudging back through the jungle the way we came.

I stood down in the pit for a while, waiting. I didn't know how long it was.

An hour maybe, when I heard footsteps again.

"Veronica?" I called, hope in my voice,

"Piper? Is that you?" My hope sunk down. That wasn't Veronica. It was...

"Bridget." Bridget's face appeared over the top of the pit as she looked down at me, amusement on her face. Immediately I noticed she was wearing a button-up shirt and slacks. She had a backpack and a rope wrapped around one shoulder.

Of course, the favorite would be allowed to have supplies. Nathan had denied the rest of us because he wanted us to fail. I wouldn't be surprised if this trap had been his idea too.

Whatever. I didn't care. Bridget's rope was just what I needed for a rescue. She could look like a hero, too. I didn't care.

I just wanted out of here.

"Throw down the rope!" I said. "Help me out." Bridget smirked. "So you can steal the treasure and spend more time with Nicholas? I don't think so." No. No way. She couldn't mean to leave me here! "Bridget? Please!" "Don't sound so desperate," Bridget said. She rolled her eyes. "I'll come back for you. After I found the treasure." She laughed. "Stay out of trouble now." She disappeared from the edge of the pit.

Panic began to set in. She really

wouldn't leave me down here? Not when she had the means of rescuing me? Surely? But I waited and I waited, and she never reappeared.

I was alone.

Chapter 0497 Time had no meaning to me, without a watch, but I certainly felt like I was stuck in that dirt pit for hours. I had tried several times to pull myself out, but each time ended in near- immediate failure.

The walls were crumbling dirt. There was nothing to hold onto. Even my new werewolf strength couldn't help me if I couldn't find a handhold or foothold.

So I could do nothing but wait. And wait. And wait.

I worried about Veronica. Shouldn't she have been back by now? What if she fell into another hole and we were both trapped here?

Bridget did say she would come back for me after she found the treasure.

She wasn't lying, right? She wouldn't leave me here to rot? The longer I stood there looking up as the sky grew darker, the more I began to doubt.

Wait. That sky was getting awfully dark. We had left at dawn. It couldn't have been night already, unless I really was starting to lose my mind. When had I last seen the sun? I tried to remember, but its position had been difficult to orient through the tree corner.

But then I understood — because the sky opened up and rain started to pour down on me.

The dirt around me turned into mud. I was glad for my boots, but they were

starting to sink down, sticking into the goop under my feet. 9 Any hope I had at finding any handholds in the walls of the pit disappeared as the sandy dirt became even slicker. Large chunks of the walls plopped down onto the ground.

The rain was chill, pelting hard onto all of my exposed skin. I'd worn my most conservative swimsuit, but it was still a swimsuit and therefore offered no protection from the elements whatsoever.

I shivered hard, the rain creeping down into my bones.

Then I noticed the water was beginning to pool at the bottom of the hole.

No way was I going to die here.

Certainly not by drowning, I had to make a final play. I didn't know what I could do here, exactly, but [wasn't going down without a fight.

Elvawas waiting for me to come back to her. I would fight to make sure my little girl didn't have to grow up without me.

I clawed at the walls, searching for purchase. The muddy dirt broke apart in large chunks, coating my hands in brown, with dirt collecting under my fingernails.

I wouldn't give up. I kept clawing. 5 And then, finally, I gripped something solid. It was a tree root, uncovered by the dirt clumps falling away. I grabbed it with both hands and began to slowly

pull myself out.

It was difficult work. My feet, with no footholds, were basically useless. I had to climb entirely with my upper body strength.

I begged Miracle for strength, and she gave what we could. Together, we began to make progress.

But the tree roots were slippery with the rain, and it seemed that the harder I held onto them, the worse of a grip I had.

My stomach dropped as I started to slip. No! I wouldn't give up.

I cried out, desperate. "Please!" My word was swallowed by the roar of the rain falling on the massive leaves of the jungle.

In the distance, a wolf howled.

I knew that howl. L- A rescue was coming. I just had to hold on. I gripped with both hands, yanked as hard as I could.

"Nicholas!" I cried. I might have been crying. I couldn't tell with the rain coming down.

My hands slipped on the tree roots, and I began to slide down. I gasped.

~ Butthen a pair of strong, steady hands gripped me under my arms.

"Nick!" I was definitely crying now, so relieved to see his face. Despite my aching limbs and my shivering, I knew I was safe now. Nicholas had found me and he wasn't going to let me die here.

Chapter 0498 Nicholas lifted me up from the hole and then yanked me into the safety of his arms. With my new weight, his feet slipped in the mud and we both stumbled backwards.

Nicholas landed on his butt in the mud.

But with me cradled against him, I landed safely in his arms.

He wore shorts, boots, and a rain jacket. The hood was down, his hair was a wet mess, sticking out in every direction.

He had never looked so handsome to me.

His golden gaze searched me over. "Are you alright?" I couldn't reply. At least, not how I

wanted to. "V-Veronica?" "Safe." Nicholas's gaze lifted to my face. "I'm more worried about you." The world was shaking... no. I was trembling. "C-cold." The warmth of his embrace was almost too much. It felt like I was hugging a burning furnace. "Tired." "I believe it. But you've done well." Well? All I did was manage to fall in a hole and stay there. Well would have been pulling myself out and not needing a rescue.

But I was too exhausted to argue. All I wanted in the whole world was a hot bath and a soft bed.

Unfortunately, as Nicholas rose, then pulled me up into the safe cradle of his

arms, I noticed we were not heading back toward the beach. Nicholas surely knew the way, so I didn't understand what he was doing.

He glanced down and saw my quizzical look.

"The storm moved in suddenly. It's a fierce one. Most of the ships have left the vicinity. I have a boat for us, but it would capsize in these waves, We'd never make it back home." So we were trapped on the island, just like I had been trapped in the hole, "We'll have to stay here tonight," Nicholas said. I strained to hear him over the torrent of water and the howl of wind that rustled through the trees.

I didn't want to stay here. I wanted a

bath and a bed. But, the positives were that I wasn't in a hole anymore, and I wasn't alone. a I Nicholas, it seemed, had risked personal injury to come and find me.

He was here with me. Even now, holding me, he was bending his shoulders forward to protect me from the worst of the pelting rain.

He was such a good man, and he seemed confident that we would survive this. I could trust him. It was so easy to.

If anyone could get us through the storm, it was Nicholas.

I curled in towards his chest, and pressed my ear right over his heart. It was pounding quickly, but strongly. He was in full survival mode.

He began walking, eyes glancing this way and that, taking in all of his surroundings. He didn't complain, didn't even utter one word, as he trekked ever forward.

The storm raged overhead. The winds were getting worse.

Shivering, I curled in tighter to Nicholas. He more fully wrapped his arms around me.

"Hold on just a little longer, Piper. Give me a bit more time to find us some shelter from this storm." I didn't know what kind of shelter there was to be found on a jungle island, but I found my answer soon enough.

Nicholas followed a trail of rocks until it surged high enough to form an

outcrop. And there, at the base, was a small cave. ) “It’s not a palace,” Nicholas said, “But it’s safe and dry.” Anything that would shield us from this torrential downpour looked like a five-star hotel to me. I clung to Nicholas tighter as he walked us there.

Chapter 0499 Nicholas carried me into the cave and then gently laid me down. With my back against the cave wall, I could sit up enough to see. If he had placed me flat on my back, I never would have had the strength to sit up on my own.

The cave itself wasn’t too deep. It didn’t go beyond a few more yards, from what I could tell. Though the shadows were thick that far in.

“I’m going to try to build us a fire,” Nicholas said. He knelt down beside me and looked me over. “Maybe find you some food. When was the last time you ate?” I couldn’t remember so I just shrugged.

The worry line between his brows  
deepened.

“I find you something to eat,” he said, more forcefully.

I didn’t have the strength to argue. My eyelids felt heavy.

Between one blink and the next, I must have fallen asleep, because when I opened my eyes again, Nicholas had built a small fire near the cave opening and was cooking what appeared to be rabbit over the flames.

My stomach grumbled. I was hungry.

But more than that, my teeth began to chatter.

Somehow Nicholas heard the clatter over the roar of the storm. Maybe he was just attuned to me. I knew that feeling. Sometimes I felt like all of my nerves and senses were focused SO

much on Nicholas, that little else mattered.

He left the meat of the fire and crossed his way back to me. Scooping me up, he brought me closer to the flames, presumably to warm me. It was too hot. I tried to push away from him, but my limbs felt like spaghetti noodles. I had too little strength.

After laying me down, Nicholas lifted his hand, pressing the back of his palm to my forehead.

“you have a fever,” he said.

He reached for me again, I continued trying to push him off. Not just because he was too hot, but because now, with my initial fear pushed down, I realized how dirty I was.

Mud and dirt covered me head to toe.

The rain had washed some of the dirt I'd previously made away from his rain jacket, yet there was still a level of grime there on his chest that I must have left there.

"Piper," Nicholas said firmly.

"I'll get you dirty," I said.

"You think I care about that?" Nicholas unzipped his jacket and tugged it off. Underneath, he had a thin t-shirt. Without missing a beat, he yanked it up over his head.

My thoughts went quiet. "Nick?" "You are freezing. The fire isn't enough." He tugged off his pants next.

"You need both heat." When he was naked he reached for me.

Gently, he eased off my damp

swimsuit. He even helped me out of my boots. 9 "I'm dirty," I said again, more weakly this time.

"I don't care," he said. He wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me against him, until he was lining my entire body with his naked own, from forehead down to my toes.

I curled into the warmth of his body and let him hold me as I drifted into unconsciousness again.

When I awoke next, our closeness had not changed, only our position.

Nicholas was resting up against the side of the cave. I was draped over his chest, limbs curled around him like an octopus.

Maybe I should have been embarrassed

The storm wasn't howling as much anymore. The winds must have died down. But the water still pelted the leaves. Our fire was dwindling, though still crackled over the wood.

Nicholas looked down and I looked up.

I felt more myself now, and he must have been able to see that.

“What happened, Piper?” he asked me.

Nicholas already knew that Veronica and I had teamed up to find his treasure before Bridget could, so I didn’t have to explain all that.

“Veronica and I were following the instructions,” I said. “I was just walking. We were counting our steps.

Then the ground opened up beneath me and I was trapped.” “A man-made trap?” Nicholas asked.

“Yes,” I said, remembering the net that had been stretched over the opening of the hole, covered with dirt and twigs and leaves to hide it.

“Veronica tried to get me out, but I was stuck. So she went to go get help.” I hesitated over the next part, debating whether I should tell him about Bridget. Whatever their romantic feelings — or lack thereof — for each other, they were friends first. I knew the truth would hurt Nicholas based on that alone.

But I couldn’t leave it out. He deserved to know.

“I saw Bridget,” I said.

Nicholas went so quiet, I wasn’t even sure if he was breathing.

“She had a rope. I asked her for help.” Nicholas waited for me to continue, not uttering one syllable. The truth was obvious now. For me to still be in that hole told the story on its own. But I decided to elaborate anyway.

“She said she would be back after she found the treasure,” I said.

“She never came back,” Nicholas replied. It wasn’t a question, but I decided to treat it like one anyway.

“No,” I said.

Nicholas arms tightened around me.

He didn’t say anything more about it,

but I could feel how furious he was by the tension in his muscles and the way his jaw locked.

Stewing in anger would solve nothing, so I tried to redirect him.

“How did you find me?” I asked.

He blinked a few times, then looked down at me again. "I had a bad feeling.

I couldn't shake it. So when the boats were heading out to collect you, I went with them. Then I saw Veronica waving her arms, frantically trying to get help." My heart warmed for my friend. She had tried her best. Unlike Bridget, she truly had stuck to her word. Veronica wasn't going to leave me behind.

"By then, the storm was showing on the radar. No one wanted to risk

coming in to get you." His eyes darkened. "But no one could stop me." Feeling stronger now, I lifted my hand and placed it to his cheek. I remembered too late, how filthy my fingers were, and began to pull back, but he caught my hand in his own and held it to his face. He leaned into it.

"Who found the treasure?" I asked.

"Bridget," he replied.

Ah. So she really did abandon me. She found her treasure, and then didn't come back to save me. It shouldn't have hurt as much as it did. Bridget was no friend of mine. But to know she would have just left me there during the storm...

I could have died.

I didn't, thank God. And now life could continue on.

But if Bridget found the treasure, that meant she was going to be the one to £0 on a romantic boat date with Nicholas.

Veronica and my plan had utterly failed.

"I'm sorry," I said. "If I hadn't of fallen in this hole..." "That wasn't your fault," Nicholas replied.

"But now Bridget has the treasure..." "Bridget has some trinket," Nicholas said. He tucked his forefinger under my chin and lifted my face so that we were looking each other in the eyes again.

I "You are my true treasure." &»

Chapter 0500 Nicholas's words struck me straight through the heart. The wrapped around me like the warmest blanket, heating me even more than Nicholas's hot body had done.

I was so very enraptured, that the only thing I could think to do, was lean forward and press my lips to his.

He tilted his head for a better angle, and then returned the kiss full- heartedly.

Yet, despite the deep feeling between us, we kept the kiss light and gentle. IT was more a bind of our hearts than of our bodies.

At least, until we pulled away and I realized our position.

We were both naked. I was essentially in Nicholas's lap, though it was more like I was draped atop of him. &» We were alone, the only two people on this entire island.

The fire crackled. The rain pelted the trees and the leaves. Yet the sound of my heartbeat was loudest, thundering in my ears.

"Nick..." Even the sound of my voice was swallowed by the beating of my heart.

Nicholas's eyes went a little wide, but then they dipped down to my lips.

He kissed me again, more passionately this time. His lips claimed mine. His tongue licked its way past my lips. I eagerly opened my mouth, accepting him.

His arms tightened around me, holding me closer. We were so close, our chests pressed together, that I swore I could feel his heart beating straight out of his chest and into mine. His was beating just as wildly as my own.

I clung to his wide shoulders, tugging as if I could bring him closer when we were already as close as could be.

Between my legs, I felt his dick twitch with interest.

I wondered if he could feel my dampness. Maybe he could smell it, or my pheromones all triggering at once.

I was interested too. Hell, interested was the mildest way of saying what I was. Truthfully, I was about to ignite.

Nicholas pushed off the cave wall and rolled us, so that I was on the floor of the cave and he was on top of me.

My skin tingled, my heart soared at this new position and the promises it made.

But then, as I blinked open my eyes to take in what would surely be the glorious sight of Nicholas hovering over me, I instead caught sight of my hand pressed against his shoulder — and the dirt crusted all around my fingernails.

“Nick,” I said, and he paused, likely sensing the hesitation in my voice. I frowned. “I’m so gross and dirty.” Nicholas shrugged. “So am I.” “You can’t possibly be attracted to me right now,” I said.

The corners of his mouth twitched upwards. “Piper, you are fucking gorgeous.” Then, as if to prove it, he lowered his mouth to mine once more and kissed the very life out of me.

By the time the kiss ended, I had no doubt of his feeling.

But I was still dirty. € He glanced down at my body. “Take a look at yourself,” he said.

I did. I saw that while my arms and legs were dirty and gross, my conservative swimsuit had protected my breasts and the apex of my thighs. It was a stark contrast, the bare clean skin that had been covered beside the dirty skin that had not.

“I have plenty of clean areas to work with,” Nicholas said, and he gave me a small grin.

All of my embarrassment fled away as { he lowered his head and sucked one of my nipples into his mouth. I combed my fingers through his hair, locking behind his head, desperate to keep his mouth right where it was. He lapped at my nipple, then traced small circles around it with his insistent tongue.

God, his mouth was fire, and I was burning. It felt so fucking good, I was sure to ignite.

When he was satisfied with one nipple, he popped off of it. A trail of spit connected his lip to my breast. It broke when he repositioned himself over my other breast, and lowered to give that nipple the same treatment.

I threw my head back against the dirt floor. I arched my back, desperate for

him to take more, to take as much as he could. His arms slid under my back, keeping me arched. This put my breasts directly on display for him, like my nipples were on a platter, ready to be devoured.

“Nick...oh...” I thought he might try to make me cum like this. I could have, probably.

But then he popped off that nipple too.

Looking down at him, I caught sight of his mischievous smile. It was unusual for him. He was truly letting himself go. My heart kicked into overdrive once again.

He removed his arms from behind my back, then lifted himself up to his knees. He inched backwards.

My heart jumped in anticipation.

“Nick...” “We’re alone, Piper,” he said. His voice was lust rough and deep. “Be as loud as you can. I want to hear you screaming for me.” Fresh dampness spilled out from my pussy. He licked his lips.

“You like that too?” he said. “We always have to be so quiet. Not this time.” We did always have to be quiet, not wanting anyone to overhear us.

Sneaking around was hot sometimes, but there were so many more times when I wanted to scream out my pleasure.

We always had to have some constraints. We could never fully lose ourselves.

But here. Alone on this island, with the { rain dampening all other sounds, no one for miles around would be able to hear me.

“Not this time,” I agreed, breathy and desperate.

“Let me hear you then. Tell me how good this feels.” “Nick »n He lowered his head with intense focus. He licked out his tongue, and lapped at my pussy. He hummed, then licked deeper, sweeping his tongue inside of me.

“Ah! Nick!” He was relentless, licking and sucking at me like a thirsty man finally finding a drink of water. Then he kissed his way up to my clit, and sucked the tiny bud into his mouth.

“Oh, God! Ah! AH!” My pleasure heightened. My pussy clamped. Even my hard nipples ached.

Everything was so intense, like pleasure overload. And all the while, I voiced my joy, screaming myself hoarse.

“Nicholas!!” My noises only egged him on. He grabbed my ass and lifted me so that he could more easily take his fill of me.

I thrashed my head back and forth. I clawed my fingers into the dirt of the ground, unable to find purchase.

Frustrated, I grabbed my breasts instead. I pinched my nipples as he pleased me, adding to the intensity of the feeling.

I didn’t care about dirt anymore. I was far too gone for that.

I could only feel Nicholas's tongue.

Could only know his hot mouth.

Could only scream his name, again and again, until the pleasure finally crossed the precipice, and I crashed over onto the other side.

"Nick!!" My body trembled and shook. He held me through it all, licking at me until it was so sensitive that I ached and squirmed away.

As he lowered my ass back to the ground, I took in the state of him. His

lips were red, his chin glossy with spit.

I trailed my gaze down his body to where I knew his erection was, only to find that he had spent all over the floor of the cave.

He looked me right in the eyes, unashamed. "Your noises are so fucking hot." Then he kissed me, and I was in heaven again.