

The Luna Choosing Game #Chapter 541 - Read The Luna Choosing Game Chapter 541

Chapter 0541 'But I thought...' My voice trailed. My brain was having a hard time processing Nicholas's words, especially since my body was already kicking into overdrive. My core was getting hot and wet. I pressed my thighs tight together for friction. "Before you said..." I m It was hard to remember now. I forced myself to concentrate so that I could think back. I remembered we'd ~ had a fight about this. I didn't want to jump past something he'd felt so strongly about before. I "You were worried I'd get pregnant," I said, remembering. I doubted that fear just up and went away. r "We'll be careful," he said. He leaned closer to me. "I have a condom."

I furrowed my brow. "Why do you have a condom?" Had he been anticipating this? "This isn't a sudden decision, Piper.

I'd been thinking about it ever since our argument that day. I kept wondering why I was holding myself back from something that we both wanted." He shook his head, looking for all the world like he thought his "We'll be careful," he said again. "And ~ if things happen, we'll deal with it together. I'm not afraid of that future anymore." da I lal My heart picked up speed, i jackhammering in my chest. He wasn't afraid of a future where he and I had a child? Hope creeped out from the dark recesses of my mind. I didn't want to let it have too much free reign. This didn't necessarily mean

that Nicholas wanted to jump into a future with me.

But it was difficult to keep my hope on a tight leash, when it was pulling so very hard at my heartstrings.

Nicholas searched my face. "We don't have to if you don't want to." "I want to," I said quickly. I'd wanted to for months.

I wanted Nicholas to have my virginity. Even if we eventually went our separate ways, he was the only one I wanted to lay claim to this special moment. When I looked back at my life, I would only find relief knowing that such a good, earnest, attractive man I cared about so very much had been my first.

He was my first and best love. He might as well be my first and best lover too.

In an instant, Nicholas surged forward and kissed me. He cupped my cheek with his hand and tilted back by face, positioning me how he wanted me to deepen the kiss.

He licked his tongue past the seal of my lips. I opened them farther, letting him have as much access as he wished. Whatever he wanted. It was all for him. «I i dr We kissed passionately, with I Nicholas leaning more and more into me. Until we both knocked somewhat off-balance and had to catch y ourselves before fallin g off the tree.

Nicholas hopped down first, then reached up and, holding my legs, I helped me down from the tree too. I stood before him, looking up at him with wide, trusting eyes. I He looked back with something like

adoration. It was so warm, so comforting. I felt like I was being wrapped up in a blanket = while also being lit aflame from within.

Then, Nicholas grabbed the hem of his shirt and pulled it up and over his head. He held it to his side for a moment as I greedily took in the sight of his bare chest. So many muscles.

"You can touch," he reminded me, and I moved my hands forward at once, eager to feel every line of hard muscle. He grinned at me, and it made him look younger. Carefree. In love. Much as he had been when we had been dating the first time. "So can I." He tossed his shirt aside, grabbed me by the hips, and yanked me closer.

"Let's get this off of you," he said. In a flurry of deft fingers and flying clothes, I suddenly found myself

standing there naked.

Behind Nicholas, the ocean pushed water into the small pool. Beneath our feet, sand tickled our toes. All around us were trees granting us privacy and protecting us from any onlookers.

The only person who could see me naked was Nicholas. That was how I wanted it.

Chapter 0542

"One second," Nicholas said and stepped back from me, even as his gaze inspected and appreciated every square inch of my exposed skin, particularly my breasts and the apex of my thighs. It wasn't anything he hadn't seen before, but every time he saw it, he looked as hungry and lustful as the first.

Nicholas found his shirt and grabbing it, shook out all of the sand. Then he gently laid it down over a soft sandy patch like a beach blanket. He held out his hand. When I accepted it, he led me down so that my most private part was protected from the sand by the barrier of his shirt.

I leaned back. My head was in the sand, but I was otherwise protected from shoulder to mid-thigh. Nicholas inspected it all, making sure I'd be safe. Then he lowered his mouth to my breast and without warning, began sucking and lapping at my nipple.

I combed my fingers through his hair, tugging a little at the strands but not pulling away. I didn't want him going anywhere. Well. At least not until a few moments later, when my

other nipple was feeling neglected. He didn't need direction though. He kissed his way to the other nipple and lavished it with equal attention.

From his pants pocket, he produced a condom wrapper. He placed it on my stomach. "For safekeeping," he said. Then he stood and unbuttoned his pants. He slid them down his legs and then kicked them away.

God, his dick was so big. It was hard, twitching. He gripped it with his hand and began to stroke, even as he dropped to his knees.

"Spread your legs," he told me. I happily obliged.

He fit himself into the space that I made. Then he reached for the condom. He put the edge between his teeth and ripped open the wrapper. He pulled out the condom and then slid it over his large cock.

I watched with fascination and rampant lust.

I was wet and ready. He'd driven me wild by lavishing my nipples with such attention. I wanted more now. I wanted everything.

"It might hurt," he said.

"I'm ready."

*Just try to stay relaxed. I'll go slow."

He lined himself up, the head of his dick near my entrance. I took a breath, trying to keep relaxed. Then, true to his word, he slowly, slowly entered me.

My body stretched to accommodate. He was so big, and the stretch hurt a little.

My face must have scrunched up in pain because he stilled.

"Keep going." I told him. "I'm getting used to it."

He leaned down and gently kissed me. Then he began moving again. When he slid in all the way to the hilt, he stopped and let me adjust.

I felt so... full, in a way I never had before. He'd used his fingers to touch me in this same way before, but it had not been like this. He was touching every part of me, entirely filling me up. Update first at [NôvelDráma. Org](#).

And as the initial soreness passed, I realized it felt damn incredible.

"I'm ready," I said.

"Tell me if it's too much," he replied. He started to pull his hips back. Then, right as he was about to fully exit me, he thrust back in. His ministrations were slow at first, but as I continued to adjust, and my grunts became moans, his pace increased.

Soon, he was jackhammering into me, his hips thrusting and rolling and oh God, it all felt so good, I'd thought I'd died for sure.

I clung onto his shoulders. I wrapped my legs around his thighs, urging him closer, faster, harder, more, more,

more.

I moved my body with his, arching up into him. His mouth found my neck and he left mark after mark.

"Nick..." I moaned, then bit myself off. We had to be quiet. We had the privacy for now, but too loud and someone would hear.

I wasn't going to last much longer like this. Everything felt too good. I had no idea sex could feel like this.

I clawed down Nicholas's back. He grunted into my neck.

Then we both toppled over into blissful oblivion.

Chapter 0543

Nicholas kept his arms wrapped tightly around me as I slowly returned back to myself. It took a good long while for my heartrate to return to normal, and even longer for my breathing.

I was sore from having lost my virginity, but pleasantly so. It wasn't overly painful. It felt more like an... awareness. As if I could feel Nicholas's dick - or the phantom of it - stretching inside of me. I knew the feeling would not last, so I didn't mind it while it stayed.

I wanted the reminder of what we'd done. I never wanted to forget the tenderness of our lovemaking. Nicholas had been so soft and caring, as well as wild and passionate, that I genuinely doubted I would ever feel like this again.

Nicholas felt like my perfect match mind, body, and soul. Despite Julian's encouragement, I knew we were doomed to be apart. And it hurt so much that my heart ached much more than my body did.

We stayed, wound together, as long as we could. Yet as the sun continued to cross over the sky, I knew very well what we were doing was hiding. And we couldn't really do that all day.

As much as I wanted to.

"We have to leave soon," Nicholas said, though he did not loosen his hold on me even a miniscule amount.

I burrowed closer against his chest. "Are you sure?"

He kissed the top of my head. "As much as I'd love to say differently, we'll be noticed if we stay longer. And we'd be in worse shape if someone comes looking for us."

I groaned. He was right, and I knew it. But I had evolved into a goo form and I wasn't keen on becoming a solid again.

Nicholas rubbed his hands down my back and across my arms. With his gentle coaxing, I finally released my octopus-like grip from around him.

I grumbled as he rolled me away, back onto the cushion of his discarded clothing. He stood without me and went searching for the articles of my clothes that had gotten cast aside. My bra had somehow gotten caught on one of the palms of the tree.

When he wrangled together all of my clothes, he brought them back to me. He deposited them on the ground beside me. Then he pressed a hand to my cheek, tilted my head toward his, and kissed me.

"You'll earn another kiss once you're dressed," he said with his lips still pressing to mine.

I smiled against them. Then I darted forward, trying to steal a second kiss. He was quicker though, and leaned back and away before I could.

I groaned in displeasure. He pointed at my clothes.

Rolling my eyes, I started to obey and slowly pulled my clothes back on. When I was dressed, he grabbed my hands and yanked me up to my feet. As soon as I was upright, he pulled me into his arms and kissed me.

My arms wrapped around him. It was a fun change of pace, me being fully clothed while he was fully naked. Unfortunately, we didn't really have time to pursue anything further than kissing. Someday, I hoped, we could rectify this by giving this specific scenario another try.

The thought startled me. Next time?

Only a handful of hours ago, I had thought that my time with Nicholas had been drawing to a close. I was so certain that I would be eliminated at the next elimination ceremony, despite the reassurances of both Julian and Nicholas.

But now, my hope was overwhelming, like it had a stranglehold on me and wasn't about to let go. Part of it was surely my wolf, who was so happy inside of me that she was practically purring.

Nicholas and I had shared something today that felt life-changing. Earth-moving.

Nothing had truly changed, yet everything felt different.

"I have to get dressed now," Nicholas said and kissed me again. I wrapped my arms around his neck, hoping to hold onto him for just a few more minutes yet. He indulged me, seemingly as love-sick as I was.

Chapter 0544

Eventually, though, we both gave in to our more mature impulses and separated so Nicholas could get dressed. He slipped on his shorts, and then held up the shirt that had been our blanket.

It was almost certainly ruined: wrinkled and covered in sand, with a few mystery wet spots here and there. He rolled it up into a tight ball and held it in his hand.

I lifted a brow at him.

"I think I'd only generate more questions by wearing this as it is," he said.

Yeah, he was probably right.

Back home, the two of us returning from somewhere with him being shirtless would have people wondering, but here, we were surrounded by beach and ocean. Sunbathing could be a perfectly logical explanation for his state of dress - or rather, undress.

No one should really think better of it.

Julian would, of course, because he'd already suspected what was going to happen. Bridget might as well, especially now that she knew the truth of Nicholas's and my intimacy. But frankly, at this particular moment, I couldn't be asked to care about what she thought.

I didn't want to bother thinking about her at all.

Nicholas kissed me again, then he pulled back with a sigh. "Let's get going or I'll keep you here forever."

That threat was tempting, but... Well, at the very least, I needed to check in with Elva, make sure she was okay.

I nodded, and we pulled apart. Side by side, we walked out of the alcove and around the beach. We went the opposite way from the deck where most likely everyone else had gathered. Near the front of the house, we passed the runway. There was a plane on it.

Nicholas reached out and touching my arm, stopped me.

The front door of the house opened. Selma appeared, with Charlotte behind her. Three more servants, larger men, walked around Charlotte: one at either side of her and then one behind. Update first at NôvelDrâma. Org.

"Charlotte!" I called. I pulled my arm from Nicholas's hold - which wasn't overly difficult. He must have let me go. Then I rushed forward.

Charlotte turned her head to look at me, even as the other servants kept her ever moving forward.

Selma also noticed my approach. She barked orders to the others to keep going, then hurried to intercept me. "Remember the quarantine!" Selma said. She held out her arms, blocking my path. She was slighter than me, I could have likely overtaken her. But that didn't seem appropriate. Even if I did, even if I fought all of them, Charlotte wouldn't be allowed to stay. In that case, we'd both have to leave.

But it hurt, losing one of the few allies I had here, especially when I had no idea what the King had planned for me next.

Nicholas quickly moved to my side. He didn't touch me again, but he stood silently beside me in solidarity. I was thankful for his presence.

Charlotte looked at me until she was loaded onto the plane and physically couldn't see me anymore. With the plane loaded up, she closed the door, and then, a little while later, the plane took off and eventually disappeared.

I stayed there, watching, for as long as I could. Nicholas kept guard beside me.

Selma watched also, standing on my other side now. She was the first to leave.

After a time, Nicholas and I started walking toward the house again. As soon as we went inside, we were

approached by Nathan.

"There you are," he said. I worried he might ask where we'd been, but he didn't say a word about that. "Come out to the deck. We're having a meeting."

"About what?" Nicholas asked. I was glad he did. If I had asked, I would not have received an answer.

Nathan looked between us both. "We're holding one more event before we leave the island."

My mind reeled. I couldn't imagine what another event might be. To me, personally, I was still trying to recover from the previous events, including the treasure hunt on the island where I had fallen into that pit as well as the social event with the merfolk that nearly ended in an international incident.

However, this was the nature of the competition. Events were commonplace. It wasn't as if I could back out simply because I was tired.

Nicholas and I acknowledged that we understood Nathan's direction. As Nathan walked away, Nicholas walked with me to the stairs.

There, holding his shirt for me to see, he said, "I'm going to change. I'll meet you out there."

I smiled at him and nodded. It was very difficult not to kiss him again. I so very dearly wanted to. But with cameras, other candidates, and servants around every turn, we couldn't dare to follow that impulse.

Nicholas dashed up the stairs two at a time. When he was gone from sight, I continued walking down the hallway toward the deck.

Outside, the other candidates and Julian were sitting down on a group of chairs circled around each other.

Veronica had her nose in the book she had borrowed from the merfolk. Julian sat beside her, his seat pulled close, and was looking over her shoulder.

Jessica and Bridget sat side by side, chatting.

"It won't be another volleyball event, will it?" Jessica asked nervously. She hadn't had the best showing during our last volleyball game.

Bridget hummed thoughtfully. "It could be," she said, "But I don't think Nathan and the others would plan two of the same kind of event so closely together."

There were two open seats left in the bunch. One between Julian and Jessica, or one between Veronica and Bridget. Wherever I sat, Nicholas would have to sit in the opposite. With that in mind, I took the open seat beside Bridget.

She gave me a big smile as I sat down, though her eyes were so cold that I shivered.

As we continued to sit, waiting for Nicholas and Nathan, I glanced out at the ocean. Down on the beach, Elva was building sandcastles with her nanny.

Elva carried a red pail and a matching plastic shovel. Under the nanny's direction, she made sure the bucket was wet, then scooped up a bunch of sand. The nanny then helped Elva to flip it upside down. When they lifted the pail, most of the sand mound stuck together. Though some did tumble down.

Elva seemed so happy anyway, laughing and clapping. I was thrilled she was enjoying her time at the beach. We'd never been before. She'd never made anything like sandcastles in her life. Update first at NôvelDrâma. Org.

I really wanted to go out there and join her.

First, though, I had to sit through this meeting.

Soon, Nicholas came out in a fresh t-shirt and shorts. No one outwardly commented on his change of clothes. Likely no one noticed, although Bridget did give me a quick, sharp look that I saw from the corner of my eye. However, when I turned to see, she looked away from me.

*Jessica," Bridget said. "Why don't you move over to make room for Nicholas?"

Jessica's brow drew together in confusion, but she began to stand anyway.

*Stay where you are, Jessica," Julian said. "Nicholas is perfectly capable of sitting in this chair."

Jessica sat back down, apparently ranking the command of a prince over the suggestion of a celebrity. Her face twisted with distress. It likely wasn't an easy choice for her.

Nicholas came closer and immediately took the empty seat. If he heard the exchange with Jessica, he didn't make any indication that he did.

Julian smirked non-too-kindly at Bridget, who pouted ever so slightly. That dissatisfied look immediately vanished, though, when Nathan and the camera crew stepped out onto the deck. Bridget was all smiles then.

Chapter 0546

The camera crew set up around the small circle of chairs while Nathan stepped inside of it.

Everyone waited until the crew indicated that they were ready. Nathan gave them a signal, and little red lights turned on, on the cameras.

Nathan clicked on his own false persona then, smiling for the camera and talking way too loud and fast. "We are here on the royal getaway island about to reveal the next event."

"What could it be?" Bridget gasped dramatically. A camera closed in on her, which put the camera man right in front of me. I guessed I wasn't going to make the cut for the broadcast today.

Nathan continued, "A race."

Bridget started to clap.

Julian rolled his eyes. Beside him, Veronica was still reading. Nicholas's frown deepened slightly. Jessica looked pale.

I didn't know how to feel.

*The race will be a combination of both swimming and running along a preassigned course starting on the beach," Nathan said. "This will test your athletic prowess. A Luna must always be in peak physical condition to overcome all the hurdles she must face in her day to day."

I caught my frown at the last second and schooled my face into something more neutral. The current Luna wasn't someone I would call in peak physical condition. I didn't mean that as an insult. I just wasn't sure I'd want to be her running mate in a triathlon or anything.

But to say so would be treason, so I held my tongue.

"I'm so excited," Bridget said, looking at the camera. "Like the Luna, as an actor, I also need to keep my physique in peak form. Some of the roles can certainly be challenging. I truly feel as if I will excel in this event."

Nathan nodded at Bridget. Then he, and the cameras, turned to Jessica.

Jessica stared back for a minute, until Nathan made a gesture to indicate she should be talking.

*I, uh... I'm not particularly athletic... I have other qualities..." She lowered her head. "But I'll do my best."

Nathan and the cameras went around the circle. They skipped over Nicholas and Julian and landed on Veronica.

Veronica still hadn't looked up from her book. I wasn't sure she had listened to Nathan at all. Did she even know what the event was?

Nathan cleared his throat, but Veronica didn't lift her gaze. After another couple of disinterested minutes, Nathan forced the cameras away, turning them instead to me. Update first at [NôvelDráma. Org](#).

If this had happened before I had been reconnected with Miracle, my wolf, I might have had some concern about what was about to happen. As a human, I never would have been able to compete in a race with those who had wolves.

But now that Miracle was restored to me, I knew I had a shot.

I wasn't sure I was as athletic as Bridget, but I was dead set on not letting her win easily.

"I think I have a real chance at winning," I said to the cameras. Nathan's expression relaxed slightly. He was probably relieved that I said anything, unlike Veronica.

The cameras came back to Nathan, and he ended the broadcast by telling the audience when and where to watch repeats of previous events, as well as when to watch this new one.

The race, it seemed, was to happen tomorrow.

That gave hardly any time to prepare.

As soon as the cameras were off, Nicholas hopped to his feet and approached me. "I need to speak with you."

I stood and walked with him down to the far end of the deck where we couldn't be overheard. Bridget glared at me when no one else was looking, but I pretended not to notice.

"What's wrong?" I asked Nicholas.

Nicholas wore a heavy-set frown.

"Piper," he said. "You have to forfeit this event."

Chapter 0547

Forfeit? Why in the world would Nicholas want me to back out of an event I had a good shot at winning?

My face must have revealed my confusion and displeasure. His own features immediately softened, but his frown did not ebb.

He lowered his voice even though we were far from the others. He must have wanted to be doubly sure we were not overheard. "You have been sabotaged since you arrived on this island. And we know for a fact, my parents are behind it. You really think they will let you compete without trying something?"

Oh. In my excitement, I hadn't considered what they might do. I hadn't forgotten, exactly. More like, I had pushed it to the back of my brain to deal with more immediate thoughts.

But now that he had pointed it out, yes, I understood there were major points of concern here. But I couldn't just forfeit!

"Do you really think they'd try something during the race?" I asked. "I'd be swimming out in the ocean? How would they manage that?"

"I don't know, but I'm worried," he said.

To sabotage me while I'm out in the water, they would risk killing me. "You don't think they'd...?" I hoped he knew what I was trying to say, because I really did not want to give voice to my fears. To say them aloud might make them come true.

Fortunately, Nicholas knew me well, so he knew what I was trying to say. "I do not think they intend to harm you physically, or... worse." He probably didn't want to give voice to it either. "But after what happened on the island, I don't think you should take any chances."

"You think they were responsible for the pit?" I still wasn't sure what I thought. It seemed like it would have been a difficult prospect to plan, but if Nicholas thought they might have done it, maybe it wasn't so outlandish after all.

"I'm not ruling anything out," he said. "I don't want to believe they could be capable of doing such harm to you. Maybe with the pit, if they had been responsible, they only meant to waylay you. Or maybe they had been hoping Bridget would save you and make herself look good. I don't know."

I hadn't considered that. Was that why she had been given the rope, while the rest of us went without any supplies? She was supposed to play the part of the heroine?

Well, she royally failed there.

"But if they were responsible, even if they hadn't meant you to be harmed down there, you still almost died. If they attempt something while you are in the water, their carelessness could lead to you... drowning," he said the last word like it physically pained him. "It's not worth it, Piper."

The word drowning sunk into me and held me down as well. Of course, I didn't want to die or risk dying. But we were only talking about hypotheticals. If the King and Queen arranged the pit, and if they try something so similarly careless now.

Forfeiting this event would drop me in the rankings. I wasn't certain what the next elimination ceremony was going to look like, but with my ranking so low to start, could I really afford to back out of this event? All for hypotheticals?

*I'm not sure I have alternatives," I said.

Nicholas stepped closer. His voice was even more urgent. "This competition isn't worth your life."

"We don't know if they are even planning something for this event. They could just think Bridget will legitimately beat me." Which seemed like a real possibility.

Bridget was used to exercising, and she had her wolf for a very long time. For years, working was my work-out, and Miracle and I sometimes still struggled to get on the same page. Despite effort on both our parts, we were still out of sync much of the time.

It was getting better, though. Update first at [NôvelDráma](#). Org.

There were other factors to consider too.

Being intimate with Nicholas had rekindled hope inside of me that maybe we actually had a chance at a future together. Wasn't that something worth fighting for? Maybe even worth dying for?

"I'm sorry, Nick," I said. "I understand your concern but this is something I have to do." Nicholas opened his mouth to argue, so I hurried on before he could. "I have to prove to everyone that I'm capable. I can't keep hiding behind you all of the time. I have to stand on my own."

*No one thinks you do that," Nicholas said. "Besides, I'm happy to protect you."

"But you shouldn't need to. Let me do this, Nick. Please. Let me prove myself."

I didn't need his permission, but I would have felt a hell of a lot better if I had it.

His frown was deep, and a worry line formed between his brows. He wasn't happy about this, that much was clear, but I refused to back down. I had something to prove. I needed to prove it.

"I won't stand in your way," he said at last. That was as much of a consent as I was ever going to get from him. I accepted it. I'd take whatever I could get.

A few moments later, Nicholas had to go inside to attend to a few things, so we split ways. I went down to the beach to find Elva. When I arrived there, she'd been joined by Julian. The nanny had stepped back a few feet.

"Every sandcastle needs a moat," Julian said, and helped Elva dig out around the outside of her castle. Then, carrying her bucket, she rushed down to the shore, scooped up some water, and hurried back to fill the moat.

"It's gorgeous," I told her and Elva beamed proudly. I sat down beside her in the sand and pulled her into a hug. "I want to live in a castle," Elva said.

"Oh?" Julian asked. "What kind of castle?"

Elva shrugged. "I don't want to go home."

Her words made me frown. "Back to our apartment."

Elva kept her eyes on the ground as she nodded.

"Anna's there," I reminded her.

"I miss Aunt Anna," she said.

"Me too," I said. I tilted my head. "But you still want a castle?"

Elva nodded again.

My heart ached. Elva didn't want to go back to our life in that apartment. But then, neither did I.

This filled me with even more determination. If I could do well in the race, maybe I could improve my ranking. And

if my ranking went high enough, then maybe the royal family would have to acknowledge me as an actual

contender.

And then maybe I actually stood a chance at becoming Nicholas's bride.

And if I could become Nicholas's Luna, then I could secure a happy future for all three of us.

I couldn't make promises to Elva that I couldn't keep, so I just held her closely and hoped within my heart that I

could give her a life she could be happy in.

"I'd like to live in a castle, too," I admitted.

No sooner had I said it, then Bridget approached.

Maybe she wasn't paying attention. Her gaze did seem to be on the ocean.

"Hey!" Julian called, but it was too late.

Bridget trampled straight over Elva's castle.

Chapter 0548

"My castle!" Elva cried out.

Bridget stopped walking. She looked down. She was standing over the carnage, the complete and total

destruction of Elva's sand castle under Bridget's own feet.

"Oops," she said with a small laugh. "Sorry about that."

Elva looked at the scene with large, vulnerable eyes. The longer she looked, unblinking, the more her eyes filled with tears, until they finally spilled out and fell down her cheeks.

My heart absolutely broke at the sight.

Julian jumped up to his feet. "What the hell, Bridget? You can't watch where you were going? You had the entire beach to walk around this."

He was right. Aside from Elva's sandcastle, there were no other impediments either close to the water or nearer the deck.

"It was an accident, Julian," Bridget said. Her smile slipped some. She looked annoyed now, especially as Elva began to cry in earnest.

I held Elva to me. She turned her face into my shoulder. Her tears made my shirt wet.

*You made Elva cry," Julian said. He wasn't smiling anymore either. His eyes were fierce, his words sharp.

Bridget crossed her arms over her chest. "It's just a sandcastle. What's the big deal?*

"Elva worked hard on it," I said. I struggled to keep my anger from my own voice.

Bridget snorted another laugh. "She didn't work that hard on it."

*She did!" I snapped.

Julian narrowed his eyes at Bridget. "What are you trying to say?"

Bridget ignored me. Her glare now was for Julian. "It wasn't even a good sandcastle. It looked like a sand mound. You can't expect me to go out of my way avoid every mound of sand."

Holding Elva against me, I immediately stood up. "Bridget," I said, my anger flaring.

She looked at me, surprised. Update first at [NôvelDráma. Org.](#)

*Be mean to me all you want, but leave Elva out of it. She's an innocent little girl," I said.

"What part of 'accident' don't you guys understand?" Bridget said. She whined a little, as if she was the victim here.

I didn't understand why she was acting like this, until I heard Nathan behind me.

"Don't record this," Nathan said.

I turned around to see Nathan pushing down a camera.

"Let them see!" Bridget called for Nathan. "Piper was being rude to me without cause."

Nathan shook his head.

Bridget didn't like being ignored. "Nathan. Turn the cameras back on." She stormed past Julian and me, rushing toward Nathan.

Nathan seemed set on disregarding her totally.

But then she raised her voice. "Nathan!"

Nathan turned to her and snapped, "You made a little girl cry!"

Bridget straightened, likely not having expected to be yelled at.

The camera crew left first with Nathan behind. Bridget, huffing slightly, hurried behind them. "Nathan! Nathan come back here and talk to me about this!"

With the cameras, Nathan, and Bridget's absence, Julian turned to me and sighed.

"They're trying to protect Bridget's image, but it's starting to crack," he said. "They can only keep the veneer up for so long. I'm such an idiot. I can't believe that I wore my blinders for so long about who she really is."

"You saw what you wanted to see," I said.

"The fantasy." He shook his head. "I was a fool."

Slowly, Elva's heavy tears slowly dried up. She continued to hold onto me as she turned her head on my shoulder and peeked at Julian

"You okay, kiddo?" Julian asked her.

She sniffled. "My castle."

"I'll help you build another one tomorrow," Julian said. "It will be even better than this one, okay?"

Elva didn't seem fully convinced. "...Okay." Her response was hesitant.

Julian gave me a sad sort of look, like he wasn't sure what to do to cheer Elva up. I wasn't sure either, but I figured getting out of the sand was a good idea.

Chapter 0549

I turned and carried Elva toward the deck. Julian stayed behind, looking down at the mess that was once Elva's castle.

I had thought he would have followed me. I felt bad now. I should have said goodbye. But, hauling Elva around, I didn't really want to go back and forth.

Julian would understand. We'd catch up again later.

Up on the deck, Veronica had moved into the shade near the bar to continue reading. The shade seemed like a good idea, so I carried Elva over there.

"How's it going, Veronica?" I asked as we came close. "Anything interesting in there?"

Veronica glanced up from the book, the first time I had seen her do so all day. "It's..." Her voice trailed when her gaze shifted to Elva. "What happened?"

*She kicked my castle," Elva sniffled.

"Who did?"

*Bridget," I said, and when Veronica looked back at me, I gently shook my head, indicating that we probably shouldn't talk about this right now.

Veronica nodded. She understood. Then she glanced around. Reaching out, she grabbed a napkin off the bar. It was a sturdy kind of napkin, the kind that kept its shape as it was folded.

Veronica folded it, origami, until it was a cute little bird.

*Hold out your hands," she said to Elva.

Elva did as Veronica asked. Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

Veronica placed the folded bird in her hands. She closed her eyes.

I blinked. Elva gasped. I looked down at Elva's hand and she was now holding the bird. Veronica had teleported it! She was getting better at that. She'd moved the bird with so little time and effort. She didn't seem winded at all, unlike when she had first begun trying to teleport objects.

"That was amazing, Veronica," I said. "Wasn't it, Elva?"

Elva held the folded bird with both hands. Her eyes were wide. "Hold did you do that?"

Veronica smiled a little, at the corner of her mouth. For a smile from Veronica, it was huge. She was practically beaming.

Elva laughed. "Let me down, Mommy. I want to play."

I lowered her down. Elva began to run across the deck, lifting and lowering the bird as though it was flying. Veronica continued to smile a moment, before it dimmed. She looked at me. "There's something I'd like to try, Piper. If it's okay with you."

I trusted Veronica with my life, but when she said it like that, I felt a little worried. "If it's not dangerous..."

"It's not." Veronica turned to Elva. "Elva, come here a moment. I have another trick."

"A trick?" Elva said excitedly. She clutched her folded bird to her chest and ran closer.

Veronica directed Elva to stand right in front of her. She placed her hand on Elva's forehead, and then closed her eyes. Under her breath, Veronica said a few words in a language I didn't understand. Merfolk maybe? I wasn't sure.

Elva leaned on one foot to the other. She seemed impatient and bored. She likely wanted the magic trick to be instant. For a three-year-old, even two minutes could feel like forever.

She didn't have to wait much longer than that, however.

Because all of the sudden, Elva began to glow. It wasn't just her skin, but like an aura all around her, glowing purple and bright.

Elva held up her hands and laughed hard.

"Wow, Veronica!" I said excitedly. She could make people glow now? What kind of magic was this?

I thought Veronica would be pleased at a successful magic trick, but when she opened her eyes and took in the sight, she wasn't happy at all.

Instead, her face grew grave with concern.

And my stomach twisted unpleasantly in response.

What was it about Elva glowing purple that would have her look so dire?

Chapter 550

Elva glanced up at Veronica and her laughter stifled. "What's wrong?" she asked.

Veronica startled a little, then tried to smile again. It wasn't as big as before. It barely twitched her lip, and certainly did not meet her eyes.

"Nothing's wrong," Veronica said. "I'm glad you liked the trick."

"How long does it last?" I asked, though as soon as the words left my mouth Elva's purple glow began to fade.

"Aww," Elva said, looking at her hands. "Do it again!"

"Elva, honey," I scolded lightly. "We don't demand things from people."

"I'm tired now," Veronica said. "Maybe another time."

Elva tucked her chin down, disappointed. But she said, "Okay."

*Thank Veronica for the magic trick," I reminded Elva.

Elva kicked her feet on the ground. "Thank you..." she mumbled.

"You're welcome," Veronica said.

Elva lifted her folded bird again. She glanced at me, as if for permission.

"Go on," I said. "Have fun."

Nearby I saw the nanny coming up onto the deck. Elva saw her too, and ran toward her, holding up the folded bird. With Elva thoroughly distracted, I turned to Veronica, looking for an explanation. "What just happened?"

Veronica took a breath. "That magic trick' was actually an incantation I read about in this book." She motioned toward the merfolk book on the top of the bar. "The book contains many sections on curses and how to properly evaluate and remove them."

My heartbeat kicked up and I perked up. She said 'remove them'! That should be exciting, a great sign! If the book talked about how to remove the curse, then maybe we didn't need to wait for the oracle to appear again after all.

Except, Veronica looked anything but happy about this.

"Isn't that good news?" I asked, because looking at Veronica, I was really unsure.

Veronica frowned. "The purpose of the incantation is to show the nature of Elva's curse and the magical power level needed to remove it. It's easier, of course, if the person who made the curse removes it."

"But that won't happen," I said. Jane was the one to make the curse, on her own daughter no less. I'd come to accept that Jane would never come around, not to help herself or anyone else. If left to Jane, the curse on Elva would stay forever.

"Yes," Veronica said. Content belong to NôvelDrâma. Org.

*So... purple. Is that good?" I was beginning to suspect that it wasn't.

"No," Veronica said flatly. I supposed I appreciated her bluntness. She was never one for false hope. Although in this case, it pulled my heart out a little. I wanted her to say purple was the best color, that it indicated a curse easiest to cure.

*Purple is the most intricate of the curses," Veronica said. "It will require the highest amount of magical power to remove."

Highest amount of power? Veronica was the only one I knew who could do any magic.

"Could you remove her curse?" I asked.

Veronica's frown deepened. "No. Not by far." She sighed. "What I do is mere child's play compared to what is needed."

My stomach dropped down to the ground. Any false hope I had built up for myself crashed and burned all around me. It was my own fault. I should have known from Veronica's expressions that the diagnosis was not very good. "I'm sorry," Veronica said.

"Oh, no. No, no," I said quickly. "This isn't on you at all."

"If I were stronger-"

"You are enough, Veronica." I inched closer to her. I dipped my head into her line of vision so she could see my face and know that I'm earnest. "We wouldn't even know any of this if it weren't for you."

She shook her head, clearly dissatisfied with herself. I couldn't talk. I knew exactly how it felt to not believe you were enough.

"We need the merfolk oracle," Veronica said. "She's the only one with enough power to have a chance."

The oracle had said she would appear again to me when I had removed doubt from my heart. I wanted to arrive, to help Elva, but I still didn't know if I could fully trust her. The oracle was a stranger. This magic was foreign, even to Veronica. How could I be certain I could trust her?

"I'll keep reading," Veronica said. "I've only just started. Maybe there's more I can do."

*Thank you," I told her, and meant it from the bottom of my heart. I hoped she knew how much I appreciated her. I wasn't sure she would until Elva was completely curse-free.

Veronica returned to her book, and I walked off a little ways, wanting to give her some space. I looked out over the water. The view was pretty good from the deck.

Behind me, Elva called, "Nick-lass! Look at my birdie!" She showed her folded bird to Nicholas, who had just stepped out onto the deck from the house. She explained in her roundabout child way that Veronica had made it and given it to her, and that she loved it and its name was now Frank.

"Hello, Frank," Nicholas said to the bird.

Elva's attention waned fairly quickly after that and she rushed over to a pile of napkins in an attempt to replicate the bird. Unfortunately, Veronica didn't notice to be able to help. The nanny did the best she could though.

With Elva distracted, Nicholas made his way over to me. Together we stood side by side. We both turned to look out over the water.

"I needed to cool down," Nicholas said. "I'm sorry."

I knew he was feeling protective from our discussion, but I didn't think he had anything to be sorry about. "I'm not mad that you want to keep me safe."

"I wish there was a way I could let you be free while also protect you from all these people who mean to do you harm," he said. Before I could reply, he added, "I know it's unlikely."

"Nick."

"Piper." He turned toward me. He was maybe a foot away from me. It seemed too close, too intimate. The others would see. They would know, surely, what we were to each other. Could they tell just from the way we looked at each other now, that we'd had sex?

I trembled slightly, remembering the feel of his body against mine. The touch of his skin. His mouth on mine. His grunts and groans echoing in my ear.

All of these thoughts would likely keep me awake every night for the rest of my life.

"You should meet me tonight," he said.

I started nodding before he even finished talking. "Where? Your room?"

"No..." Softly, he added, "Though a bed would be nice." He cleared his throat. "While we're on this island, we should take advantage of it. Find me tonight, out here, after everyone has gone to sleep."

"Here on the deck?" I asked.

He nodded his head forward. "There near the shore. The stars are endless here, a beautiful sky. I want you to see

it as we swim together in the ocean."

"Isn't that dangerous?" I asked.

His gaze was fierce, looking at me. "I'll keep you safe."

His protectiveness always did funny things to my stomach. Today, it also stole my breath away. "Nick."

"Meet me tonight, Piper."

What could I say to that, but, "Okay."