

The Luna Choosing Game #Chapter 551 - Read The Luna Choosing Game Chapter 551

Chapter 0551

It was difficult to wait the hours needed for everyone else to have gone to sleep. I couldn't stop thinking about Nicholas, and being in his arms again. A late night swim sounded dangerous but I trusted him to keep me safe.

All I had to do was wait.

Finally, after Elva was deeply asleep and the house grew quiet, I exited my bedroom. The guard at the door nodded at me but didn't otherwise comment. He probably noticed that Nicholas hadn't returned to his room yet. The guard likely knew exactly where I was going.

Desire filled me so much that there was no room for embarrassment.

I turned from the guard and tip-toed down the stairs. I was barefoot, wearing only my swimsuit, a new one that Nicholas had ordered for me when my others had gone missing. I didn't want to wake anyone else and have them asking questions.

Fortunately, the house was so well-maintained that there weren't even creaks in the floorboards, and I was able to descend the stairs without incident.

The first floor was eerily quiet. Without the staff and with the lights turned off, the house felt abandoned. The starlight was bright from outside, however, and illuminated the way down the hall. The back door to the deck was unlocked as I slid it open.

Down by the water, standing just at the shoreline, I saw a familiar silhouette.

I approached Nicholas and without a word came to stand beside him. He was wearing his swim shorts and nothing else. It was difficult not to stare at him, and to instead look up at the stars. Both were equally as breathtaking.

In the city, I never saw stars like this. Here they completely covered the sky.

I wanted to say so to Nicholas, but I held my tongue. This close to the mansion, I was afraid anything I said would be overheard.

Nicholas glanced at me. Then he tilted his head to one side, gesturing further up the shoreline. I nodded, and together we walked around the water's edge, up to the very same alcove where we had made love.

My heart hammered in my chest, as my eyes traced forward to the spot where we had laid together. There was no lingering evidence of it now. Water and wind had returned everything to how it was before we had been there.

Nicholas stopped when we were safely hidden from the house by the trees. He looked at me with hungry eyes, and I knew, though the land had forgotten what had happened here, Nicholas hadn't.

And neither had I. Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

"Nick," I whispered. We were a good distance from the mansion now. The crush of the waves would likely hide our regular speaking voices. But the moment felt too soft, like speaking too loudly might break it somehow.

Nicholas stepped closer to me. He wrapped his arms around my waist, then lowered his face down to mine and kissed me.

I sighed as I looped my arms around the back of his neck.

His kiss was gentle, but the firm press of his hard body against my curves sparked a fire within me. I immediately wanted more. I moaned a little, hoping he would take the hint and kiss me deeper.

Instead, he broke the kiss to chuckle. "Someone is eager tonight."

"Don't tease me," I said, with a bit of a pout.

"Who's teasing?" he replied. His gaze dropped down to my lips and then down farther, to where my breasts smooshed against his hard chest. "I like you like this."

Then, at once, he surged forward and reclaimed my mouth. He showed no hesitation this time, as he licked his way past the seam of my lips. He delved deeply into my mouth with his tongue, tangling with my own.

The kiss stole my breath away. I had to hold on for dear life, as my knees felt like they would give out at any

moment.

When we parted, mostly to breathe again, Nicholas looked at me for a long moment. Then he said, "Come with me into the water."

Chapter 0552

By now my legs had resumed some basic functionality so I nodded. He released me and I stood on my own. Then he took my hand in his and clasped it.

Side by side, we slowly waded into the water. The waves were mostly calm now. As the water reached our stomachs, the waves simply lifted and lowered us gently, like a rocking cradle.

Even as a decent swimmer, I was still nervous about entering the deep water. Fortunately, Nicholas didn't take us beyond where my feet could touch the ground while my shoulders remained above water.

Then, turning toward me, he lowered his hands down my thighs, and lifted me up against him so that I was his level. I wrapped my legs tightly around his waist and my arms around his shoulders. Like this, he kissed me.

"Nick," I moaned against him.

The grip of one of his hands tightened on my thigh, as the other slide upwards toward my core. He teased his finger along the edge of my panty line, before slipping one errant finger underneath. He touched my clit, and I bucked against him. I broke our kiss to gasp.

The ocean water was cool, but his body was hot. And with the way he was teasing me, tracing small circles around my clit with his fingertip, I was close to igniting.

"Does it feel good?" he asked. A smug smile pulled at his lips. He seemed pleased with himself at how easily was losing myself to the feel of him. I bucked and grinded against him, almost too lost to answer.

"Yes."

He dipped his head down and latched onto the side of my neck, sucking in a mark.

I buried my fingers in his hair, desperate to keep him right where he was. All of it felt so good. I didn't want it to end.

"Nick... Oh, oh... Don't stop."

"I won't," he promised. He licked over the mark he'd made, easing the initial sting. Meanwhile, his fingers continued to work wonders on my clit. He added some pressure now, bullying me, heightening my pleasure to record peaks.

"Nick!" Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

"You're mine, Piper." Nicholas spoke now, like a man possessed. "No one else will ever get to see you like this." It sounded like a promise, and the picture of it, of being only Nicholas's for the rest of my life, helped topple me over the peak and straight into climax.

"Ah-" I cried out, only to be cut off when his mouth closed over mine. He swallowed all of my sounds of pleasure as if taking them into himself, claiming them as he had claimed me.

Later, as we made our way to the shore, Nicholas held my hand again, no less tightly than before. Even through my pleasure-addled mind, I could tell something was amiss.

I tugged at him when our feet reached dry sand, and asked, "What's wrong?"

He didn't answer directly, but after a moment, he turned to me, his expression filled with worry. "Please be careful during the race tomorrow."

Did he think that I wouldn't be? I had far too much to lose. "I'll be careful," I assured him.

That didn't seem like enough. "If you sense anything wrong... alert someone. Anyone. Preferably me, but whoever is nearest to you. As soon as you sense it. Okay?"

He seemed to be letting his worries overwhelm him. But, given everything that had happened lately, I supposed I couldn't blame him. Truthfully, I was nervous too, though I couldn't let it stop me.

I was going to do whatever it took to get to the top of this competition and not to be eliminated. But a promise was what he wanted, so that was what I would have to give. "I promise," I said. And I hoped I could keep it.

Chapter 0553

The next morning, after dressing in my one piece swimsuit, I stood in front of the vanity in the bedroom, trying to decide how best to wear my hair, as to eliminate the most friction and increase my speed in the water.

Swimmers, I knew, wore swim caps to cover their hair, but lacking that, I wasn't sure what to do other than tie it up in a ponytail and hope for the best.

Elva, already dressed for the day, watched me. She wore a look of determination, as if she was the one about to go out and race. I appreciated the solidarity.

More so, when she gave me a thumbs up and said, "You got this, Mommy!*

I laughed as I turned to her and scooped her up into my arms. "How can I not, when I know you will be cheering for me?" I said. "We both need to give it our best."

"I'll cheer for you," Elva said, "So do well, okay?"

"Okay," I said and kissed her cheek. She wrapped her tiny noodle arms around my neck. I held her closer.

I would be careful, I'd already promised Nicholas. But now was the time to make the same vow, silently to Elva. My little girl needed me to come back to her, so I would do whatever I needed to, to both win the competition and make it safely back to shore.

Motivated, I decided to go to the window to check on how choppy the waves were today. That would determine how difficult my swim was certain to be. The waves weren't too bad, thank goodness.

But then my gaze lowered to Bridget practicing on the beach. She must have finished stretching early, because she was already sprinting a short distance.

God help me, she was fast. She culminated her sprint with a few cartwheels and a backflip, which she landed perfectly. Her confidence hadn't been an act, then. Bridget was actually a good athlete. Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

"Wow," Elva said, and I could help but agree. She really was impressive, even I had to admit it. Though watching her made a deep kind of pit open up in my stomach. I knew the competition was sure to be strenuous, but... couldn't do a backflip.

No. Stay strong, I reminded myself. Backflips were not part of the competition. I just had to run and swim faster than Bridget. I could do this.

I gripped hard onto that dwindling confidence and carried it with me as Elva and I went downstairs. We met Veronica out on the beach near the deck. She had already begun stretching. I immediately began to follow suit. Elva did as well, copying us.

I looked around but there was no sign of the princes yet. Thoughts of Nicholas and I kissing out on the water flashed in front of my mind, but I pushed those memories down. Now was neither the time nor place to be thinking such things.

As we stretched, I realized Veronica was very limber. I hadn't thought of her as competition before, mainly because we were friends, but I now belatedly realized that I had more than just Bridget to watch out for in this race.

Veronica must have seen me sizing her up because she gave me a flat look and said, "I have no interest in winning this race."

I blinked, surprised. "What? Then why compete at all?"

Veronica glanced around. Her suspicious eyes landed on Bridget, still bouncing around farther up the beach. "I don't trust anyone. You'll need someone out there to watch your back."

She was competing just to help protect... me? My heart warmed with affection. Veronica was such a good, loyal friend.

I was embarrassed. I wished I could be in a position to not need her to sacrifice her part in the competition to help me, but the truth of it was, I did need her help. I was in over my head here.

Chapter 0554

I'd promised to be careful, and I would be. But I didn't know how careful I could be when I was swimming out in the ocean, unable to fully take notice of my surroundings.

To have a friend like Veronica, someone I trusted so implicitly, guarding my back, gave me relief without measure.

*Thank you, Veronica," I said. "I mean it."

She nodded.

Near us, about halfway between us and Bridget, Jessica was stretching alone. Watching her, she seemed to be the least flexible of the ground. Perhaps the least athletic? Her deep-set frown seemed to indicate that she was not at all happy about today's event.

"Don't be overconfident," Veronica said softly, so that Jessica would not hear. "Jessica has never flexed her wolf before. We'd don't know what she's truly capable of."

I took the words to heart. Everyone and everything felt like a wild card today. Who knew what the race might bring out of its contenders today?

What I needed to focus on was pushing my own limits and doing the very best that I could. Concentrating on myself, I push-pulled my muscles to ready them for the strain I was to ask of them today.

Truthfully, I wasn't much of an athlete myself, and my wolf and I weren't so fully in sync yet for me to be overly confident about all this. But when I had worked at the restaurant, I had pushed myself for long hours, on my feet most of the day. That combined with my days-long runs as a wolf, I thought I might stand a chance.

As I contemplating this, I didn't notice Bridget approach us until she was right at our side.

"Elva," she said, smiling.

Elva had given up on stretching and was sitting on the sand. She wasn't making a sandcastle exactly. What she was doing was more like moving sand from one pile to another and then back again. She seemed to like the way it felt slipping through her outstretched fingers.

When Bridget said her name, she dropped all the sand she'd been holding like she'd done something wrong.

"What did you need, Bridget?" I asked, standing up for my little girl.

Bridget didn't acknowledge me at all. Her smile stretched wider, as big and bright as the sun. It almost hurt to look at her.

"Elva, why don't you come with me for a minute? I have something to show you," Bridget said. Finally, her gaze slid to me. "Your mother can come too of course."

"We should be preparing for the race," I said.

"Elva's not taking part," Bridget said. "It's just a little surprise, but it will give her something to do while we're all competing. Just watching must be so dull for a little girl." Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

I glanced at Elva. She was frowning, with her brow pulled together. She wasn't very good at hiding her emotions. She was too young. Although she might have come by it honestly. Jane might have been better at hiding her true self nowadays, but I never was.

Elva seemed to be taking after me.

"You don't have to if you don't want to," I told Elva. She looked between me and Bridget.

She was troubled. She didn't trust Bridget, but I could see her curiosity flash in her eyes. She wanted to know what Bridget wanted to show her.

"It will be fun," Bridget said.

Elva looked at me, and I sighed. "I'll go with you."

I didn't know what Bridget wanted to show Elva, but there's no way I would let Elva go see it alone.

After everything Bridget has done, and everything I suspect she has done but can't prove yet, I'm not letting Elva go anywhere near her without me.

Bridget simply could not be trusted.

Chapter 0555

Holding Elva's hand, we followed Bridget around to the side of the mansion. A camera crew followed us, with their cameras trained on Bridget, Elva, and me. I tried to keep my head up high and my grip firm on Elva's hand. Constantly having cameras watching was

unnerving. It felt like I was constantly under a microscope, so I had to perform to be the best person I could be. Since mistakes weren't tolerated, I felt like I couldn't be myself.

As we came around to the side of the mansion, I saw a massive sand sculpture right there on the beach. Bridget ran to it, then threw her arms out, and spun around.

"Elva!" she called. "Look what I made you!"

Elva gasped, then tugged me forward. We rushed toward the sculpture, which I realized as we drew closer, was an elaborate sandcastle.

It was multi-leveled, with towers stretching even taller than Elva. Each tower had winding stairs down the sides that led to a main, large building with carefully carved windows. Every detail was meticulously designed and crafted, even down to the brick façade that covered the entire sculpture.

Elva was in total awe. I was too, for a minute. It really was a work of art.

I wondered who Bridget had brought in to make this.

"I made this castle for you, Elva," Bridget said, "As an apology for the unfortunate accident which destroyed your own little, dilapidated castle."

Bridget made this? My initial thought was to majorly doubt that, but I pushed down on that feeling, recognizing it likely as jealousy. Bridget was so damn good at everything. Would it be so out of question for her to be good at this too?

"This is for me?" Elva released my hand, so I let hers go too. She dashed forward to look closer at the castle.

"I thought you might want to see what a real sandcastle should look like," Bridget said. Her sugary voice might have sounded nice, but I could hear the insult underneath. Fortunately, Elva seemed blissfully unaware, too caught up in appreciating the craftsmanship and beauty of the sand sculpture.

"Your little pile of sand looked like so amateurish compared to what I'm used to," Bridget went on. "You can see now how I would have thought it wasn't anything when I stepped on it."

"Not everyone makes sandcastles just for the aesthetics," I said, unable to contain myself anymore. "Children, for instance, are learning and playing. They don't need to make sculptures like this every time they go to the beach."

"They don't need to," Bridget replied, "But they should certainly strive to. If we pushed our children to do better, maybe they would grow up to be actresses or other successful members of society. Not... what was it you do again, Piper?"

"I was a waitress," I said.

"Right." Bridget kept smiling, totally ignoring the fact that she insulted me right to my face.

I opened my mouth, about to really give Bridget a piece of my mind, when Elva called for me.

"Mommy! Look it!"

I gave Bridget my best glare as I moved around her to Elva's side, to see where she was pointing. There, tucked into one of the windows, was a little sand cat, snoozing on the windowsill. To carve something that intricate would have required such a steady hand, it was impressive.

*Such a sweet thing, being impressed by windows," Bridget said. She giggled a little, patronizingly, for the cameras.

"She's admiring the cat," I said.

Bridget looked at me. "What cat?"

That little voice of doubt that had whispered in my mind that Bridget hadn't crafted this sculpture herself came rushing back to me, this time with renewed fervor. Anyone who had taken the time to design and make this castle would appreciate their details being recognized.

Bridget didn't seem to recall any of the specific details that she would have had to painstakingly craft, had she actually designed this herself.

I kept my accusation to myself, however, recognizing how easily it could be twisted to make Bridget seem a victim. Hopefully, through the cameras, the public would be able to see Bridget's true nature through her veiled insults.

*Bridget! Piper!" Nathan called from where the others had been stretching. "It's time!"

I gestured Elva closer and then took her hand. "Come on, honey. Let's go find Nicholas."

"But the castle, Mommy..."

"We'll come back later," I promised.

As we walked back toward the deck-side of the beach, I spotted Nicholas and Julian now standing near Veronica. Nathan was just beyond, setting up the cameras alongside a crude start line, which was no more than a line drawn in the sand.

Out in the water, a few boats were set up to show the water side of the race track.

It was nearly time. Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

"There she is," Julian said as we came closer. He was giving me his typical, sideways-slanted smile, though it didn't quite match his eyes. "You ready for this?"

"Ready as I'll ever be," I told him.

He wanted to say more. I could tell just by looking at him. He was worried. He probably wanted me to be careful, like Nicholas did.

But unlike Nicholas, Julian didn't make me promise. He just held my gaze for a while, and I held his in return. He must have been able to tell, just from looking at me, or perhaps from gauging my previous actions, that I wouldn't take unnecessary risks.

"We'll be right here," he said, and I nodded, relieved. He might as well have said, We've got your back. By now, I shouldn't have been surprised that these two princes cared about me so much. Yet it still felt so surreal to know it was true. I was blessed, truly.

Finally, Julian looked away from me. He lowered himself down to one knee and held out his arms for Elva. "Why don't we find a good spot to watch the race, Elva, huh?"

Elva glanced up at me. I immediately leaned down and kissed the top of her head. Then I let go of her hand and she rushed to Julian.

Julian lifted Elva up into his arms and carried her closer to the water.

With the two of them moving on, and Veronica headed to the start line, this left me and Nicholas.

"You won't forget your promise," he said.

"I won't," I assured him. His face, usually so stony and expressionless in front of the cameras, was crinkled with worry. Knowing my words wouldn't be enough, I inched closer to him, as close as I dared with so many onlookers. We weren't touching, but we were mere centimeters away.

Like this, I could feel his warmth and he could feel mine.

He closed his eyes and took a few visibly-deep breaths. When he opened his eyes again, he had schooled his face

once more, hiding his worry behind an expressionless mask. The anxiety still shone in his eyes though.

I didn't know what exactly he was expecting to happen, but if he was going to be the one stressed out, then I had to be the strong one instead.

"I'm going to be okay," I said.

Holding my gaze, I watched his resolve harden. "You will," he agreed. "Because I won't allow otherwise."

Chapter 0556

Bridget, Veronica, me, and Jessica lined up at the starting line in that order. By now the camera crews were ready and waiting. Many were dotted along with beach with a few others out in the boats around the designated racing area.

Nathan directed us where the path would be, showing us both on a map and through a sample runner: a local member of the staff who was a prolific swimmer. Nathan then asked us if we were comfortable we knew the route and we all said we were.

"Good luck, girls," Bridget said to the rest of us as we took our marks. "You're going to need it."

Veronica gave her a flat look in return. Jessica wasn't paying attention. It took everything in me not to glare. *She's trying to get into your head," Veronica whispered to me. "Ignore her."

I nodded. Veronica was right, of course. I needed to concentrate.

I tried my best to drown out Bridget's overconfident musings by focusing on my own abilities. Inside of me, Miracle was pacing, ready to assist.

Nathan readied the starter pistol then handed it to Nicholas to start the race.

My eyes met Nicholas's once more. I felt his concern and his affection in that one look.

Then he raised the starter pistol toward the sky and fired.

BANG.

At once, all four of us darted forward. Sand kicked up behind our fast footfalls.

For the first stretch, we were neck and neck. We all must have been tapping into our wolf-strength. Miracle was flexing inside of me, adding speed to my legs.

It was difficult to fully contain her, but shifting was against the rules. We had to maintain our human shapes for the duration of the race.

The first stretch of the race pushed our limits across the beach. Bridget, Veronica, and I pushed as hard as we could. Jessica began to lag behind. I couldn't turn my head, but I could hear her struggle, her footfalls slowing as the rest of us advanced.

Before too long, our path veered to the right and we all hopped through the waves, before diving into the water. It had been a long time since I swam so diligently, so pressingly, as if my life depended on it. But I tapped into those memories now, of swimming in races and gym class at the Academy. I pushed myself to the edge, my muscles burning. Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

Here in the water, even Veronica began to fall behind.

This left Bridget and I neck in neck as we pushed ever forward.

Bridget made everything looks so easy, while I had to struggle. But I used that as motivation to draw from my deepest strength. Miracle growled in my mind. I felt her frustration flood through my veins. It matched and amplified my own.

We couldn't let Bridget win.

I was so very tired of watching Bridget win everything. She'd gone on so many dates with Nicholas already, and he always seemed so exhausted by the ruse, especially as of late, after the incident with the pit.

I didn't want Nicholas to suffer anymore. Nor did I want myself to suffer in having to watch them.

I wanted to be the one to win legitimate dates with Nicholas. Force the cameras to watch us for a while.

Nicholas was also so protective and possessive of me, ready to protect me from all the world, and any man, that meant to do me harm. I wanted to return those favors. I needed to defend Nicholas as he was always ready to defend me.

And the first step to do that was to deny Bridget the chance to win any more dates with him.

So I pushed my body, even as my muscles ached and burned. I would not back down. And neither would Miracle.

Bridget and I stayed in close proximity. Though she inched ahead, I refused to let her gain much more of a lead than that.

Chapter 0557

For a while, I thought maybe I could do this. If I could muster my resolve, maybe my will could outmaneuver Bridget's confidence.

And, as I pushed myself, I finally began to take the lead away from Bridget.

I was pulling ahead. The raceway was clear ahead of me and I felt my heart soar.

This was my moment. I could prove to everyone that I could be a capable Luna. I was strong. I was fast. And I was-

"Aarggh -!"

Suddenly something grabbed my leg and yanked me down under the surface. Water filled my mouth. I spit it out, but I hadn't enough air. I felt like I was choking.

I kicked against my restraint, eventually hitting something solid. It released me, and I swam as fast as I could toward the surface. I broke through and sucked in a lungful of air - just as the whatever-it-was caught me by both legs this time and dragged me down.

Beneath the water, I looked down, and straight into the raging eyes of Prince Ronan, the merfolk prince I had turned down. He seemed furious, his features twisted with anger.

Was this... revenge?

My heart thundered in my chest. This merfolk man meant to kill me!

He pulled me down, and his hold on my legs was too strong this time for me to break free and kick him. I tried to punch at him, but the water slowed my fists to mere brushes of skin.

He laughed at me, his gills fluttering with the motion.

Not knowing what else to do, I leaned down, reached forward, and covered his gills with my hands.

Immediately, he tried to pull away, but I kept firm, my hands laid flat over his gills. If he was trying to drown me, then I would suffocate him. Fair was fair, and I wanted to live!

I had to get back to Elva! To Nicholas!

After everything Nicholas and I had shared, only to lose it now? I couldn't let that happen. I'd promised him I'd be careful. I couldn't let myself die just because some asshole who couldn't take no for an answer now held a grudge.

Unfortunately, in merfolk form, Prince Ronan had a massive fish tail that he used now to thrash me around. I couldn't hold onto his gills any longer. I couldn't even keep my body straight.

I was trapped in a whirlwind, being thrown this way and that as if caught in the jaws of a shark.

Then, coming closer, I saw a figure. Veronica?

She swam straight past me, placed her hands flat on Prince Ronan's chest, and in an instant, he was cast several yards deeper into the ocean.

Veronica grabbed me and together we kicked toward the surface of the water. But it was so far. I had been underwater too long. My breath was running out. My consciousness was dimming. Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

The world was turning black.

I couldn't give up, but everything hurt.

Keep kicking, Miracle said in my mind, but she was weakened now too. That thrashing had shaken us both. And there was no air.

I kept my face towards the surface of the water. The sun shimmered on the surface. I only had to reach it.

I was growing more and more tired.

Yet, then, a figure broke down through the waves. And I saw a face.

Nicholas.

It had to be an illusion. There was no way he was here.

But thank God. If I was about to die, his was the face I wanted to see.

His eyes were panicked. He reached out for me.

I swore I could almost feel him.

Then everything went dark.

Chapter 0558

Nicholas POV

Panic and fear waged war in my heart as I swam down into that water and saw Piper, the woman who had claimed my heart more than once, losing consciousness. Her eyes were slipping closed. She was running out of air.

Veronica was doing her best to drag Piper to the surface, but Piper was barely kicking now. She was dead weight, dragging Veronica down too.

My heart was in my throat. My stomach twisted uncomfortably. Piper looked dead. She was drowning, I was losing her.

I couldn't lose her.

Kicking downward, I reached out for Piper. I still had fresh air in my mouth from before I dived underwater, so the moment Piper was in my arms, I touched her face, tilted her head, and brought my mouth down to hers.

A kiss of life, I breathed my air into her lungs.

Relief surged through me as I felt her stir against me. She was alive.

As I ended the kiss, Veronica was still there, waiting. She reached for Piper, and, with Piper kicking again, we all pushed toward the surface.

Movement brought my attention down to the depths beneath us.

And there, I saw the shape of merfolk man with a massive fish tail, rushing toward us - toward Piper. As he came closer, I recognized him as that asshole prince from the merfolk ball. The one who had tried to make moves on Piper, and then wouldn't listen to her rejection.

This asshole had already tried to take something that didn't belong to him, and now he was trying to take Piper's life?

My inner wolf howled in raged, his anger rising in tandem with my own. My fingers curled, my claws breaking through my skin.

I exchanged only a passing glance with Veronica, who immediately understood. She took on the bulk of Piper's weight. Together, they breached the surface. Piper, thankfully, could have air of her own.

Now, she just needed someone to protect her from the danger beneath her. And I was more than fit for that task.

I pushed myself into the space between Ronan and Piper just as Ronan came near. Rather than grabbing her, Ronan instead found himself clasping a six foot tall pissed off werewolf.

He recoiled at once, until I reached out and sunk my claws straight into his shoulder. He cried out.

I wished I had the spell to breathe and speak underwater, not to help me with this fight, but because I wanted him to know the full depths of what he'd done here.

This fucking asshole dared to touch what was mine.

Who did he think he was to touch Piper? My friend. My lover.

My bloodthirsty wolf growled in my mind, My mate. We must protect her!

Ronan's wild eye gaze was filled with both fury and fear. Perhaps he had thought he would have been able to get to Piper without opposition - that he could simply swoop in, murder her, and leave without being waylaid.

Well, surprise, Prince Ronan. Piper is loved and valued and would be protected until my dying breath.

Ronan grabbed my arm, then twisted and began to pull me down, deeper into the water. Was this what he had planned for Piper? To pull her down until her air ran out?

The thought turned my vision red. Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

Yes, Ronan might have the advantage here, being able to breathe underwater. In addition, his tail made him fast and his swimming strong.

But I didn't need to swim to beat him. I just needed my muscles and my claws.

With my wolf roaring in my mind, I drew back my claws and then clamped them down on Ronan's neck, right over his gills.

He cried out as his blood spilled out into the water. The anger diffused entirely from his eyes, replaced now only with fear. If he wanted to drown me, he had to keep dragging me down, but to do so would mean his certain

death. I wasn't about to let go first.

No one touched what belonged to me.

The he dared hurt Piper. Dared touch her.

These acts would not go unpunished.

I curled my claws deeper into his scaly flesh. And finally, his will broke. He slipped his massive tail between us, and using the immense muscle there, flicked me away from

him. I kept holding on. My claws did more damage on the way out, tearing through his skin.

Blood fogged the water. Sharks would be attracted soon.

Ronan turned tail and fled as fast as he could.

The force of his tail kick pushed me upwards. I was running out of air, but my rage fueled me forward. I kicked and kicked until I breached the surface and sucked in a fresh breath.

My first thought, as the fury ebbed, was for Piper. Was she alright? Where was she? I needed to see her.

I searched the beach with a fast sweep of a gaze. There was a small crowd and someone on the sand. Piper?

Before I could start to swim toward them, a hand came into my vision. How singularly focused I must have been to not notice the small boat drifting towards me until it was directly at my side.

Julian shook his hand in front of my face. "Get in."

My wolf was still raging. I struggled to do anything but seek out my mate. But the reasonable part of my mind reminded me that a boat would be faster travel than my own tired legs. So I grabbed Julian's arm and together, we managed to get me onto the boat.

"Go," I said, before my feet ever touched the floor.

Julian signaled the driver and the boat barreled forward toward the shore. Since it was a small speedboat, we were there in a flash. The boat was light and could come close to shallow water. When it reached as close as it could, I jumped out of the boat and rushed ashore.

Despite being able to breathe now, I couldn't catch my breath, until the crowd parted somewhat and I saw Piper sitting upright on the sand.

Thank God.

I pushed my way between Jessica and a cameraman. I didn't care about either of them. About anyone really, but Piper. I needed to get to her, to feel her, and make sure for myself that this wasn't a dream. That she was alive.

*Nicholas," she said.

I dropped to my knees in the sand beside her.

Her beautiful brown eyes locked onto mine. She looked worried - for me?

Didn't she know the fear that had wormed through my whole body, clenching my heart, at the thought she might

be hurt?

"Nicholas, are you -?"

Her voice cut off as I reached out and pulled her to me. I buried my face into the crook of her neck and shoulder. Beneath the saltwater, I could detect her scent. I breathed it in, trying to take in as much of it as I could.

I would pull her fully into me if I could.

As it was, I crossed my arms around her back and kept her buried and safe up against my chest.

That asshole Ronan was still out there. He would need to be handled.

But for now, Piper was here. She was safe.

My wolf whispered, We protect our mate.

Chapter 0559

*Just for the record, I won the race," Bridget said, from the peripheral of the small crowd gathered around me.

Nicholas was still holding me, with Veronica, Jessica, and Elva close by. Everyone, it seemed, was worried about me - all except Bridget, who said again, "Did you record my finish? Did you see it?"

I ignored her, and focused instead on the closeness of Nicholas. His warmth. The strength of his arms around me, ever-protecting me. His scent, dimmed slightly by the salt water clinging to his skin and his hair.

Why was he wet? He wasn't in the race.

It took me a long moment to realize that my vision of him in the water wasn't a dream. He had truly been there. I didn't understand how, but I knew, deep in my heart, that he was the one who stopped Ronan from killing me. And Veronica, who had so valiantly come to my rescue as well.

I was eternally to them both.

I trembled, remembering the cold depths of the ocean.

I'd never been afraid of the dark or the cold or of water, but Ronan had instilled fear into me, the likes of which was unfortunately becoming so familiar. I felt the same fear when I face my sister with her ready to kill me, or when Elva had been so sick, we didn't know if she would recover.

"Nick," I whispered, for only him to hear.

"I have you," he whispered in reply. "You are safe.

I closed my eyes, trying to gather strength from his presence and his words. Yes, I could believe him, because he was here. He was with me, and he would help protect me. Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

I had done well on my own, but I didn't need to do it all by myself any longer. Nicholas was my knight in shining armor. He wouldn't let anyone like Ronan do me harm.

Eventually, as I grew in strength and conviction, I began to take notice to the somewhat compromising way Nicholas and I were holding onto each other, and the way the cameras were closing in all around us.

"The cameras..." I whispered to Nicholas, hoping he would understand. We needed to put more space between us, lest everyone in the kingdom discover what we are.

"Let them see," Nicholas whispered in reply. "I don't care."

That was the adrenaline talking, I knew. If he were calm, he would know that our closeness could be a stain on his reputation. He had reasons for the game we played, where we pretended not to mean as much to each other as we really did.

"Nicholas," I said, more firmly.

Slowly, he loosened his hold on me and leaned back.

Immediately I regretted suggesting he should. I was so cold without him. On reflex, I reached out and clutched his arm. We could have space between us, but I wanted him near me. I needed him there.

I looked at the others around me. Veronica was holding Elva, both looking at me with concern. Jessica was worrying her hands together. Julian came running up to the group, out of breath. He knelt in the sand on the other side of me and placed his hand on my shoulder.

Our eyes met. His held a question. I nodded in answer, and he sighed in relief.

Even Nathan seemed concerned. Where usually he'd give Bridget attention or focus on turning the cameras away from Nicholas's and my affection for each other. This time, he looked over me as if searching for physical damage. I didn't even think he liked me.

He did eventually return to himself and turn the cameras away. When they were off, he asked me directly. "What

happened?"

Nicholas answered, "Prince Ronan."

That was enough to understand.

Nathan's face turned grim. "We should call the ambassador."

"I'll do it," Nicholas said at once. He glanced at me.

"I'm okay," I said, but Nicholas still hesitated. We both knew Prince Ronan was close by still, but I highly doubted the merfolk prince would dare come forward to attack me in front of all of these people. He likely had planned to make my death look like an accidental drowning, not a murder.

Chapter 0560

"I'll keep an eye on her," Julian said, holding his brother's gaze.

"Thanks," Nicholas said. He placed his hand over mine on his arm, then, gently, pulled my hand away from him. "I'll be back as soon as I'm able."

I could see the determination burning in his eyes. I didn't want him to go but I knew he wanted to see this through for himself. He didn't trust anyone else, except maybe Julian, but Julian hadn't seen what Nicholas had seen. Nicholas needed to tell the ambassador all of it.

I lowered my hand down to my lap.

Nicholas stood up slowly, like he had to physically force himself to leave me. He held my gaze for as long as he could, before turning and following Nathan toward the house.

Bridget rushed after him. "Nicholas! Did you see my win?"

Nicholas didn't reply and all three disappeared into the mansion.

"I'm glad you're okay," Jessica said. She sighed. "I need a drink." She turned toward the mansion too and started walking toward the deck.

*Prince Ronan?" Julian asked. Glancing sideways at Elva, he didn't dare say more.

"Pulled me down," I said, and refused to elaborate for the same reason. Instead, I looked at Veronica. "Thank you. If it wasn't for you, I don't think Nicholas would have made it in time." Content belong to NôvelDráma. Org.

A smile pulled at the corners of Veronica's mouth. "I did what I set out to do. Keep you alive was the goal." "Mission accomplished," Julian said. He gave Veronica an appreciate smile, coupled with a soft, warm look. *She teleported Ronan away from me," I said.

Julian's pride grew brighter. "Nicely done. A high leap from fruit to moving people."

Veronica lowered her head, appearing somewhat bashful, though she didn't blush. "No choice in the moment. I'm just glad it worked."

"Me too," Julian said.

"Me three," I agreed.

"Well, you should have seen Nicholas," Julian said, returning his attention to me. "The minute your head dipped below water, his shirt came off and he was running forward at a full-clip. I'm surprised he didn't rage shift, honestly,"

"He probably swims better as a human," Veronica said. "He would have done anything to get to Piper quicker. And I'm glad he did. A few seconds later..." She didn't finish that thought because Elva began to cry. "Oh. Elva, I'm sorry."

"Mommy..." Elva sniffed.

Veronica lowered Elva down to the ground and she rushed into my arms, burrowing herself against me.

Her tears flood. Her loud sobs made her words choppy and difficult to understand. "You... almost... drown... died.."

I held her to me and gently patted her back. "I'm okay, honey. I'm okay now."

I rocked her in my arms, soothing her with whispered words. How scary it must have been for such a small girl to almost lose her mother.

Eventually, she cried herself to sleep.

Julian and Veronica stayed nearby the entire time. With Elva asleep, their whispered words grew louder to include me.

"But if your family planned this "Veronica started.

*That asshole prince was already angry on his own," Julian said.

"But would he have been able to find this island without help? And how would he have guessed the perfect time to snatch Piper?" Veronica shook her head. "It could be coincidence.*

"Listen," Julian said, and I could see the spark of anger ignite within him. It was not directed at Veronica, but at someone else, far away. "If my parents had anything to do with it, I'm going to find out."