

The Luna Choosing Game #Chapter 0581 - Read The Luna Choosing Game Chapter 0581

Chapter 0581

He was demanding, his tongue insistent, his lips melding with mine. I clutched at his shoulders, holding on, as his hands traced long paths up and down the length of my back.

When we broke for air, I sighed against him. He laughed lightly as he kissed along my cheek to my ear.

"No more fears of what is between us," he said. "Because I am truly alive because of you."

"Oh, Nick..." I turned into him and sought out his lips this time.

After another kiss, and then another, we split far enough to rest our foreheads together. I closed my eyes, finding contentment here with him like this.

*Julian's right," Nicholas said, breaking the soft quiet between us.

I peeked open my eyes to look up at him.

"I have to treat you right, keep you happy, or I risk losing you. If not to Julian, then to someone else," Nichols said. "You are precious, Piper. There are many people who would be ready and willing to scoop you up if I fumbled even once."

I smiled and shook my head lightly. "You can't think you would lose me so easily."

"I would deserve to," he said. "You should only know love and happiness." He sighed as he looked away. "I fear I am already failing at keeping you safe."

"None of this is your fault," I told him, "and I refuse to hear anything else about it."

He nodded a little. "You're right. What we should be doing is getting you off this damned boat. I can't wait to get you off this island."

I couldn't help but agree.

Nicholas stepped back, took my hand, and escorted me off the ship. The crew, probably having noticed our intimate moment had been courteous in letting us have a few moments alone above deck. They nodded at me now as we passed them. They each wore soft smiles. I wondered how much they saw and heard.

On shore, the others had moved onto the deck. There I found Elva, I rushed to her and held her. She seemed confused.

"What's wrong, Mommy?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said. Content belongs to NovélDráma. Org

"Why are you all wet? Did you go for a swim?"

Oh, God. I had forgotten I was still soaked through, and now I'd gotten Elva wet as well. I had just been so happy to see her.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"It'skay," she said,

I kissed her cheek and sat beside her. She was still coloring in the coloring book pages. Now she was showing me her work. She was getting better at coloring in the lines.

"What a day," Jessica said.

"Tell me about it," Julian said. "I don't know about everyone else, but I'm ready to go home."

"Me, too," Veronica said.

I agreed wholeheartedly, but it still hurt me to see everyone so down. I couldn't help but feel responsible. Yes, I couldn't exactly control that a sociopath wanted to kill me, but it still felt like my fault somehow.

"Why don't we do something to lift our spirits?" I said.

Jessica, Veronica, Julian, Elva, and Nicholas all looked at me. Bridget probably would have too, but she had already gone inside.

"What?" Jessica asked.

"Uh. I don't know. What about another volleyball game?" That had been kind of fun before, before Bridget's wardrobe malfunction had ruined everything. Julian was a better man now, though, so that probably wouldn't happen again.

The others glanced at each other.

"Sure," Jessica said.

"Great," I said, standing. "I'll go tell -"

Before I could even finish my sentence, the sky opened up and rain began to pour down.

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The rain poured down so heavily that it was even starting to reach us in the covered deck. Elva dove to cover her precious coloring book pages.

"Everyone, inside!" Nicholas said.

We grabbed our things and hurried inside. I helped Elva with her crayons and coloring pages, careful not to get them any damper than they already were.

The moment we were inside, the storm truly began outside. Lightning struck and wind howled.

"So much for volleyball," Jessica grumbled.

A particularly loud thunderclap made Elva jump. She cuddled closer to me, hugging my thigh.

As we were standing around there, watching the storm outside the windowed sliding glass door, Selma came out from the kitchen. When she saw us - or rather, when she saw Elva crying, she came forward, leaned down, and asked her, "How would you like some ice cream, little one?"

As I came with Elva into the kitchen, I quickly learned from the excess of ice cream in the fridge, that Selma was looking for ways to get rid of the ice cream. She had planned many big desserts for our remaining nights, but with our trip ending early, there was no longer any need for such surplus.

If the ice cream stayed after we all left, it would just go to waste and have to be thrown away.

Because of this, twenty minutes later, all of the candidates, even Bridget, and the princes and Elva, had a pint of ice cream each as we lounged around in the living room. C6ntent belongs to Nov6lDr6ma. Org

The sugary ice cream was helping with everyone's mood somewhat. No one was mad about the storm anymore. Jessica had even put on a couple of records, upbeat dance music.

Yet still the overall mood was still glum. What was supposed to be a fun island beach vacation had turned into more or less a nightmare.

I was still determined to lift up everyone's mood.

"Since we're all already here, why don't we play a game?" I asked.

"We can't play volleyball," Jessica said.

"It doesn't have to be athletic," I said. Especially not with us feeding our faces with ice cream. "We could play something else... like... charades!"

Everyone looked around.

"I don't know..." Veronica said.

Bridget clapped her hand. "I think it's a great idea!"

I startled, looking at her. "You do?"

"Yes," she said. "That could be great fun! It's the best rainy day party game!"

Jessica rolled her eyes. "Fine. I guess it could be fun."

I looked at Veronica. She shrugged. "I guess."

"If you want to, Piper," Julian said.

I looked at Elva. "I just want to color," she said. She stretched herself on the floor, her coloring pages and crayons in the space before her. She picked up a purple crayon and scribbled it across a flower petal.

"Nicholas, Jessica, and I will be on a team," Bridget said. "Piper, Julian, and Veronica on a separate team." She jumped to her feet. "Hold on while I get everything set up."

I wasn't sure what she was taking charge so adamantly. It was just a silly party game, not a challenge or an event.

I understood a little better, when she returned with a bowl of words written on scraps of paper, because standing behind her was a camera crew ready to shoot.

Bridget knew that she had taken a hit lately with her terrible behavior. This must have been some new plan of hers to bring her reputation back up.

Agitation grew within me but I didn't say a word about it. Let her do whatever she wanted as long as we could have fun and lift everyone's mood.

We separated into our teams, sitting together. Nicholas, when choosing where to sit, picked the spot outside of Jessica, farthest from Bridget and closest to me and my team.

"Round one!" Bridget said. "I'll go first!"

With the cameras recording, she seemed over enthusiastic. Veronica gave her a flat, bored look. I just barely caught myself before I could roll my eyes. With the camera catching all, I didn't want anyone to know my disdain for her.

Bridget reached into the bowl of words and pulled out one. She wasn't allowed to tell anyone what it was.

"Oh, this is an easy one!" she announced before putting the paper in her pocket. "Now, don't feel back, Piper's team, if you don't do as well as us. Keep in mind that I'm an actress, after all. I'm naturally more talented at some things than the rest of you."

Veronica and I looked at each other.

Julian groaned. "Get on with it."

Bridget ignored him. "Ready the clock," she said. Jessica started the kitchen timer Selma had brought them. The chime was set to go off after sixty seconds.

"Go!" Jessica said.

Bridget began making some kind of motion. I wasn't sure what she was trying to do? She was gyrating her body, kind of like a fish out of water but standing up? It didn't make any sense.

"Dancing?" Jessica said.

Bridget kept moving, which meant that guess was incorrect.

"Fishing," Nicholas said, which showed how well we were in sync. That was exactly what I had been thinking.

Bridget stopped moving to glare at him.

He shrugged, and she began again.

"Cooking? Swimming? Being electrocuted?" Jessica shouted, calling one quickly after the next.

Bridget continued her strange fluid movement.

Nicholas just shook his head.

Jessica continued trying. "Bubbles? Mermaids? Trying on clothes?"

The timer dinged. Bridget groaned as she stopped her strange movements. "Come on, you guys! It was baking cupcakes! Obviously!"

Nicholas opened his mouth. He immediately closed it.

Jessica's face scrunched up in confusion. "You didn't even move your arms!"

Bridget glared until she glanced at the cameras, as if remembering they were there. She immediately brightened. She clapped. "Alright. Good first effort team. We'll get them next time."

It was my team's turn.

"Piper, your turn," Bridget said to me. I'm pretty sure it was up to my team to decide our first contender but

whatever. Julian or Veronica didn't seem to care, and neither did I.

I stood, went to bowl and pulled a word. Golf cart. Okay. That was weird but I could do it.

"I'm ready," I said.

Jessica set the timer. "Go!"

I moved to stand like I was about to swing a golf club.

No sooner had I gone through the motion, than the first guess came out of Julian's mouth. "Golf cart!"

My eyes went wide. I stopped.

Had he seen my paper? No. He couldn't have, from that distance.

He had to have actually guessed that.

"No shit!" he laughed. "Was that really it?"

"Yeah," I said, laughing now too.

"Woo!" he said, jumping to his feet. Veronica clapped, as did Jessica. It was an excellent guess.

Julian jumped forward, scooped me into his arms, and swung me around. We both laughed all the way.

However, all good feelings vanished the minute I heard a deep, guttural noise.

Julian lowered me down. His face went pale. He swallowed hard. He took two very large steps back from me.

"Uh... sorry, Piper..."

"It's okay..."

We both glanced at the couch. At Nicholas.

Nicholas, who was still growling.

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Julian immediately took another step backwards, adding more space between him and me. We both nervously glanced at Nicholas who mostly seemed confused by his own reaction. He cut off his growl with a sharp grunt.

"Sorry," he said.

"Don't worry," I replied.

"It's my fault," Julian said.

"No," Nicholas quickly corrected. "I don't know what came over me."

"I knew this game was a bad idea," Bridget says, rising from the couch. "I tried to warn everyone, but no one takes me seriously."

I distinctly remembered Bridget championing the idea for charades so much that she took to mostly organizing it herself. Now, suddenly, when something had gone wrong, she didn't want anything to do with the idea?

"We should definitely stop," Bridget continued, "I, for one, am out totally." She looked around at everyone, expecting them to agree.

Maybe she wasn't wrong in this instance. The joyful mood I had been attempting to cultivate seemed utterly at waste now, with only thick tension in the air.

Jessica worried her bottom lip. Veronica looked down at her lap. Julian apologized. Nicholas said, "I'm the one at fault."

Everything really did seem like it was falling apart.

Then Elva raised her head, looking up from her coloring books. She spotted the empty spot between Nicholas and Jessica on the couch.

"Can I be on Nick-lass's team?" she asked.

And just like that, the entire mood shifted. The tension broke and everything brightened. Jessica laughed. Veronica's lips twitched in an almost smile. Julian smiled outright. So did Nicholas.

"Of course you can," Nicholas said. He glanced at me. "If it's okay with your mom."

Elva turned her doe eyes on me. It would have been fine with me anyway, but having her look at me like that would have melted even my coldest moods.

"You can," I told her, and she cheered. Cóntent belongs to NovélDráma. Org

"Now wait a minute," Bridget said. She placed her hands on her hips. "This unbalances the teams." "I don't see how," I said.

Bridget narrowed her eyes. "With Elva on my team, we now have four, compared to your team's three." "My team' she says," Julian scoffed. "Didn't you just tell everyone that you are quitting the game?" "Yes, but -"

"So Elva volunteered to take your place," Nicholas said.

"I had thought we were quitting the game," Bridget said.

"Don't be jealous of a child," Julian told her. "Just sit this one out without making a fuss, yeah?"

Bridget glared at all of them, even Elva. I sidestepped into her line of sight, blocking her from seeing my child and looking at her that way. Elva was innocent in all this. If Bridget wanted to be mad at someone, let her be mad at

me.

She could be furious at me and I wouldn't care. Not anymore. The moment she pushed me off that boat was the moment she forfeited any right to my feelings. I should have stopped caring what she thought long ago. When she left me in that pit on the jungle island? Or maybe even before that.

Bridget has been showing me her lack of empathy for a long time. It was past time that I believed what I saw.

"Fine," Bridget eventually snapped. Then she turned and stormed off towards the kitchen.

When she was gone, the fun began once more.

Everyone decided that Elva should go next, so she hopped to her feet and rushed to the bowl to pick out her word. I decided to stay with her, while Julian returned to his seat beside Veronica. Neither of them seemed to care that I was technically helping the other team.

Everyone, by now, I think, was rooting for Elva.

Elva dug out a slip of paper with a word and looked at it. Then she showed it to me. The word was 'home'.

Home was a concept more than a thing. It would be a trickier word to try to act out. But Elva seemed confident about what she had to do. She had an idea before I could even suggest anything.

She took her place in front of her team. I stood nearby, ready to assist her if needed.

"Timer!" she called.

Julian counted down from three, then said, "Go!"

Elva immediately ran over to me and hugged me. Tears welled in my eyes at once, but I blinked them back. I dropped down to one knee and immediately hugged her back.

"Mother!" Jessica called. "Daughter? Hug!"

Elva squeezed me, with her noodle arms around my neck, then she let me go. Turning, she rushed across the room to Nicholas, where she threw her arms wide.

Nicholas moved to the edge of the seat, in time to catch Elva's hug. He wrapped his arms around her in turn.

"Family," Nicholas said.

Elva shook her head a little.

Nicholas considered.

"Father?" Jessica asked, slightly taken aback. "Parents?"

Something seemed to click within Nicholas. An understanding flashed behind his eyes.

"Home," he said.

"That's it," I said. My heart hammered in my chest. How had he known?

Elva leaned back. "You got it, Nick-lass!"

Nicholas smiled so fondly at Elva that I thought I might melt into a puddle right there in the living room. Elva so wanted Nicholas to be her father. To see them interact like this...

God, if only I could make her wish come true.

Meanwhile, Julian had been hard at work fashioning a piece of paper into a crude sort of crown. It was entirely makeshift, with jagged mismatched edges and fastened together only with tape. Yet when he stepped toward Elva, holding forth her price as if it was something precious, Elva's eyes went wide as saucers.

Julian lowered it down onto her head. Her smile was so bright it could have lit the entire room.

You would have thought Julian handed her a prized possession, not just some paper and tape, with how bigly and

brightly Elva was smiling.

"Congratulations on this victory, little princess," Julian said.

I was tearing up again. I didn't want to cry in front of everyone, so I searched for something to do to keep myself busy. I noticed that several of the ice cream pints were empty. I gathered them up.

"I'll go get us some more from the kitchen," I said in a rush.

"Piper?" Nicholas asked, standing.

I gave him a smile. It did little, I was sure, to hide the dampness in my eyes. "I'll be right back." Nicholas seemed to understand that I needed a moment to myself. He nodded as he slowly sat back down. Leaving the room, I walked into the kitchen. Headed toward the trash can, I didn't notice the person standing just inside the door, or the foot she put into my path until I tripped straight over it and toppled to the ground.

The empty pint containers rolled out of my hands, dripping melted ice cream all over the floor.

I glanced back at my attacker as I pushed myself up to my knees. "Bridget?"

"You should watch where you are going," she said. She leaned now, her back against the face of the fridge. She crossed her arms over her chest. "You are always so clumsy, Piper."

Clumsy? Clumsy?

Oh, that was the absolute last straw. I was at my wit's end with Bridget. I was always trying to be nice. I always

tried to do the right thing.

And where did it get me?

Left in a hole. Pushed off a boat. Making an ice cream mess.

"What's the matter, Piper?" Bridget mocked me further. "Have something to say?"

Chapter 0584

Ever since I had been brought into this competition, I had been mocked, ridiculed, shoved around, bullied, set up, nearly killed, and threatened at every turn. Bridget's arrival hadn't helped the situation at all.

While I could blame the underground organization for much of what happened to me in the past, except for the bullying, Bridget's treatment of me had nothing to do with Jane or her evil group.

Bridget was mean to me, perhaps even mean enough to want me dead, just because she didn't like me.

I'd had enough.

Growling I pushed myself up to my feet and swiveled to confront Bridget head on. She didn't seem concerned at first. She just cocked her head and stared me down, almost looking bored.

"You have had it out for me since day one, Bridget, and I'm sick of it! It's one thing to talk about me behind my back, or to bully me within the competition. But since we've gotten to this island, you have taken everything way too far."

"Oh? Did I make you mad, Piper?" She straightened somewhat and began looking at me with more interest.

"Maybe you meant for me to be hurt or dead, maybe you didn't," I snapped. "But regardless, your actions could have led to my death!"

"You're still alive, aren't you?"

"No thanks to you!

Bridget narrowed her eyes. She stepped away from the fridge and closer into my space.

"I didn't realize I was supposed to be your babysitter," Bridget said in a low, vicious tone. "Can you really not take care of yourself, Piper?"

"I never did anything to you," I said, slowly coming to realize how deep her hatred for me rooted. "How could you be so unfeeling about my potential death? Or at least the very real threat to it?" Cóntent belongs to NovélDráma. Org

"You should know," she snapped.

"Because of Nicholas?"

"You've turned both Nicholas and Julian against me," she said. "For years they were in love with me. They would do anything I told them to. They'd bend over backwards to make certain that I was happy and all my needs are met. But then you come around... and suddenly it's like I'm some nuisance!"

"I didn't do anything!"

"You existed, Piper! You stole Nicholas's attention and Julian's devotion. You ruined everything for me!"

I failed to see how she could see anything this way. She remained a well-known, well-liked high-paid actress. The only thing that threatened that livelihood was her actions occurring during the competition. So far the royal family had managed to protect her image, but she was working on destroying it herself.

"I didn't do shit," I shot back. "Feelings are feelings and they can't be controlled. You are the one who pushed both Julian and Nicholas away by acting so terribly. And you even threaten your own reputation by continuing to attack me."

"I shouldn't need to attack you!" she shouted. "I should already have what I want!"

"And what do you want?" It couldn't be Nicholas. Or Julian. She didn't seem to care about their feelings or their love. Whatever she wanted was something more tangible than that.

"I want to be Queen."

Oh. Yeah, okay.

God help me, it made me so sad to know that some of these women wanted to be queen so badly they would do anything for it. Bridget, it seemed, was not quite ready to kill for it. But she was ready to let me die for it.

We were not the same.

"I don't want to be queen," I told her.

She looked at me in disbelief. "You think I'm some kind of idiot. Everyone wants to be queen."

"Not me." I never had any use for politics, especially after Elva came into my life. The only things I truly cared about were my family, those close to me, and survival. Becoming queen was such a far off fantasy, that it mattered so little to me. I wouldn't care at all about it, except it directly affected Nicholas.

Chapter 0585

And, frankly, Bridget was far too selfish to be a good queen. She cared about the title and the power. But what good would she actually bring to the nation? If she only cared about herself, how could she possibly empathize with the kingdom's people?

I shook my head. I was still furious.

"If you are responsible for what's happening with Ronan," I said, "you had better pray that no one finds out about it, or your entire reputation could be in shambles. You want to be queen so badly, but what happens when you fail? Don't you want a life to return to?"

"I won't fail," Bridget said with unfailing confidence.

I could barely believe what she was saying. "Is it really worth the risk?"

Bridget lifted her chin. "Anything is worth becoming queen."

It wasn't an admittance of responsibility of Ronan, but it was a near thing. She certainly wasn't denying it.

An unpleasant chill ran down my spine. The hairs on the back of my arms stood upright. I felt like I was looking at a different person than I'd been used to. The veneer had come off, and the true Bridget was cold and calculating, as heartless as they came.

A tiny bit of fear spurred inside of my chest.

Maybe she really would kill me for the crown. She might even do it herself.

"I hope you sleep well tonight, Piper," Bridget said, her voice devoid of all emotion. "With Ronan still out there on the loose... I hope he doesn't do anything too drastic." Content belongs to NovelDrama. Org

She pushed past me then and walked right out the door.

I stood alone in the kitchen, trembling slightly, looking down at the mess of melted ice cream and pint containers on the floor.

I was in over my head here. I'd known that from the start, but... I hadn't realized it was like this. I could handle the bullying, even the occasional sabotage. But to actively seek my death? Just so she can have the crown?

And that look in her eyes...

I fully believed she wanted to be queen so badly she would do anything for it. Now, I felt as if not only would I have to watch my back for Ronan, but also for Bridget as well.

I never would have thought it would go this far. Bridget was so cutthroat. I didn't know if I'd ever feel safe again under the same roof as her.

Minutes or hours past, I couldn't be sure, until Nicholas came walking through the kitchen door.

"Piper, you taking so long that I..." His voice trailed as he gaze around the room, taking in the mess and my shaking form. Immediately, he took two long strides forward and pulled me into his arms, "What happened?"

I couldn't speak right away, so I soaked in the warmth of his closeness instead. But then, eventually, I found my voice. And I told him everything, every word that I could remember from when I walked in this room and Bridget tripped me.

The more I spoke, the more Nicholas began to glower.

"You don't have to be afraid," he said, though the words were clipped. Anger was taking root. I saw his own doubt in his eyes.

I shook my head. He didn't understand. "You didn't see the look in her eyes," I said. "Whatever Bridget you remember as children doesn't seem to be there anymore. She's totally obsessed with the crown."

His reluctance to hate his friend was understandable, even with everything he'd seen, but something shifted in him when I said the words. That hesitation vanished as if he finally understood the depths to Bridget's obsession.

"Nick, she's willing to kill for the crown," I said. "She's willing to kill... me."

Nicholas's hold on me tightened.

Chapter 0586

Nicholas's anger began to vibrate through him. He growled, probably without realizing it, with each exhale of breath.

"It's past time I speak with Bridget myself," he said, low and dangerous. Yet, even so, he did not move -not until I pulled back enough to look up at him. He met my gaze with stern eyes. "I should have set her straight a long time ago."

"What will you say?" I asked him.

"I don't know yet. But she has lost every right to any benefit of the doubt I might have otherwise given her. I want the truth. I also intend to make my own truth known."

"What's that?"

His eyes became fiercer. Looking at him, he seemed more hardened warrior than young prince.

"Bridget will never be queen," Nicholas said.

It was a bold claim, especially when his parents favored her so heavily. But I appreciated the remark all the same. Nicholas, despite having been childhood friends with Bridget, was finally seeing her for the person she was now.

I wondered when the change in her began. I didn't doubt so much that Nicholas, Julian, and Bridget truly had been friends in the beginning.

Was it her parents who pushed her into her obsession to be queen? Or was it her lifestyle? Or did she simply have an inherent greed for power that manifested itself as she grew older?

It didn't matter, I supposed. Facts were facts, now, regardless of how they became so.

And the fact was Bridget wanted me dead. I needed to rely on Nicholas now.

"Okay," I said.

Nicholas nodded and started to lead me from the room.

"I can't," I said right away. I motioned toward the mess on the floor.

"The servants will clean it in the morning," he said. Most of them had already gone to bed.

"No." I couldn't possibly leave my mess like this for someone else to clean. By morning, the smell alone would be overpowering. "I'm perfectly capable of cleaning this up." Cóntent belongs to NovélDráma. Org

"Piper..." He wanted to argue with me.

"Go," I said, and nudged him toward the door. "I'll clean up quickly and then join Veronica and Elva."

"They are still in the living room. I'll make certain they stay there," Nicholas said. "I'll likely take Julian with me to confront Bridget."

I nodded. Honestly, having something to do while this confrontation occurred might have been a godsend. I didn't want to just have to sit there wondering what was being said. Cleaning up, I could distract myself.

Nicholas leaned in once more and kissed me on the temple. He lingered, his lips to my skin, like he didn't want to leave me. I didn't want him to leave either. But the sooner this whole thing with Bridget was cleared up, the safer would ultimately feel.

So I stepped back, away from the warmth and safety of Nicholas's body.

He gave me one last long look. His face was a steel mask by now. I couldn't discern his feelings, not beyond his affection for me and his anger at everyone else. He seemed to be trying to tell me something, but I just couldn't read his non-verbal cues.

Then, he turned and left me.

Alone now, I grabbed some a rag from the sink and wet it with water from the facet. Armed with the wet rag and a dry towel, I turned to the mess and began to clean up as best as I was able.

After picking up the empty pint containers and tossing them in the trash bin, I lowered myself to my knees and wiped up some of the melted ice cream.

It reminded me of working at the restaurant after closing. The quiet was almost peaceful, in a way, and it felt good to be able to clear my mind, focusing only on the task of cleaning up this mess.

Chapter 0587

I was entirely drawn into cleaning. So much so that the rest of the world seemed to fall into the background.

Maybe this was why I didn't notice right away the sound of footsteps and the slight drip of water down onto the ground from a very wet body.

Odd, I thought. Didn't I turn the facet off? Did it have a drip?

I turned my head toward the sink, when Ronan grabbed me by the back of the head, clutching a bunch of my hair, and yanked me backwards, off-balance and onto my ass.

I opened my mouth to scream, but he was prepared for that. He stuffed a soaking wet handkerchief into my mouth.

He started to drag me toward the door. I struggled, kicking my feet, while clawing at his wrist with my fingernails. But his hold was firm, and I couldn't seem to catch any friction on the floor.

"Why can't you just fucking die already?" Ronan snapped.

He dragged me out into the hallway. I tried to grab at the door, at anything I could reach really, knowing Veronica was just over in the living room. If she listened, she could hear my struggle.

Yet before I could see if my plan worked or not, Ronan threw me out the back door. I landed with a thud on the deck.

Immediately I spit the handkerchief from my mouth. Content belongs to NovelDrama.Org

"Why are you doing this?" I shouted. I hoped someone could hear me. "Why throw your life away? For me? You don't even know me!"

"Not for you, you dumb bitch!" Ronan snapped. He loomed over me, staring down with open disgust and hatred in his eyes. "I pity you. You don't know what it's like to be in love. I would do anything for the love of my life. If she wants you gone, it's my honor to see that happen."

"True love would never require someone to murder for it!"

For a moment, he hesitated. A small shimmer of hope spread through me. Maybe I'd gotten to him. Maybe he understood now.

The next moment, that hope smashed down like waves on a rocky cliff.

"You don't know how special she is," Ronan said, entranced like a man possessed. "She asks so little of me, and accepts all of me. I will never betray her. Never desert her like so many others have before. Even if we cannot be together, I will see her dreams come true."

"You're insane!" I yelled, but the words didn't faze him. He didn't seem to be listening to me at all. He was too far gone. Whatever delusion that had been spun for him or that he had spun for himself, it had overwhelmed whatever remained of his sense.

He was lost to his delusion. And I was surely about to become a victim to it.

I tried to crawl away, scrambling like a crab. I made it a good foot or two, before he dove and caught my ankle.

"Where are you going, like minnow?" Ronan said. An eerie sort of glee entered his voice. He was enjoying the chase almost as much as the thought of pleasing his lover.

"Let me go!"

He pulled me back toward him. He was stronger than me, even with my newly returned wolf strength.

I tried to kick at him. My foot landed once, in his chest, but other than a grunt, he made no other hint of displeasure. He continued to pull.

I looked back at him, ready to scream at the top of my lungs.

But I realized I didn't need to.

Veronica stood behind Ronan, without his knowledge. She held an expensive-looking vase up over his head.

Then she brought the vase straight down, crashing it over Ronan, and he dropped, lifeless, down to the ground.

Chapter 0588

Nicholas POV

I returned to the living room where Veronica and Julian were helping Elva color. Jessica had already excused herself and gone to bed. Both Veronica and Julian looked up at me and their eyes went wide.

"What happened?" Julian asked.

I wanted to tell him but not in front of Elva.

Instead, I turned to Veronica. "Piper is just cleaning up in the kitchen. Please stay here until she comes out to you. Do you mind watching Elva?"

"I can do that," Veronica said.

"And me?" Julian asked.

I finally looked at him. I hoped he would be able to tell a lot from my flat gaze and my words," I'm going to speak with Bridget."

"Oh, shit," Julian said and hopped to his feet.

Yeah. He understood what I had meant to convey.

"I'm coming with you," Julian said, just as I'd hoped.

I kissed the top of Elva's head. She barely noticed, so entranced with her coloring. Then, with Julian in tow, we started toward the stairs. Along the way, I briefly filled Julian in on the altercation between Bridget and Julian that had happened in the kitchen.

With each step, Julian uttered a new curse word. By the time we reached the top stair, he had gotten quite creative.

In front of Bridget's room, we knocked. She must have been expecting us - or at least, me. She opened the door right away. Her face was bright when she looked at me. Seeing Julian behind my shoulder though, that brightness dimmed somewhat.

Without a word, she backed into the room and let us enter.

Julian and I stood near the dresser, carefully avoiding the mess of clothes spilling out of her nearby suitcase. Bridget stood nearer the door with her back to it. Content belongs to NovélDráma. Org

"What is this about?" Bridget asked. She continued to smile dully, a look of fake confusion on her face.

"You already know," I said. I was tired of all her games. It was past time to cut down to the core of the situation.

The look of bland confusion disappears from Bridget's face in a blink of the eye. Good. Maybe she would stop trying to bullshit us and give us the truth for once.

"Piper got to you, then," she said. "I knew she would."

Got to me? What the hell did she mean by that?

"She told me what happened in the kitchen," Nicholas said. "What you said."

"And you so quickly believed her?" Bridget's face suddenly twisted into upset. God, she could do that so quickly, no wonder she had won so many acting awards. She shifted her entire persona in a blink of an eye.

"What happened to us? To our friendship? To make you treat me this way?" Bridget asked. Her bottom lip trembled.

"Damn, you're good," Julian said with a low whistle. I was relieved he could see it too, and knew she was lying as much as I did. We'd both had the wool pulled over our eyes with her for far too long.

"You've both changed so much," Bridget said. "When we were boys, you cared so much for me. Can't you see how Piper has poisoned you against me? You so quickly believe that I am at fault, but what do you really know about her?"

"I know she's a shitty liar," Julian said. "She's a terrible actress. Unlike someone else I know." "She is deceiving you," Bridget said. "She's good at pretending to be bad."

"I dated Piper at the Academy," I said. "I saw every side of her. She is no liar, much less a natural one."

Bridget stood firm. "She has deceived you for a long time."

"Bridget, stop," I said.

"You really are just embarrassing yourself," Julian added. "I've seen the tape of how you abandoned Piper on the island. Dear mom and dad might be shield you in the public's eyes, but they can't save you from my own."

Chapter 0589

"Mine either," Nicholas said. "Your behavior since you came to us has been unacceptable."

"*You are letting your foolish affections for that commoner affect your judgement," Bridget said.

"Instead of asking what happened to us? What happened to you? This person you are now... the vicious snake... is nothing like the girl we grew up with," Julian said. "Did life as a superstar not suit you?"

"I don't know what you mean," Bridget said. "I am the same."

So much for honesty, then. I doubted we'd get anywhere with Bridget like this. Whatever reasons she had to become the way she was were locked up inside of her and in a past she wasn't willing to share. I couldn't waste anymore time trying to unlock those secrets, not when they didn't affect any outcome.

Bridget had done terrible things since she came here. Whether out of love or affection for me or not, those actions could no longer continue without consequence.

"Bridget," I said. "Let me say this plainly so that there is no confusion."

She looked at me with her full attention. Julian did too, curious.

*You will never be my Luna, Nicholas said. "Even if Piper goes her own way and does not becoming my bride, you still have no chance. For as long as I live, you will never wear a crown."

Julian whistled, impressed. "Yeah, you can double that for me. You've turned into a real piece of work. It's a shame, to be honest."

Bridget looked at us both. Her innocent demeanor slowly faded away. And in its place was an overconfident coldness that almost seemed...detached.

"Bold words from two little princes," Bridget said. "But I'm going to go ahead and not let myself be too disappointed. After all, how much of this is really up to you?" She grinned.* After all, the King and Queen get the final say, don't they?"

Like hell they would, if their decision was for me to make Bridget my bride.

I opened my mouth to say so, when I heard a scream from the hallway.

"Nick-lass! Nick-lass! Where are you?"

My stomach dropped at once. That was Elva!

I met Julian's wild eyes with my own for only a brief moment before we both rushed to the door. Bridget dodged out of the way. In the hallway, I bent down and scooped Elva into my arms.

She'd been wandering the hallway alone... The guard who had been outside of Piper's door had moved to help her, but she was crying for me. Fat tears streaked down her face.

"What is it, Elva? What's wrong?" I asked. Where was Veronica? Where was Piper?

"The s-scary man..." was all she managed to get out.

I handed her to Julian's waiting arms.

"I got you," he whispered into her hair. "No one will hurt you." To me, he said, "Go, Nicholas! Now."

I didn't need to be told twice. I turned and ran down the stairwell. The back door was open. I rushed that way, with the guard following closely behind. Content belongs to NovélDráma. Org

Outside, I first saw Piper - alive, upright, pale but okay. I exhaled.

Then I noticed Veronica. And from there, I spotted the crumbled up merfolk man at their feet.

Prince Ronan.

How the hell had he gotten here?

To hell with worrying about that right now. My wolf was raging. I had to make sure Piper was safe. I ran to her and pulled Piper into my arms. She trembled like a leaf under my touch, which made me hold on tighter.

I was strong. I could hold us both together, even with the fear gripping like a vice at my own heart.

"What the hell?" Bridget said as she stepped out onto the deck. She must have followed me down here.

Ronan groaned from the ground, stirring at the sound of her voice. He lifted his head, peeked open his eyes.

"My... beloved?"

Chapter 590

Bridget blanched. "What did you call me?"

Ronan clutched at his head as he forced himself upward into a sitting position. "Beloved?"

"You hit your head too hard there, merfolk creep," Bridget said.

Ronan's eyes grew wide. "How can you say that, Bridget? After everything we've shared?"

"Shared? I don't even know you!" Bridget snapped. "I don't know who you think I am but you've got the wrong idea."

"But, Bridget -" Ronan began once more.

Bridget looked straight at Nicholas. "This guy must be a stalker."

Given Bridget's fame, it was possible, I supposed, that Ronan had some kind of delusion that Bridget and he were in love and that he had to prove something. But

Julian's digging showed that Ronan and Bridget did know each other for real. They had even been something like friends. C nt nt from N v eldr ma.org

I glanced around, curious who else might be buying this act. No one seemed truly convinced. Nicholas held me around the waist with one arm, while he openly glared at Bridget.

The guard stood close to Ronan, ready to move in at a moment's notice.

Veronica gave Bridget a flat look.

"Whatever you think about me," Bridget said, "you can't think that I'd actually want someone this pathetic."

Ronan's face crumpled, stricken. "This can't be real. You said

"I didn't say anything to you." Bridget said quickly, cutting her off.

"Let the man finish," Nicholas said.

Ronan looked back at Nicholas. His face was crinkled with upset. Bridget, it seemed, was absolutely ripping his heart out. If he hadn't just almost killed me, I might have felt bad for him. As it was, I couldn't care less about his heartbreak. I just wanted the truth.

As Ronan seemed to look at Nicholas, he seemed to realize something - perhaps the precarious position he was in. He was trapped. There would be no escape for him from the consequences of his actions.

But would this knowledge encourage him to tell the truth? Or would he lie to protect Bridget?

Ronan swallowed. Then he spoke, "Bridget told me that for us to be together, she needed Piper out of the way."

"Bullshit!" Bridget shouted. She stepped closer to him. "How dare you?"

"You lied to me!" Ronan snapped back at her. "You let me believe that we had a chance? And now you are acting like we don't even know each other? What is wrong with you, Bridget? Have you forgotten the vows we made to each other?"

"We made no vows!"

Their shouting seemed to rouse the rest of the household. Selma herself peeked through one of the windows and gasped.

Nathan stepped outside and took in the sight with wide eyes. "I will get the ambassador!" he called as he rushed toward the store.

Ronan shut his mouth and lowered his head. He didn't seem like he was going to say anymore.

To me, he had said enough, and confirmed all our suspicions that Bridget, despite her protests, had something to do with this.

Nathan returned quickly, with Ambassador Zale and five merfolk guards in tow.

Two of the guards grabbed Ronan under the arms and forcibly lifted him.

"I have no idea how he managed to get through our security line," Ambassador Zale said, speaking to Nathan as he drew closer. "We were on full alert at all times."

"He had help," Nicholas said. He kept his hand on the small of my back, even as he turned toward Zale. "I'm sure Bridget can fill in the blanks for us."

"Like hell I can! I don't know anything about this," Bridget snapped. Her perfect veneer was cracking. She seemed genuinely nervous all of the sudden.

Zale looked at her in suspicion, then back to Nicholas. "An accomplice?"

"I believe so," Nicholas said.

"Nicholas!"

I inched closer to Nicholas for comfort. All of this was making me feel so exposed. If Veronica hadn't joined me out here... if she hadn't heard me and dropped that vase on Ronan's head, I could very likely be dead right now.

Then, with shock, I realized I didn't know where Elva was. I glanced up at Nicholas with fear in my heart.

"Elva?"

"She's safe," he told me softly. "She found me and Julian and told us to find you. She's with Julian right now."

Relief flooded me and I exhaled deeply. Good. She was safe. I could relax now.

"Well," Zale continued. "Now that Prince Ronan is captured, I can assure you that he will never bother you or yours again, Prince Nicholas." He side-eyed Bridget. "Would you prefer we speak to his accomplice?"

An international incident could be made or lost here. It was one matter to let the merfolk handle one of their own kind, but to give them Bridget was an entirely different matter. That Bridget was a werewolf was reason enough. That she was an ultra-famous superstar only made it potentially more disastrous.

The werewolves had to handle their own, or they would lose faith on the global stage. I didn't need to know much about politics to know that

"We will take care of Bridget," Nicholas said.

Ambassador Zale gave a polite bow. "I will take my leave then. I intend to see to his return and imprisonment personally."

"I'm relieved to hear that, Ambassador. Thank you," Nicholas said.

Zale gave another bow, "I regret this incident occurred at all, Prince Nicholas. Please do not thank me for cleaning it up now, well after the fact." He looked at me. "Miss Piper."

Then, after signaling to his guards, Zale began to walk down to the beach. The merfolk guards continued behind him, after forming a circle around their prisoner. Ronan looked back twice on the way forward, once at the stars and then once at the water. Both times his gaze went straight to Bridget.

The moment they had gone, Bridget stepped forward, panic in her voice. "Nicholas, you have to believe me. I didn't have anything to do with this-

"Silence, Bridget." Nicholas's voice was flat and firm, the voice of a royal. "I am tired of your games and your lies. When we return to the palace, I will personally make sure that you are removed from the competition."

"You... wouldn't."

"You've done enough damage with your time here."

Bridget's panic shifted then into righteous anger. In a flash, she stormed forward, coming right up to Nicholas. Then, without warning, she slapped him straight across the face.

Nicholas didn't even flinch.

The guard moved forward at once, grabbed Bridget's offending hand and pulled it behind her back.

"Bridget!" Nathan snapped in surprise.

Veronica covered her mouth with her hand.

Anger flared hot within me. How dare this person touch Nicholas like that?

"You have no right!" Bridget snapped at Nicholas. "Remove me from the competition? You

are out of your mind."

"You have no right!" I shouted back. "How dare you raise a hand to your prince!"

Bridget didn't listen to me at all. "Only your parents can decide to remove me from the competition, not you! And They, as well as the vast majority of the public love me."

"Control yourself!" Nathan said.

Bridget ignored him too. "Who else in the competition is fit to be queen? Piper? Veronica? Get real. You need me. And the sooner you realized that, the better everything will be."