

The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 133

3rd Person

The mountain village of Alta Montaña sat so deep in the rainforest that unless one was standing at its center, they might never realize it was there. It was well known throughout the kingdom for its beauty and artisan wool goods, but it wasn't the sort of place many Southern Islanders went unless they were trading or hoping to soak up some time in nature.

While tourists poured into the town from regions far and wide, the area's raw natural beauty struggled to tempt locals – as more often than not the entire mountain was covered in clouds. Even when it wasn't raining, it was a normal occurrence to walk out the door only to disappear into a blinding haze of white fog.

Needless to say, it wasn't a good place to lose one's possessions, as finding them again could prove very challenging.

This was part of why the city's orphan gang proved so successful when it came to pickpocketing and

swindling. It was easy to hide among the clouds and grift money from unsuspecting tourists, for even when their mark realized something was missing, they certainly couldn't see to track down the thieves.

This was also how it came to pass that Ethan and Jane managed to come within feet of their lost pups,without ever realizing it.

They arrived in the village in the early hours of the morning, having driven through the night to reach their remote destination. They had no way of knowing whether or not the pups were somewhere in the small town, but it was the closest corner of civilization to the jungle where the children were last seen.

"I don't know about this." Jane murmured, gazing around the quaint village. "If they went into the jungle maybe we should start looking there – this is an awfully long way from the turn off."

"I know." Ethan sighed, "but somewhere here might have seen them. There's no telling where they might be in the forest, and they're smart kids, they'll have tried to get to people for help." As beautiful as he found the landscape here, Ethan was less than amused by the constant downpours and relentless cloud cover.

It made picking up on the children's scent- let alone tracking them – all but impossible.

Jane was not convinced, she nervously gnawed her lower lip as she scanned the village, trying to put herself in her pups' shoes. She knew they were smart enough to try and find food and fresh water, but would they trust strangers? Would they go to adults for help after everything that they'd been through? Sometimes she worried there was too much of her in them, or that she'd unintentionally imposed her own insecurities onto them – and that was before any of this began.

She scented the air for what felt like the thousandth time, but like Ethan, the flooded streets and dense fog prevented her from smelling anything but damp and mud. It was so powerful in fact, that she was struggling to even smell Ethan. Her wolf was anxiously pacing in her head, and Jane had to wonder how anyone tracked anything in such an environment.

"Why does anyone live here!" Linda exclaimed, swatting at the dozen mosquitos happily sucking her blood. "It's hot and miserable and just... argh! This morning I found a tarantula in my shoe – a tarantula!"

Jane glanced at her friend, she wasn't doing well with their change of scenery, but she couldn't really blame Linda. It had been days since they'd heard from Eric, and even then Ethan had been the one to make contact. Jane could only imagine how difficult it must be for her to be separated from her mate so soon after forming their bond.

"I know." She commiserated, hate to think about the pups handling it all on their own."

"Hey, they're probably loving it" Linda suggested, seeming to realize she'd accidentally increased her friend's concern. "You know how they are with bugs and nature – they're not nearly as high maintenance as we are"

Ethan pursed his lips, thinking of Paisley. Unlike her siblings, she had never had much opportunity to explore the outdoors. Her heart had always been too weak to go on adventure hikes or exciting excursions, which meant she was probably as unhappy as Linda.

Still, he didn't want to make things worse for Jane, so he swallowed his concerns and continued to scour the area for signs of the pups.

Little did they know that on the other side of the cloudy town square, the pups were standing hand in hand, listening to Sophie instruct them on the art of thievery.

"You have to be lightning fast." She advised. "And only use your pointer and middle fingers – never your thumbs. Pinch them together like tweezers and your mark won't feel a thing."

"Our mark?" Paisley asked in confusion.

"You know, mark- like target, whoever you want to steal from." Sophie explained impatiently.

"But I don't wanna steals from anyone." Paisley grumbled sullenly.

Speaking over his sister, Parker eyed the older girl with resignation. "How do we choose a mark in the first place?" He wondered.

"Well tourists are best, because they never pay attention to anything and they always have lots a money. Sophie reasoned. "Plus the locals know what we're up to. You can tell who's who just by the ways they act. If someone is from here, they walk around like they know the place, with a purpose. The tourists bumble and look around at everything like they're on some alien planet."

"But we can't see what anyone's doing." Riley objected, feeling equally as sulky as her sister. "I can only see people's feets through the fog."

"I know, but that's our advantage" Sophie turned them around, pointing through the thick white haze.

We're low enough to the ground to see what the grown ups can't. And the feet are all you need, rich people have really nice shoes, and you can get really close without them ever knowing you were there."

"But what if we get caught?" Ryder objected.

"You won't be – there's four of you. If one of you gets pinched, the other three can help fight off the baddie" Sophie suggested. "Honestly you're lucky, do you have any idea how many times I wished there were two of me so I could fool a mark? That's why Fabian's so excited about you."

"He is?" Parker asked, wrinkling his brow.

"Yeah! We can do so many more cons with twins – and there's two sets of you!" Sophie informed them with a big smile. "Besides you're really little, so the adults won't ever suspect you and they'll be distracted by how cute you are."

"But we're not gonna stay here very long." Riley reminded her."Just until we can make a little money so we can find our parents."

Sophie pursed her lips. "Well that will take a little time. You're first few scores have to go to Fabian – to pay for your spots in the gang"

"We have to pay for our spots?" Paisley questioned.

"Well yeah, everyone has to do their share." Sophie shrugged, seeing nothing wrong with this idea. "We're like a big family, no one gets a free ride."

"Well why do we have to be part of the gang?"

Ryder inquired, "why not just do this on our own?"

"Because, it's safer with us." Sophie shared, only half paying attention to the conversation. The older girl was busy scanning the street for potential targets, and she'd given this speech so many times she knew it by heart. "Otherwise you'd have to fend for yourself, find someplace to sleep in the forest where you might get eaten. And Fabian can't allow any competition, cuz if someone else in town is making money that doesn't go to the gang, everyone suffers."

That doesn't sound very fair." Parker mused aloud.

"Well nothing in life is fair." Sophie responded dismissively. "It's not fair that we're all orphans when you still have parents, or that you're lost this way.

Survival isn't about fair, it's about doing whatever it takes."

The pups exchanged worried glances, at least they tried to. In effect they simply peered through the gloom in the direction of one another, hoping the others were thinking on the same wavelength.

The more time they spent here, the more it seemed like they were going to have to escape yet another safety net. They didn't understand why their luck never seemed to get any better, they could only pray that it would change soon. Even as they thought this, a voice sounded in the distance, one that sounded so much like Jane, that all four of their heads whipped around.

Ethan...I don't.. the pups... forest."

They only caught bits and pieces of the sound, but the pups were immediately on alert."Was that...?"

Riley murmured, too afraid to say what she suspected and jinx them.

It sounds like Mommy" Paisley whispered in reply.

"Where's it coming from?" Ryder added eagerly.

"Over there!" Riley exclaimed, pointing into the clouds. "Let's go!"

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