

The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 171

Ethan

At first I thought I was hallucinating. It wasn't possible that Jane and the pups were here. I assumed I was dreaming, that my imagination was putting their scents in my head – that I'd lost my mind faster than any of us could have expected. However the closer I draw to the door I know it's real, my wolf is racing around in circles in my mind's eye.

Overjoyed to see his mate and our pups- happy for the first time since I injured my spine.

No, no, no. I think, even as he dances and howls like a puppy. They can't be here what are they doing here? Surely they didn't figure it out surely my beta or Linda didn't betray my confidence.

I brace myself for the overwhelming emotions of seeing my family, as well as the confrontation I know is inevitable now. After rejecting Jane in the hospital I thought I wouldn't have the strength to survive doing so twice, but now it's obvious I don't have a choice. I can't very well hide in my apartment while they bang on the door, and the truth is I'm beyond excited to see them.

Being away from Jane and the pups after everything we went through in the Southern Isles has been nearly impossible. I've struggled every day not being able to see them and hold them, to feel with my own two hands that they're safe. The only way I've been able to manage my protective instincts is by telling myself that they're safer in the Dark Moon pack.

I'm barely breathing as I open the door, and then they're there in front of me, as if they never left. The pups are beaming and jumping up and down, and Jane is looking as though she's frightened and determined at once. I can immediately sense she's as on edge and agitated as I am, and I don't like her coloring one bit. She seems far too pale, and as though she might have recently been sick.

"Daddy! The pups cry, throwing their small bodies at my legs. I catch them before they can connect with my lower body and feel the metal braces holding me upright, scooping them into my arms.

Sweet Goddess, how have I survived without this for a full month? They're warm and sweet and every bit as perfect as I remember. I swear my heart swells three sizes just being near them. For once my wolf is perfectly content, and I'm fighting back tears of relief and affection.

"Oh my goodness, what are you doing here?" I ask,

"Let me look at you!" I pull back only far enough to study their young faces – especially Paisley. I love them all, but Paisley will always have a special place in my heart. She's the one who helped me survive losing Jane. She was the first, the most fragile and the most closely bonded to me. I'm not surprised to see she's crying even as the others cheer, and horrible guilt consumes me as she sobs into the curve of my neck.

Don't cry cuddlebug." I croon, bouncing them gently. I'm so happy to see you, I've missed you so much."

I know I should probably be keeping up my cold act right now, but I can't help it. I feel like I've been drowning in darkness lately, and they're finally giving me some light at the end of the tunnel. Later I'll find the strength to fight with Jane, to return to my pretense of cruelty, but right now I'm just letting myself feel this incredible joy and relief.

We missed you too, Daddy!" Parker exclaims. "It feels like it's been forever and ever."

I know!" I agree, kiss each of their precious faces in turn and settling on the couch. What have you been up to? I want to know everything!"

"Daddy, is cold in the Dark Moon pack!" Paisley shares, pouting and shaking her head glumly.

There's snows everywhere and my face hurts when I go outside. I don't like it at all!

"Poor munchkin." I sympathize, carrying them inside. "Do you still have all your fingers and toes? Let me see so I can count and be sure." I occupy myself with kissing all of Paisley's digits, letting the sounds of her giggles fill me with warmth and repeating the test with the others. Of course the kisses quickly turn to tickles, and before long I have four pups writhing and laughing uncontrollably in my lap. The moment is perfect, with one huge, glaring exception.

I can feel Jane in my periphery, looking on in silence, her arms crossed over her chest. She hasn't spoken a single word, seeming to prefer standing on the sidelines and watching me like a hawk, as if she's afraid I might mistreat the pups as badly as I've mistreated hers. I can't say I blame her.

It's taking all my willpower not to look at Jane directly. I'm not sure I can survive seeing how badly I've hurt her. I know it's weak of me – not being brave enough to face the consequences of my actions, but if I see her in pain I don't know if I'll be able to do what's necessary to keep her at arm's length. It was hard enough in the hospital and on the phone, seeing her in person is a torture of another kind.

I hate the person I've had to become to protect my family from me, but what other choice do I have? I need her to hate me. Jane deserves better than to spend her best years playing nursemaid to a madman, especially when I've already stolen her freedom once before. Besides, she and the pups aren't safe with me, and not only because I can't protect them anymore. It's the people closest to me who will be in the most danger when my mind starts to go – I don't want to risk hurting them.

My mind is overtaken with images of Jane and the pups cowering in fear when my temper detonates. Of them running away from me, Jane throwing herself in front of the little ones, begging me not to hurt them. I imagine not being able to recognize her amidst my psychosis, of looking down to see my hands covered in blood when I finally regain my senses, and finding Jane's lifeless body at my feet.

I'd much rather they remember you as a heartless bastard than lay a hand on them, and I thought I'd accomplished this – until Jane called.

I never expected her to take the fall for me, and I'm furious with myself for not guessing that she'd protect the pups from the truth rather than throw me under the bus. I have to find a way to make them all give up on me before it's too late. If I do, they can start over with someone worthy of them. They'll forget about me and they'll move on! They'll have a far better life than they would if they stayed.

At the same time, I don't know if I can bear rejecting Jane again, let alone the pups. She seems to have brought the pups here thinking that I won't reject them the way I did her – that they'll be safe from my mistreatment even if she isn't. I understand why she thinks this – especially after what Linda said about her expecting abuse, but it makes me so angry to think she would subject herself to such harm. It doesn't make sense, because I know I would do anything for our children too but love isn't rational, and I hate the idea of her being hurt even if it's a sacrifice for our babies.

Worse, Jane doesn't know the real reason I rejected her. She doesn't understand that I don't have choice. I have to push them all away for their own good. I won't do it in front of the pups unless she doesn't give me another option, but I have to make them leave – if only I could figure out how to stop hugging and cuddling them right now.

All four kids are chattering away, snuggling into a puppy pile around me as they tell me about everything that's happened since we last saw each other, and all the while Jane stands by and watches.

When they finally settle enough that they start to drift off to sleep – no doubt long overdue for naps after driving through the night fueled by excitement - I extract myself from their precious forms and rise to my feet.

I take Jane's arm just above the elbow, relishing this tiny touch and wishing I could pull her into my arms and never let her go. Instead I pull her into the seclusion of my bedroom, taking a few steadying breaths before turning on her. Jane hovers near the door, overflowing with nervous energy. My wolf aches to comfort her, but I have to be strong.

Closing the distance between us, I demand. What the hell are you doing here?"

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