

The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 173

Ethan

I couldn't be more shocked if Jane had pulled out a knife and stabbed me. I can't believe what I'm hearing -I can't believe what I'm saying. My beautiful, intelligent, passionate mate is begging on her knees, offering to become my slave again if I'll only reconsider rejecting the pups. The irony is unbearable. I rejected her in part to avoid shackling her to a madman, and now she's suggesting that very same thing – only worse.

As I look down at her, struggling to comprehend that this is really happening, my wolf tries to burst free, only to find himself hobbled and motionless – stuck within the steely confines of my skin. He doesn't stop, thrashing violently inside me, rattling my bones as he tries to escape. The pain is unbearable, both physical and mental.

Eventually my wolf gives up, receding deep inside me with a tortured howl. He knows we're paralyzed, but he keeps trying all the same. I think he's in denial, refusing to believe he's truly going to be trapped forever. At first seeing Jane calmed him and I thought we might actually get through this meeting without one of these agonizing episodes, but that was before he saw what we've done to her.

There could not be stronger proof that I don't deserve her. Jane should be with someone who worships her, who is so good that they couldn't hurt her if they tried. I never should have fought Jane when she returned for Paisley. I should have handed over my precious daughter and let them run off into the sunset together. I was selfish, determined to get my mate back and refusing to do what was best for my daughter. And thank goodness Jane did return – if she didn't I might have ended up screwing up our precious pup just as badly as I did her mother.

My every instinct is to gather Jane into my arms and kiss away her tears, apologize for being so horrible and promise never to let anything ever harm her again. But that's not a promise I can keep. I don't have the strength to protect her anymore and I know the threats will keep coming, including from myself. They can't stay, but I have to find a way to help get Jane back on her feet before I send her away.

I can't leave her in this state – so shattered that she'd sell herself to me like some cheap commodity.

At the same time, I can't show her any sign of weakness.

You should be ashamed of yourself." I growl, watching the words slam into her with visceral effect. "I left the pups with you because I thought you were a good mother. I thought you were stable enough to care for them. But clearly I was wrong.

Trust me, Ethan." Jane murmurs hollowly. I'm more ashamed of myself than you could ever be, and I've known for a long time now that I'm not a good mother.

My wolf whines pitifully, but I try to retain my composure. "I'll let you and the pups stay through the holidays." I announce coldly. "Until you can prove you're a fit mother, and the pups adjust to the idea of living in the Dark Moon Pack. But you're out of your mind if you think I want you back in my bed – even as a slave."

Jane clenches her eyes shut, tears spilling over her lashes. She whimpers softly, with relief? Pain? I can't tell. After a moment she looks back up at me, her green eyes shining with grief. What happened to you?"

"What do you mean?" I respond sharply, paranoia filling me. She can't know – surely she doesn't know I mean what happened to that sweet boy who loved me even though I was an omega?" She weeps, shaking her head. "What happened to the man who married me against everyone's wishes? Who rejected his fated mate for me?"

Now that gets my attention. As far as I know Jane never learned about my meeting with Nina. "How do you know about that?"

"You don't remember do you? She asks, a note of irony in her thick voice. (You were too drunk, but you told me about meeting her – about not having the tiniest interest in her because you already had me.

"Yes well, if I'd been smarter I would have taken her when I had the chance." I lie. I have no doubt she would never debase herself this way – even for her pups welfare. I should have listened when people warned me about omegas.

Jane trembles, but doesn't acknowledge my harsh words. You'll really let us stay?

I don't exactly have a choice." I declare. "If you're willing to sell yourself to me, who knows what else you might be willing to do. For all I know you'll be out on the street offering your body to any alpha who will take you in."

That isn't fair!" Jane objects, showing a flare of anger for the first time. Good, I'd much rather have her anger than her sadness. I'm a successful business woman and I'm only here because you're the pups' father. This isn't about money or protection."

Well it wasn't fair when you stole my pups from me and hid their existence either." I rumble. Why do you believe you deserve a luxury you didn't grant to me?"

"Because despite my crimes, I gave you four beautiful pups who worship the ground you walk on." She reminds me. "Is that worth nothing to you?"

You're worth nothing to me." I correct her viciously. "How many ways do I have to say it before you understand?"

Jane yanks her body away from me then, backing away even as she glares at me. I can tell she wants to yell at me, to attack me even, but I'm sure she's afraid of saying the wrong thing, of making me change my mind about letting the pups stay. "You don't have to say any more." She growls, moving towards the door. "I understand perfectly."

She turns on her heel and runs out of the room, and though she waits until she's down the hall and has closed herself in one of the guest bedrooms, the distance doesn't do anything to prevent me from hearing the sounds of her sobs.

Suddenly my fury and outrage over my situation surges out of me in a great torrent, and I find myself sweeping all the items from my desk. I wish I could roar and shout, but if I can hear Jane, I'm sure she can hear me. Making a mess of my office doesn't help ease my temper. I take no pleasure as papers, books, and technology go flying onto the floor – not even the visceral crash as they land can satisfy my rage.

My beta, Matthew, appears a few moments later, entering through the side door and looking over the mess with solemn understanding.

"Don't." I bark. "I don't want your pity."

"I'm not going to offer you pity." He answers simply. "I actually thought I might be able to give you a little hope."

What hope, there is no hope for me, Matthew. How many times do I have to tell you?" I hiss, glaring at my loyal Beta.

"Your wolf is calmer with your mate nearby." He assesses coolly. I know things just went badly, but if Jane is around you'll have more time, you might be able to hold on long enough for the doctors to find a cure,

"You know the chances of a cure are all but nonexistent." I reply, slumping into my desk chair.

Continuing to bring it up is simply cruel."

But Ethan, it is possible.

The doctors said so."

Matthew reminds me.

"Lot's of things are possible." I counter. "Flying to the moon is possible, but the chances of me doing it are zero. I have to be realistic here. If I hang my hopes on a long shot then we won't be prepared. The most likely outcome is madness and death, we have to assume that is going to happen, we have to be pragmatic and ensure everything is in place for that eventuality."

"I understand that. But being realistic doesn't mean giving up completely. You're not even trying to fight, Ethan!" Matthew accuses. "You're just giving up – that isn't you!"

What am I supposed to fight for?" I demand. "I don't have anything left! The best I can hope for is a few more months of misery. I don't want to extend my life if it's going to be like this."

"For them!" He shouts, pointing to the door Jane just exited. "For your family! Don't do this, Ethan.

It's not too late. The pups still love you, Jane still loves you!"

And look at what I've done to her!" I command, I don't deserve her, and the pups deserve better too.

Maybe so." Matthew agrees. "But you're the one they want." I stare at the solid wooden panel, wishing there was some way out of this mess. I despise myself, and I want to make this better for my family at any cost. Jane will understand if you tell her the truth."

I can't do that.'I insist. If she finds out she'll never leave me. That isn't the goal – I'm no good for her even when I'm sane. I think we've already proven that much."

"For the pups then. If you get better you can still be in their lives." Matthew argues. You won't be a danger to them. They need their father."

I know he's right.I know if there's a chance, I should fight for it. I just don't know if I could survive getting my hopes up only to have them dashed again. Then again, if I'm going to die anyway, it won't matter if I can survive it.

"Alright." I agree. "I won't give up yet – for them."

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