

The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 199

Ethan

"Ethan, if you're going to do a bunch of grand gestures for Jane and make us take credit for them, you could at least warn us!" Linda scolds over the phone. "I mean the photo album was one thing, but now you've really taken it too far.

Honestly, her mortgage?"

"I assumed you would just tell her Eric feels so guilty for deceiving her all those years that he's going overboard." I reply.

"I did, but you have to admit it seems like a bit much – even for him!" Linda replies.

"Besides I'm not expecting you to take credit for everything – Devon agreed to say the babysitting service and personal gifts are from him." I supply, smiling at the she-wolf's indignation.

"And her company's stock portfolio?" Linda gripes, "how are you going to explain that one?"

"Angel investors." I answer easily. "It's not like that's out of the realm of possibilities after all – La Louve is the most profitable fragrance company on the market, any number of hedge funds would be thrilled to invest."

"You know that this is crazy, right?" Linda grouses.

"She would so much rather have you, Ethan. Not to mention Paisley."

"Believe it or not, I've heard all this from Matthew and Devon already." I inform her stubbornly. "But I've made up my mind. I want the best for my family, and that's not me."

Linda sighs, a heavy, beleaguered sound that makes it clear she thinks I'm being completely unreasonable. "Are there any updates on your condition?" She asks after a moment. "I mean is the prognosis still terrible?"

"My doctors just told me about a potential surgery."

I relate, somewhat reluctantly. "It's risky, and if it goes wrong I could end up worse off than before. "

"Risky how?" Linda clarifies.

"Well there's still so much fluid compressing my spinal cord that any surgery would apparently be very difficult because they can't actually see my nerve pathways. If they knick the wrong thing then my paralysis could become truly permanent, or more extensive than it already is." I explain.

And then I truly would have a death sentence."

"But I thought the braces were helping you?" Linda responds, trying to understand. "Didn't they tell you that the more you keep your body moving, the more the swelling would decrease? Is it possible to keep up the physical therapy so the swelling decreases enough to make the surgery more viable?"

"Maybe." I confirm. "And I think that's what I have to do anyway – I might be willing to risk the surgery if things were more stable with the pack, or if I was in worse condition. If I started to really lose it then I might attempt it anyway – because at that point I wouldn't be doing the pack or Paisley any good by waiting. Luckily having Paisley here is helping my wolf stay calm."

"I still can't believe that Jane let her go." Linda laments. "She must be heartbroken."

"She was pretty devastated," I share grimly. "But it won't be forever. If I don't find a way to get better Paisley will be back with Jane and the other pups within the year." I can practically hear Linda wince. She hates listening to me talk about my possible death so matter-of-factly, but I don't see any benefit in ignoring reality. That won't help anyone.

"Aren't you afraid of having her around when you're in this state?" Linda presses.

"Yes, but she really didn't give us an option. She's a stubborn little thing." I remark, unable to keep a hint of pride out of my voice.

"She's her father's daughter." Linda counters dryly, taking a moment to let her words sink in. "How's she holding up?"

"She misses them." I relate, "but it gets a little easier every day, and they talk on the phone constantly."

"Good." Linda breathes. "You'll let me know if you need anything?"

"Yes." I promise.

"And you'll warn me before you decide to -I don't know, buy Jane a castle and sign my name on the card?" She adds, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

"You have my word." I laugh. "Bye Linda."

After I hang up, I finish getting ready for the day, drop Paisley off at school and head for the pack headquarters. However when I arrive, I find Matthew waiting outside my office, looking very nervous indeed. Things have been tense between us lately. He understands my determination to do right by the pack and my family with whatever time I have left, but I know he disagrees with me about what "right" is. The closest we came to actually being on the same page is when I decided to bring Paisley home.

"Is everything alright?" I ask, my heart skipping a beat. My immediate thought is of Jane and the pups; has something happened? Am I just jumping to conclusions?

Matthew pales when he sees me, and my suspicions increase. Oh Goddess, what is it. He slowly rises from his armchair. "I have to tell you something, and I need you to be calm when I do."

It speaks volumes that Matthew is still afraid of my temper despite my paralysis, but I hate the trepidation on his face. "Why, what's wrong?" I demand. As strange as it seems, the scent of Matthew's fear calms me slightly, telling me this isn't about delivering bad news, but something else entirely.

"I did something." Matthew confesses vaguely.

And you're not going to like it."

I narrow my eyes, feeling as though I'm on a roller coaster of emotion. Worried then calm, now near panicked that Matthew might have betrayed my confidence. "What? What did you do?"

"Ethan," Matthew begins, raising his palms in supplication. "You've been doing so much better lately, but you're still trying to do everything on your own and it simply isn't working. You were a different man when Jane was here, and I understand why you couldn't let her Stay, but that doesn't mean you can't get help from someone else."

"Matthew, what did you do?" I snap, not liking the direction this is taking one bit.

"I called Nina." Matthew's voice is barely audible, but I heard him loud and clear.

"Nina?" I repeat, aghast. "As in-?"

"As in, your fated mate." Matthew confirms. "I've been tracking her ever since you two met all those years ago – just in case. I thought if you wouldn't let Jane help you, you might let her."

"Have you lost your mind?" I thunder. "What part of 'the people closest to me are in the most danger' don't you understand? Moreover, what in the Goddess's name makes you think I can trust this woman? I met her for two hours almost a decade ago – for all you know she'll betray my secret to the entire pack!"

"Oh come off it!" Matthew grumbles back. "She wouldn't have any motive to do that. If she cares for you, she'll want to help. If she doesn't, she'll either go away or she'll stick around to take advantage of your status like Eve. Either way you spin it, she benefits from keeping the secret."

"I can't believe you did this without talking to me first!" I hiss, groaning as my wolf tries to break free.

"You would have stopped me!" Matthew shouts, raising his voice at me for the first time in my memory. "You aren't yourself right now, Ethan.

You were fvcking suicidal a few weeks ago and as thrilled as I am that you've turned things around, I don't trust you not to go down that path again if things take a turn for the worse! I can't just stand by and watch you suffer without trying everything I can to help you. Not as your Beta and certainly not as your friend. It will be good for you and Paisley both."

"I don't care!" I roar, feeling beyond betrayed.

Matthew has never defied me this way."You didn't have any right! I ought to remove you from your position."

"I had every right!" Matthew combats. "I have served you loyally since we were eighteen years old and I have been your best friend for another ten years on top of that! If anyone has the right to give you a kick in the p*nts when your stubborn as-s deserves it, it's me. And we both know you aren't going to fire me- you might want to, but if I'm gone you'll have to trust someone else with your secret and we both know there's no one as loyal to you as I am."

"Fine, I won't fire you." I grit out, pacing awkwardly in my braces. "Just undo it." I order. "Whatever it takes, call her back and tell her not to come."

"You don't understand" Matthew states grimly, shaking his head. "This didn't just happen. I called her the other day."

"What are you saying?" I demand fiercely.

"I'm saying that she's already here." Matthew confesses, glancing towards my closed office, "and she's right on the other side of those doors.

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