

The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 123

Jane

What do you mean, he's already gone?" Linda demands, her mouth hanging open in shock and disbelief. Mere moments ago she'd been telling me how happy she was with Eric, and now she looked as if her entire world had been turned on its head.

There was an earlier boat departing, Ethan explains wearily, gesturing towards a ship steaming out of the harbor. And he thought you would try to go with him if you knew.

So he just left me?" Linda gasps, sounding as if the words are catching in her throat. "He might be going to his death and he left me without even saying goodbye?"

I'm sorry, Linda." Ethan professes, his deep voice full of sympathy. "He wanted to protect you, that's all."

I wince, knowing how well this announcement will be received. Somehow men never seem to learn that making decisions for their mates under the guise of protection never goes over well. Sure enough, Linda's hands curl into fists as her cheeks flush scarlet, but she stomps away down the dock, having enough sense not to explode at Ethan.

I immediately try to go after her, but Ethan catches me around the waist. Not so fast, you.

How are you feeling?

Well enough to go talk her down. I state simply, not turning to face Ethan for fear of letting him see how pale I am. "Let me handle this, can you get the disguises without us?"

I'm not worried about the disguises, I'm worried about you." Ethan corrects, trying to get me to look him in the eye. I don't like leaving you alone when you've been so sick."

It'll be okay." I promise, starting to lose my patience. "It's just a bit of seasickness and Linda needs me."

Says the woman who insisted she was dying a few days ago." Ethan sighs, releasing me. "All right. We'll plan to meet back here then? In half an hour?"

"Deal." I agree, but I'm already following Linda.

When I find her, curled up in the windowsill of a seaside shop and glaring at everyone who passes by, I can tell she's on the verge of tears.

"I'm so sorry, honey." I tell my friend. "What can I do?"

"You think there's anywhere on this island to find a stiff drink?" Linda sniffs, crossing her arms over her chest.

"I can guarantee it." I say, though the idea of alcohol makes my insides roil in protest. "Come on," I encourage, wrapping my arm around her shoulders and pulling her up, "let's go find a bar, and we can talk all this out."

A little while later, when we're ensconced in the corner of a quaint brewhouse – Linda with a tumbler of liquor and me with a glass of ginger soda – she lets her sorrows roll off her tongue freely. "I've waited for him for so long." Linda admits, taking a swig of her drink. "Years! Years of watching him moon over you, and years of being invisible. Now he finally wakes up and gets his head out of his ass, and he just leaves me behind like I'm nothing."

"You know that's not why he did it." I soothe, squeezing her hand. "I mean look at Ethan. He tried to leave me behind. Men always want to run off and slay dragons while we stay safe at home."

"So they get all the adventures, all the fun, and we just bide our time like good little house wives." Linda gripes, "and I'm not even married!"

I know." I sigh. It's infuriating, and it isn't fair. We have just as much right to be here as they do."

We should make a pact." Linda suggests, emptying her glass. That no matter what happens on this trip, we won't let them leave us behind. We won't let them exclude us, and if they try, we'll find a way to get back in, even if we have to go it all on our own."

That's a pact I'll gladly make." I smile softly.

There's no way in hell I'm going to let Ethan keep me in the dark about his efforts to rescue the pups. I think he knows better now than to try, but I wouldn't put it past him if things changed somehow. If the odds shifted out of our favor and he believed I was in danger, I know he might try to pull the same sort of stunt Eric did.

We clink our glasses together and make a toast to seal the deal, For the pups."

I smell Ethan before I see him. I can feel him approaching behind me as if his body is an extension of my own, as if my every nerve ending is coming to life just being in the same room as him.

We've got company." Linda murmurs, eyeing something over my shoulder.

I know." I answer, trying to appear nonchalant as my mate approaches.

In the next moment Ethan's massive hand settles on my nape, circling the back of my neck in a possessive hold that tells every man in the room I belong to him – as if his mark didn't already. The modern, independent woman inside me wants to object, but my inner omega loves it, preening with the knowledge that such a powerful man chose me above all others.

I turn my face up to Ethan's, offering my lips for the taking and hoping he won't notice the tension he's interrupted. He obliges, extracting a few lazy kisses from my mouth before straightening up again and glancing between Linda and I suspiciously. "You two aren't plotting mischief, are you?"

So much for distracting kisses. "Us?" We say in unison, our voices full of abject innocence, we'd never!"

Ethan rolls his eyes and takes the seat next to mine, tucking me into his side. "I knew it was a bad idea to leave you two alone."

If you want to blame anyone, blame Eric."

Linda mutters. "He brought this on himself."

"Brought what on himself?" Ethan questions, his eyes narrowed.

Nothing." We chime again.

Goddess save me from scheming she-wolves."

He grumbles, flagging down a bartender. He places his order and looks back to us, his smile tightening slightly. "I don't blame you for being upset, Linda."

Her eyes glistened dangerously, Alpha, if someone did to you what he did to me, you'd rip them to pieces."

That's why I don't blame you." Ethan remarks, flashing his fangs. "All I ask is that you not forget that there's more at stake here than your relationship. The pups lives depend on us – they depend on Eric convincing his family to trust him again – and it might be easier for him to do that.."

Without bringing home a strange she-wolf."

Linda finishes the thought for him, looking slightly mollified. "You're right." She agrees after a moment, "I'm sorry, I was being selfish."

The distraction of Linda and Eric had pulled my mind from the pups for an unforgivably long time, but now that I've been reminded, I can't think of anything else.

"What do you think it means, that there hasn't been word of the pups in his Kingdom?" I ask Ethan, thankful he's finished his task quickly so that we can discuss these new developments. "I mean, we know they were headed to the Southern Isles.

Ethan scrubs a hand over his face. It could be any number of things." He shares grimly, "my spies might not have the inside track anymore, Aimon might be farther ahead of us than we expected, he could be keeping things very quiet or it could even be... it could even mean that they escaped.

Escaped?" I repeat, not sure whether this idea is more comforting or frightening. "Do you really think that's possible?"

"We're not going to know anything until we arrive and get the lay of the land." Ethan announces. "I've got everyone in my employ looking into it, but the Southern isles span hundreds of miles. Depending on where the traffickers were keeping them, how they were transporting them, what they planned... there are just too many possibilities to know anything at this point."

When he says it like that, it makes me think that the pups might actually have been better off going to Aimon, at least then we'd know where they are. "What are we still doing sitting here?" I jump up abruptly. We have the disguises, why are we wasting time talking when we could be back on the ship?"

Because the ship doesn't leave for another hour." Ethan reminds me in a low, even tone.

We're going as fast as we can, Janey."

"It's not fast enough!" I exclaim, the urgency of our situation slamming into me with full force. It was different when we thought the pups were headed for the capital, when our plans were always going to depend on besting Aimon, not tracking them down across hundreds of miles.

They could be anywhere!" I choke, "they could be lost or injured, they could be in grave danger at this very moment!" My breath is coming in gasps, my lungs can't seem to draw in enough air, and soon Ethan is standing beside me, trying to comfort me even though we both know there's no use. How are we ever going to find them?

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