

## The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 220

Ethan

"You're letting them stay?" Nina demands, glaring at me as she wears a hole in the floor, pacing back and forth with the indignant energy of a she-wolf scorned. Unsurprisingly, she was less than amused to learn I decided to allow Jane and the pups to stay with us – though in truth it hadn't been much of a choice. My mischievous mate forced me between a rock and a hard place, and I wasn't about to drag her out of the penthouse kicking and screaming.

"I can't just throw them out." I sigh, wincing as I do the stretches my surgeon prescribed post-surgery.

"Of course you can." Nina argues, coming to a stop in front of me. "You just don't want to."

Though Nina is my fated mate, I find I have far less patience for her insubordination than I do with Jane. I'm not sure what it is about the woman, but my wolf simply doesn't have the same soft spot for her. So while I might allow Jane to speak to me this way, my automatic instinct is to cut Nina down to size. Luckily I have enough self-control to avoid snapping at her. "I don't need this right now, Nina."

"Then when?" She presses, not taking the hint. "If not now, then when?"

"Careful woman, you're working my last nerve" I warn. I don't appreciate her interfering with my family, especially not after she swept me out of the city knowing Jane was in trouble. "You're already on thin ice and I'm in no mood to be tested."

Nina flinches reflexively, another sign that we simply aren't well matched. She looks at me with true fear, not the sultry shudders Jane often displays when chastised. Perhaps I should feel guilty for being such an ogre, or for constantly comparing Nina to Jane, but I simply can't help it.

How can I look at my fated mate without thinking of the woman who I truly love?

Nina is eyeing me warily, but her reticence merely masks a cool determination I recognize only too well. "Listen to me, Ethan." She begins, trying to sound warm and gentle. It doesn't suit her. "I'm so happy you're better, but I don't like what's happening here. You're letting Jane walk all over you."

"She's my mate and she's breeding." I answer simply. "She deserves a little slack."

"No, I am your mate!" Nina explodes. "Me not her!"

What about what I deserve? I've stood by your side all these months, asking for nothing more than to earn your respect but you couldn't even give me that." Tears burn in her eyes, and a stab of guilt pierces the walls around my heart. "I see what's happening Ethan! You're going to go back to her, and I'm going to be nothing more than collateral damage – again! She's already digging her claws into your wolf and you're just letting it happen."

Damn it. I think bitterly. I don't want to hurt Nina, but I can't make myself want her any more than I can make myself fall out of love with Jane. The truth is that I don't know why the Goddess sent Nina to me, but I have to think it was for a reason, if only to keep me on course. Maybe she's here to make sure I don't give into my feelings, and there's no denying that I need all the help I can get.

Taking a deep breath, I say, "Nina, I'm not going back to Jane. I'm sorry that it's such a struggle for me – but it is. That doesn't mean I'm not determined to do right by you both."

Nina shakes her head, looking more vulnerable than I can ever recall seeing her. "I'm never going to be enough for you am I? You're never going to stop wanting her."

I rumble wordlessly, another pang of regret sounding in my heart. I'd been afraid of this, but until now Nina has insisted she only wanted to be Luna. This is the first time she's admitted she might have feelings for me. "I warned you from the beginning, Nina. I cannot be a true mate to you. I will do my duty to care for and protect you, but I cannot offer you love or pups."

"But..." She gestures to the spot where I stand, looking even more hurt than before. "But you're cured, and we're to be married."

"I will not father pups with anyone but Jane." I explain mercilessly, knowing that there's no space for misunderstandings here.

Nina hiccups a sob, shaking her head. "I don't understand you – we're fated, why isn't that enough? Why aren't I enough?"

"I'm sorry." I profess honestly. "I don't understand it either. I only know the heart wants what it wants. Still, I've been up front with you from day one. Did you think you could change my mind?"

"I thought my sacrifices to care for you would be worth something – appreciated." Nina accuses bitterly.

"They are, but appreciation only goes so far." I declare softly, watching as Nina wraps her arms protectively around herself "Maybe in time" I suggest weakly.

"No!" Nina hisses. "Don't do that. I don't want lies and placations. If you don't love me now, you never will and we both know it."

"I really am sorry." I repeat helplessly. "I know this isn't what you were hoping for, but we'll still marry – your still be my Luna. Jane will give up eventually and take the pups home, and everything can go back to the way it was."

Nina clenches her eyes shut, but she nods reluctantly, almost as if she's making the gesture against her better judgment – as if she doesn't truly believe it. "Whatever you say, Ethan."

The next day I wake up to the feeling of my wolf crawling beneath my skin, desperate to get out.

He's been plenty restless since the surgery, but today feels different, as if he cannot wait a moment longer. I barely make it out of bed, untangling myself from the puppy pile surrounding me on all sides.

The pups had claimed their territory in my bed on my first night home, evicting Nina from her rightful spot, though not by force. She simply doesn't have the patience to sleep with tiny feet jabbing her all through the night, and so the moment they come for cuddles, she disappears. In time I'm sure they'll go back to sleeping with Jane, or splitting time between us, but they've wanted to be near me since the surgery, and there's no way in hell I'd turn them away.

So on this day I slide off the mattress and onto the floor, careful not to wake them even though a war is being waged beneath my skin. I instantly understand that the time has come for me to transform, whether my body is healed enough to handle the change or not – there's no holding my wolf back.

I haven't shifted in so long that it takes a minute for my wolf to break out into the open, pain tearing through my body like a firebrand. Eventually he emerges with a triumphant howl, and for the first time in months, my soul is finally free. The sounds of my roars and howls wake the pups, who jump up rubbing their tired eyes before understanding sets in. Four luminous smiles greet me when they see the huge furry beast at the foot of the bed, and then they're on me, giggling and crying out in excitement.

"Daddy you're a wolf!" Paisley exclaims, leaping onto my back. She flops onto her belly, hugging my furry body with all her strength.

Parker and Ryder are down on all fours, playfully growling and wavering from left to right as if preparing to pounce. I drop my front legs onto the hardwood floor, showing them my fangs and wagging my tail even as Paisley jolts around on top of me. My body is still sore and aching, but I'm overflowing with adrenaline and euphoria, as lighthearted as a pup myself. The next thing I know, Riley is charging towards me between her brothers, a war cry on her lips and a devilish glint in her eye.

I pounce before the little imp can reach me, smothering her with wolf kisses as she giggles and squeals. By the time Jane and Nina arrive on the scene, the pups and I are loping around the room, wrestling and pouncing, making a mess of the entire room.

"Ethan you shifted!" Nina exclaims, looking thrilled. "We should go for a run!"

Unfortunately for Nina, Jane is beside her – and I can't seem to see anything else. My sweet little mate is silent, watching the pups and me play with an incandescent smile. I bound over to her, unable to help myself. In this form the scent of the pup growing in her womb is stronger than ever, and I can't resist nuzzling her swollen belly with my velvety muzzle. I nose my way under the hem of her pajama top, swiping a few licks over her belly button and purring when a tiny foot thumps against my tongue.

I immediately know that Jane is the one I want to run with, not Nina. I carefully close my teeth around her sleeve and start dragging her to the 8 door. If I were still in charge, I would have done everything in my power to fight these instincts, but I'm not in control now – my wolf is, and he wants Jane. Luckily she's only too eager to spend time with me, and she shifts in a heartbeat.

We fly out the door in perfect sync – together at last.