

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

Chapter 162

Jane

My first Christmas with all four pups should be a joyous occasion. After all, every Christmas I've known since becoming a mother has been tainted by Paisley's absence. I've wanted nothing -but the ability to bring her home where she belongs for as long as I can remember... and yet it takes all my strength just to get myself out of bed in the morning.

Three weeks have passed since we returned from the Southern Isles. We had all our things shipped from the penthouse in the first couple of days we were home, and though having all their favorite toys and possessions back helped the pups adjust, they're still furious with me for taking them from Ethan.

It's amazing how such young pups can hold a grudge for so long, but they don't forget easily, and they wouldn't even talk to me the first week we were here. They've gradually warmed up a bit – though not without a good bit of bribery on my part, offering sweets or fun activities like ice skating and sledding. It was something of shock to leave the tropics for the icy cold of the mountains, and Paisley seems especially unprepared – having never lived in such a cold climate before, but the winter activities have undoubtedly been a help in thawing their feelings towards me.

Nothing is better than hot cocoa and warm hugs from Mommy when a little one feels frozen through, and I'd be lying if I said I haven't been using this to my advantage. It isn't easy to play cheerleader when I feel so completely hollow inside, but I also know that earning my babies' forgiveness will help fill the gaping hole in my heart, so I'm doing my best.

Today is no different. When the pups emerge from their room and blearily wander into the kitchen for breakfast, I greet them with a wide smile, hoping today will be the day they finally want to start their morning with hugs and kisses once more. I used to wake every morning with three cuddle bugs sneaking into my bed, now I can barely get a hello from them, even though I stay up half the night trying to soothe their nightmares.

Things haven't been easy for the pups after their traumatic adventure, and though they cry out for me when the bad dreams and frightening memories wake them in the middle of the night, by morning those feelings are long gone. Hello angels." I say brightly. "Are you ready for pancakes?"

They exchange a few glances, then shake their heads. We don't want that." Parker announces.

"We don't like pancakes." Riley adds, offering me a haughty little sniff.

I raise my brow, I've never known my pups to refuse a pancake a single day in their lives. I know that sometimes children arbitrarily decide they don't like things from one minute to the next, but I doubt that's the case now. This is certainly a protest against me. "Alright." I sigh, praying for patience. "What would you like instead?"

I'm not hungry." Paisley pouts.

"Me neither." Ryder adds.

I have to fight the urge to roll my eyes. This is not the first time they've attempted to use a hunger strike to make their ire known. Luckily for me, they're still too little for this ever to last for very long. Tummies start rumbling sooner or later, and then their willpower goes out the window.

"Fine." I shrug. "I already made pancakes for myself, so I guess I'll just eat them all alone." I extract a couple of golden brown discs from the stack I made, and slide them onto a plate, carrying it to the table and sitting down to have breakfast. I can see the pups staring at me out of the corner of my eye, their little mouths hanging open in surprise. I pour syrup over the stack and cut off a small triangle, moaning theatrically when I pop it into my mouth.

I can hear the pups scenting the air, and I even catch one low gurgle from Parker's belly. I try not to smile, reading the paper and sipping my coffee as they look on. As the minutes pass, they sidle closer and closer to the table, as if the pancakes are luring them in like fish on a reel.

Everytime I cut a new bite, they seem to be standing closer than before, until eventually they're gathered on either side of my chair, staring longingly at the pancakes on my plate.

"Well hello there." I say, feigning surprise.

What kind are those?" Riley asks softly, her eyes wide as she gazes at the golden cakes.

"Blueberry." I answer nonchalantly, knowing these are their favorites. I almost ask if they're sure they don't want any, but in the end I decide to wait for them to ask.

They look really fluffy." Paisley observes, licking her lips.

They are," I confirm, taking a bite of bacon. "I made my special recipe. It's too bad you don't want any – the leftover batter won't be the same if it's not used fresh."

The pups exchange another look, "Maybe we could just have a nibble." Ryder suggests.

You know, to make sure we still don't like them." Parker adds.

That can be arranged." I agree, spearing a child-sized bit on my fork and offering it to Paisley.

She chomps it down with great gusto, then sighs with pleasure.

Yummy?" I ask, fighting the urge to smile.

"They're not bad." She allows, unconsciously leaning her warm little body into my side.

"Can I try some?" Riley requests.

I'll tell you what," I proclaim, standing and moving back towards the kitchen, "I make you a few plates, and whatever you don't eat, I'll put in the compost. Sound good?" When I turn back, it's to find all four pups scarfing down the pancakes on my plate with their hands. They freeze when they catch me watching them, their eyes going wide as if they hope I might not see them if they don't move.

I can't help but laugh now. "I guess I'll get myself some more too."

A few minutes later I'm placing small plates in front of each of them, smiling as they dig in.

Angels, I know you're upset with me." I say for what is probably the thousandth time. "But refusing to eat or talk about it will only make you feel worse. I wish you would just tell me what you're thinking so we can deal with it together."

I've given this same lecture so many times I've lost count. It always comes back to the same thing: I love you no matter what, and I just want what's best for you.

But talking isn't gonna change your mind."

Paisley counters. "You said so."

"I did." I confirm. "But that's the point sweetheart. Talking isn't always about changing things or changing people's minds. It helps just to express yourself, to tell someone you're cross with how you're feeling and know that they understand. It can help just to be heard and listened to."

But you already know how we feel." Parker pouts, shoveling pancakes into his mouth.

'Slow down," I advise, "And I know some of how you feel, but again it's not about that, it's about you getting the emotions off your chest."

But they're not on our chest." Riley argues.

"It's just an expression." I explain. "It means that when you hold things inside they build up and get worse and worse, and letting them out can really help." I continue, reaching for Ryder- who's nearest to me- and breathing a sigh of relief when he doesn't automatically pull away.

I wish you all would talk to me. I love you so much, and I know you're having a hard time with more than just me and Daddy. You went through a lot in the Southern Isles, and I know you must have felt a lot of scary things at the time and it's important to talk about what you went through."

I look around at their beloved little faces, hating how guarded they all are. Frowning, I put an offer on the table I've been trying to avoid, even though I know it's probably the right thing to do.

'But if you don't want to talk to me, I can find someone different, someone who will listen and work through all your feelings with you.'

"Who?" Parker questions suspiciously.

"It's what we call a therapist. They're a special kind of doctor who is an expert in emotions and sometimes it's nice to have someone to speak with who isn't a part of your life already. They don't have any stake in the conversation except to help you, so you know it's safe to share with them, and they wouldn't be allowed to tell me about what you discuss. It would be totally private." I share.

The pups shift uncomfortably. Do we have to?"

If you don't want to talk to me, then you need to talk to someone." I decide.

We would talk to Daddy." Paisley remarks shrewdly, making my heart sink like a rock into my stomach.

I'm sorry, but that isn't an option." I announce, hating this.

They glare and cross their arms over their chests.

Then we choose the therapist."

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