

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

Chapter 164

Jane

Come on munchkins, we're going on an adventure!" I announce, get your coats.

The pups look at me suspiciously. What kinda venture?" Riley asks.

Their first therapy session had helped more than I expected. I don't know everything they talked about with the doctor, but I expect having another adult reassuring them that they were loved and safe helped set them at ease. They still aren't really talking to me, but they're not fighting me as hard as they were before either.

The hardest part is still when they wake in the middle of the night crying out in fear, then asking for Ethan when I go to comfort them. It's the worst with Paisley. She's never lived without her father before, and I'm trying to keep a special eye on her. She asks for him more than any of the others, and it seems most difficult for her to believe we can't simply call him and ask for a visit. The more time that passes the angrier I become with Ethan for leaving our babies. It's one thing to hurt me, but another entirely to hurt them. I've decided to distract them anyway

I can, to try and make them feel like our family is whole without Ethan – not that this is an easy feat.

"A Christmas adventure." I answer, coming back to the present. We were away for so long we're very behind on decorating and baking, and doing all the fun holiday things!"

What fun holiday things?" Paisley asks, looking curious now.

Well, for one thing – every year we go to this beautiful christmas tree farm, then we go on sleigh rides and pick out a tree and cut it down ourselves. And every night there's a bonfire with hot cocoa and smores..." I lower my voice to a whisper. "Sometimes Santa even turns up."

Santa?! " She exclaims, looking to her siblings for confirmation. Unfortunately they're not beside her anymore, because the moment I mentioned the tree farm they went racing for their coats.

That's right." I confirm, offering her a big smile. "It's going to be so much fun, you'll see."

The pups quickly pile into the car, and as we drive up into the mountains I gradually nudge them into the holiday spirit, playing Christmas carols and singing badly until they join in. Before long the car is a cacophony of wrong lyrics and tone deaf voices, and I feel better than I have since returning home. This Christmas will certainly be bittersweet, but the more we get out and do things like this, the more confident I feel that we can find some joy in the season.

When we arrive at the farm I double check the kids' winter clothes before releasing them into the deep snow, and they bound away through the white powder like the excitable puppies they are.

I have to speed walk to keep up with them: Riley, Ryder and Parker leading the way to the horse drawn sleighs, with Paisley racing along excitedly behind them. Maybe it's the pregnancy, or maybe it's as simple as finally seeing my children all together at this special time of year, but I feel myself near tears as I watch my littlest chasing after her brothers and sisters. She's not as fast given her heart and lack of practice trudging through snow, but she's every bit as excited, and her giggling laughter fills my heart with warmth.

This is exactly what I needed. I realize. I needed to see that everything we went through was worth it, that there's hope we can be happy again sometime in the future. I still feel raw and fragile to my core, and I know that the months ahead are going to be incredibly difficult, but as long as I remember to cherish these little moments, I think I can get through the worst of it. After all, I survived Ethan once before right?

The pups nearly collide head-on with the sleighs, thankfully wrangled by the drivers before they can try and clamber onto the horses. They spend a while greeting and cuddling the huge Clydesdales pulling the sleighs, asking the drivers what the horses' names are and feeding them carrots before bundling into the old-fashioned vehicles. There are bells on the horse's tack, so as we set out through the snow jingling chimes fill the air, and the pups' faces light up with glee.

"Mommy, it's cold!" Paisley tells me, shivering in her little boots in the seat across from me.

"Come here lovey." I encourage, pulling her into my la\*p, "you're not used to all the ice and snow are you?

"No – I like it though." She says thoughtfully, Snuggling closer. "Is fun to play in, it just gets cold after a whiles."

"It certainly does." I agree. "What did you and your Daddy used to do at Christmas, hmm?" It's dangerous to bring up Ethan, especially with Paisley, but I want to try and make her feel as at home as possible with us, and that means finding out what traditions they had.

Well Gamma and I used to bake, and Daddy always took me to meet Santa at the mall." She answers thoughtfully. We'd decorate the tree together on Christmas eve, then go to the festival in town. It was really nice."

That sounds lovely." I tell her, leaning my cheek against the top of her head. Is there anything you want to do this year to celebrate? I don't know if I can make cookies as good as your Gamma did, but I can try."

Yeah, I love baking." She exclaims, looking up at me curiously. Will Daddy come for Christmas?"

All of a sudden all four pups are looking at me hopefully, and now I feel like crying for a completely different reason. "I don't think so, sweetheart."

"Why hasn' he called?" Riley asks, "doesn' he wanna talk to us?"

I'm sure he does." I proclaim, not sure if I'm telling the truth or a lie. "But he must be very very busy with the pack. He was gone a long time .

"But he always makes time for me." Paisley insists, And he would never miss Christmas!"

I'm sure he doesn't want to miss being with you for the holidays." I assure them, "He loves you so much, you know that."

The pups exchange a few glances, and I wonder if the therapist was right – are they going to figure out I'm lying soon? As much as I hate keeping up the facade, I can't bear for them to know the truth. I can't let them find out they've been abandoned. "The truth is I asked him to stay away this year so that we could settle in as a family. It's our first Christmas all together and we're still trying to get life back to normal. I thought it would be too confusing if he came."

The pups are looking at me with wide eyes and deep frowns. Paisley has gone stiff in my arms.

You shouldn' have done that Mommy." Parker scolds, crossing his arms over his chest. You should a asked us."

Like it or not, I am your mother, and I make the rules." I remind them softly. "I have to do what I think is best for you, and you're not always going to like it."

You sound like Dr. Nora." Riley grumbles, mimicking her brother's pose and crossing her arms over her ch3st.

"Do 1?" I ask, not surprised to learn their therapist might have told them something along these lines. "Well she would know, she's a Mommy too."

The pups are quiet after that, not saying another word until the sleigh stops at the edge of the tree fields. Together we clamber out of the sleigh and begin perusing the rows of stunning evergreens, trying to decide which tree to bring home with us. We continue searching for the better part of an hour before deciding on a huge fir tree, and the sleigh driver helps me chop it down then carts it back to the horses.

After the tree is safely tied to the roof of the car we return to the main thoroughfare, gathering around the bonfire, drinking hot cocoa and making snores. The pups have all but forgotten our earlier argument by this time, and when we meander our way through a forest of twinkle lights towards Santa's grotto. They're practically bouncing up and down as we wait in the line to sit on his la\*p, and I eagerly pull out my phone to take photos when it's finally the quadruplets turn.

They bound up to him at once, and the actor lets out a surprised, "Ho, ho, ho! Four pups at once, my goodness." Riley and Paisley climb into his la\*p while the boys stand beside him like perfect little gentlemen as I take photos. After I'm done, Santa turns to them and asks, "And what do you want for Christmas, little ones?"

The pups exchange eager looks, nodding at one another before Parker looks up at the costumed man and says, "we want our Mommy and Daddy to get back together."

The bottom falls out of my stomach when I hear these words, and my wolf begins swearing up a storm in my head. Well fvck.

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