

The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 184

Jane

My heart sinks when I hear Paisley’s question, and I realize that Ethan was right about telling them together – not only for the sake of setting a good example for them, but because I didn’t anticipate this particular question. It will be easier to break the bad news with him beside me, so that all the blame doesn’t fall on my shoulders this time.

It breaks my heart that they’re still asking this, though it’s not surprising. They might be growing up fast, but they’re still so little. It’s going to take a very long time and lots of repetition for them to understand – as much as any child can understand being separated from their parents.

“No sweetheart.” Ethan murmurs gently. “In the new year you’re going to go home with your Mommy, just like we planned.”

I watch their faces as they absorb this news, hating inflicting pain on them but knowing there’s no other way around it. Riley, Ryder and Parker drop their gazes to their laps, hiding their disappointment from us. Paisley, on the other hand, is staring at Ethan with utter determination.

She stands up, slow and deliberate, her young face very serious as she turns her attention to me. “I wanna stay with Daddy.” She says firmly. “I wanna go back to the way things were afore.”

I feel my knees begin to buckle, and catch myself on the back of the couch. I’ve forgotten how to breathe, and even as the room begins spinning I’m fighting to control my expression, not to show her how deeply her words cut me. That hurt. That really hurt. Ethan’s strong hands catch me just above the elbows, and he eases me down onto the couch, “Easy now.” He murmurs, “Are you okay?”

I nod, choking back my emotions. The room is still spinning, and I’m afraid I’m going to be sick. “

Mommy, wha’s wrong!” The pups gather around me anxiously, their faces scrunched up in concern. I try to draw in a few breaths of air, but it isn’t easy at all. I clench my eyes shut against the room whirling around me in a sickening blur, trying to gauge whether or not I’m going to be sick and whether I’m steady enough to reach a restroom if that is the case.

I’d been afraid that the pups would never stop asking for Ethan- that I’d never be enough for them again – but the reality is worse. Paisley doesn’t want me at all. And what if Ethan says yes?

If he was willing to take Paisley back, could I possibly let him? Is it truly in her best interest to stay with me, or is that my own selfish desire to have my daughter near? Would she be happier with Ethan?

‘I’m sorry, Mommy.’ Paisley says, tears in her eyes as she cuddles close to my side. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“It’s not your fault cuddbug,” Ethan explains, kneeling down beside her. “Growing babies takes a lot of energy.” Ethan explains, “It makes Mommies very sleepy and upsets their tummies. You’ve got to be very gentle with your Mommy while she’s pregnant, okay?”

Their eyes go wide, and they nod, looking at me with worried expressions. “I’m okay angels, just a bit dizzy.”

“And Paisley, we talked about this.” Ethan answers in an incredibly gentle voice. Wait, he knew? She’s already requested this? He knew and he didn’t tell me. “You belong with your Mommy and your brothers and sister.”

“I promised I wouldn’t ever leave you again, remember?” I prompt, wanting to reach for her but still uncertain of my own wellness.

“I know,” Paisley frowns, tears sliding down her cheeks. “But I didn’ know keeping you meant losing Daddy.”

“I’m sorry, lovey.” I sigh, “that isn’t what I want, but my life is in the Dark Moon pack, and Daddy’s is here.”

“I know it’s all very strange and different, but I promise you’ll grow to love it, Paisley.” Ethan adds softly. Paisley is glaring at him now, her lips quivering as if she wants to make an outburst and is holding herself back for some reason. His voice grows stern, “You promised me, Paisley.”

“Paisley you can’t stay behind.” The other children encourage, and I’m amazed to see our conversation last night and the prospect of a new sibling has allowed them to accept this change. I have a feeling it’s only temporary, and also suspicious that they’re still plotting things, but right now I’m not going to question this. “We have to be together.”

She looks back at the other pups, looking suddenly uncertain. “Besides your Mommy’s going to need as much help as she can get with the new baby.”

Ethan continues, “You’re all going to have to take on more responsibilities as big brothers and sisters. These are very important jobs.”

“And Mr. Fluff needs you too!” Riley adds, gesturing to the forgotten bunny, who is currently scampering towards the kitchen, no doubt following his nose. Paisley follows the direction of her sister’s finger, and when she looks back at us, I realize she’s not angry with me. She’s angry with Ethan for not letting her stay. I’m beginning to wonder if she knows that he’s the reason none of us can stay. Before this trip she was equally upset with me, but now she throws another furious look at her father and climbs up onto the couch next to me, crawling halfway into my lap. She nudges her head under my arm and continues throwing sullen glances at Ethan. “Fine,” She mutters. “I’ll go with Mommy.”

I use my free hand to stroke her cheek, dropping kisses to her hair. “There now, no more arguing.” I croon. “It’s still Christmas, and there are more presents to open.”

Ryder, Riley, and Parker bound over to the Christmas tree, excitedly sorting through the boxes and bags, then delivering them to the person assigned to each gift. Paisley stays tucked under my arm, and her familiar weight against my side relieves some of my dizziness, I continue cuddling her, catching Ethan turn away out of the corner of my eye. His head is bowed, his shoulders and stiff, and his hands clenched into fists.

What is that about? I wonder. Is he angry at me? At her? For doing what he wants?

However When Parker brings Ethan a gift box covered in too many bows to have been wrapped by anyone but a four-year-old, He turns back with a smile, looking completely unbothered. He accepts the present, playfully shaking the box and earning himself a scolding from Ryder, “Daddy be careful!”

“I’m sorry.” He replies sheepishly, carefully ripping the paper off. Inside there is a set of four candles, each of which bears one of the pup’s names. Ethan pulls out the first one, lifting the Riley jar to his nose and blinking in astonishment. “Goddess, it smells exactly like you.” He says to the pup in question. It only takes a moment before he looks up to me. “How -?”

“Creating scents is what I do, remember?” I remind him. “And the pups wanted you to have something to remember them by.” At my words, Paisley cuddles closer with a little whimper, and I deposit another kiss on her sweetsmelling hair, rubbing her arm in long, soothing strokes. Ethan however, is staring at me as if I’ve given him the moon. His eyes are shining, and I realize just how badly it’s hurting him to give up the pups. A spark of rage courses through me despite the emotion he’s clearly trying to hide, visibly blinking tears from his eyes.

It didn’t have to be this way. I want to roar. You’re the one hurting yourself, not me.

“Thank you, pups.” He tells them gratefully. “You have no idea how much this means to me.”

I’m so busy trying to contain my anger with Ethan that I barely notice when Parker and Ryder deposit a large box in my own lap. Lifting the tag I read: To Jane, To Make Up for All the Moments You Missed.

I don’t understand the meaning of the card until I lift the boxes’ lid, finding a baby pink scrapbook inside. Paisley’s Firsts is written across the cover, and I’m crying before I can even open the book.

Linda knows that I keep scrapbooks like this for all my kids, highlighting all their important first moments: First steps, first words, first smiles. Of course I was never able to create one for Paisley, because I wasn’t around for her firsts.

“Mommy, why are you crying?” Paisley inquires, reaching up to try and pull my hands from my face.

“Because it’s you!” I hiccup, “It’s all the things I dreamed about being there for but never could!”

I flip open the front cover, raking my gaze over the pages with awe. Everything is there, from the day she was born, to right up until I arrived in the NightFang territory this summer. “How did Linda even get these photos?” I ask aloud, looking at Ethan. A wall comes down over his expression when my gaze reaches his face, and I catch only the quickest flash of indistinguishable emotion before his features become completely drawn and blank.

He shrugs. “She asked me to send them, I didn’t know why.”

The scrapbook is only half full, and on the last printed page, another message awaits, For all the photos yet to come.

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