

The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 206

Ethan

“Daddy!” Paisley’s sweet voice whispers in my ear, as one of her sharp little fingers jabs my side. “Daddy, are you awakes?”

My eyes are still closed, and it feels as though I just fell asleep a moment ago. I’m not sure what time it is, but I know something must be up if Paisley is trying to wake me. Normally she climbs right into bed with me and snuggles up without a word, perfectly content to snooze until I’m ready to get up – even if her tummy is growling with hunger, she’ll happily choose cuddles over food.

“Daddy,” she whispers again, giving me another prod.

“No.” I moan, throwing an arm over my eyes dramatically. “I’m asleep.”

“Daddy!” Paisley giggles, the sweet sound lifting my sleepy spirits. “I’m serious.”

“So am I” I grumble, pulling the covers up over my head to hide from the adorable creature.

A moment later the duvet is yanked back down, and Paisley is sitting on my chest, determined to interrupt my rest. “Daddy I needs to talk to you.”

Begrudgingly I peek one eye open, assessing the serious pup and the low light filtering in through the windows. The sun must barely be rising, but my daughter’s beautiful green eyes are completely alert.

What’s wrong princess?” I ask, encouraging her to lie down again. She happily agrees, sprawling on my broad chest and resting her cheek against my shoulder.

“I’ve been thinking.” She says.

“Mhmm, about what?” I encourage, petting her tiny limbs.

“Well, your surgry’s in two weeks.” She reminds me, as if I could forget. “And I know everything’s gonna be okay,” Paisley pauses, betraying her fear that this isn’t actually true. “But just in case it isn’ I was thinking that you should go see Mommy and Ryder, Riley and Parker one last time... in case it’s goodbye forever.”

To be honest I’d been thinking about this idea myself, but every time the notion rose in my mind I forced it back down, telling myself I was being selfish, putting my needs above theirs. When I don’t respond, Paisley presses on. “You could take me for a visits, see everyone again, and then leave me ’til after the surgry’s done with. That way...”

She trails off, unable to finish the grim sentence. Still, I know where she was headed. That way if I don’t survive, she’ll already be with Jane and her siblings when they get the news. Nina won’t have to bear the burden of taking my daughter back to her mother, and Paisley will be with the best support system possible.

“It’s okay, sweetheart. I know.” I confirm, stroking her dark hair. With her perspective in mind, I can’t think of any reason to say no. Paisley is giving me the perfect excuse to see my beloved family before I go under the knife, and this truly will be the best thing for her if the worst happens.

“I agree.” I breathe, hugging her a bit more tightly. “We should go for a visit – as soon as possible.”

When I tell Matthew my decision, he heartily agrees, but Nina is another matter entirely. I tell her my decision over breakfast, waiting until Paisley left for school before sharing the idea with my fated mate.

Nina puts down the piece of toast balanced between her perfectly manicured fingers, “Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“Listen,” I begin, exhaling heavily. “Paisley might be young, but she was absolutely right. If I’m.. If I die on the operating table, I don’t want my family’s last memory of me to be that day at the rest stop – when I took Paisley away. I want to make sure they know how much I love them, and I want to see them one last time for myself.”

“Ethan, you can’t tell Jane how much you love her. It will undo everything you’ve been working for these last few months.” Nina objects, shifting restlessly in her chair.

“I know. I’m going to right a letter for Paisley to give her if I don’t make it, but I still need to see her one last time, even if I can’t tell her how I feel. And I can tell the other pups.” I insist. “Besides, this way Paisley will be with Jane and her brothers and sister already. You won’t have to worry about taking her to the dark moon pack if I die.”

“Forgive me, Ethan, but it almost sounds like you’re expecting the worst to happen.” Nina frowns. “Are you planning on dying?”

“Of course not.” I rumble, annoyed by the question even though I know it’s well-intentioned. “I’m just trying to be realistic, Nina. I have a fifty-fifty chance. I don’t want to leave this earth with things unfinished. I need my children to know I love them. I need Paisley to be with her mother if she loses me.’

“Okay, I’m sorry.” Nina concedes. “You’re right. But if you’re going to do this, then I’m coming with you.”

“Now I’m not sure if that’sa good idea.” I sigh. “I’m not Sure how Jane or the pups would handle that, and I don’t want to hurt them worse than they already are.”

“The way I see it, you need someone to watch your back.” Nina argues, “and besides, how would it look if you went off to see your ex and left me behind. If you do survive the surgery, we have to look like we’re completely united, otherwise the pack will never support our marriage.”

Of course, I think. Our marriage. The one you’re determined to make happen and that I’m going along with because I owe you for screwing up your life plan.

The one neither of us will be happy in, but we’re agreeing to for convenience and status.

“Alright.” I agree. “But there may be times I want to be alone with them, and I’m going to need you to respect that.”

“Of course.” Nina smiles gently. “We’re a team, Ethan.

And I’m determined for us to be a strong team. This trip can be a good thing for us, as long as we play it right.”

“I’m sure you’re right.” I allow, unable to push away the intrusive thoughts banging on the door to my consciousness. Thoughts about how calculating Nina is, how determined she seems to become Luna, and how little she seems to care for anything else. I know that isn’t entirely fair of me – there’s nothing inherently wrong with ambition and Nina explained why it was so important to her when we struck this deal. I just worry about how far she’s willing to go to protect this dream.

Either way, by the next morning Nina, Paisley and I are piling into the car to travel to the Dark Moon pack, for better or worse. We drive all day long and into the evening, Nina and I taking turns at the wheel. Paisley slept most of the way, but she perked up the nearer we drew to the capital city.

We pull up outside Jane’s apartment around eight o’clock at night, and though I debated the idea of going straight to our hotel and approaching the family the next morning, Paisley convinced me that we should go see them first. We take the elevator up to the top floor, and Paisley skips down the hallway towards the apartment, obviously overjoyed to see her Mother and siblings. I’m beaming as I watch her, thrilled to see her so happy for once.

I don’t regret agreeing to let her stay with me, since I know she would have kept endangering herself in order to come back to me, but I do feel guilty. I hate knowing that she feels responsibility for my wellbeing, that she thinks she has to take care of me. No five year old should bear that burden, even if they want to.

The apartment door opens before Paisley can reach it, pulling me out of my thoughts and into the present.

Riley, Ryder and Parker pour out of the house, tackling their sister and immediately clambering onto her in a puppy pile. They’re squealing and laughing with joy, and I find myself laughing along with them.

As soon as they hear my voice, the pups’ dark heads pop up, and then they’re racing towards me. “Daddy!”

They cry, astonishing me as they pile into my arms. I can’t believe they’re so happy to see me after everything I did, but ‘ll be damned if I’m going to question it. I hug them tightly, tears burning in my eyes as their excited sounds and sweet kisses rain over me.

I swear to the Goddess, if it weren’t for the fact that I haven’t seen Jane yet, this moment would be enough to let me die a happy man.

I’ve missed you all so much!” I tell them honestly, unable to hold back my feelings.

“We missed you too, Daddy.” Riley shares, nuzzling my chest and breathing in my scent. “You’ve been gone too long.”

“Yeah, we’re sorry we were so grumpy before.” Parker adds, Ryder nodding in agreement.

I clench my eyes shut, fighting back a fresh wave of tears and dropping kisses to their heads. There’s only a split second between when I hear the elevator ding behind us, then smell Jane’s perfect scent, and hear her voice. “Ethan?”

I turn around with the pups still in my arms, and there she is – as beautiful as the day I met her. And by her side is Devon, with a possessive arm wrapped around her waist.

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