

The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 209

Jane

Before I became a mother I used to sleep like the dead. Truly, a tree could fall right by my bed and I wouldn't wake. I always slept through the night, and I never struggled to rest in cars, trains or planes. Now a cricket can chirp a mile away and I'll jolt up like someone has screamed in my ear. Of course it's not only sounds and disturbances that wake me now. My wolf always knows when one of my children needs me – even if they don't make a peep.

So when I wake in the middle of the night with my wolf urging me to check on the pups, I don't question it. I slide out of bed and pull on my robe, striding out into the darkened apartment. I find Paisley standing in the middle of the hallway, staring at her father's closed door.

"Paisley, why are you still up?" I whisper, coming forward and brushing her hair back from her eyes as she looks up at me.

"Cuz I can't get in bed with Daddy when he's with Nina." She replies sadly. My stomach sinks, I hate the idea of Ethan sleeping with Nina too, and I wonder how many nights my little girl has stayed up this way, wishing she could be with him but feeling like she's not allowed.

"Well why don't you come get in bed with me?" I suggest warmly. "You know I miss my snuggle- bug."

To my surprise, Paisley's lower lip quivers as is she's on the verge of tears. She frowns up at me with wide eyes. "I can't."

"What? of course you can." I encourage, leaning down to her level.

"No. Because Mommies always know when something's wrong." She whimpers, shaking her head.

My heart aches, and all my instincts tell me this is related to Ethan's strange behavior. "That's true." I concede. "But you know, Mommies also know how to make things better." I remind her gently.

Tears spill over Paisley's lashes, and she sniffles hopelessly. "Not this time." She murmurs miserably. "There's nothing that can make this better."

Something cracks open inside me, and it takes all my strength not to burst into tears myself. There's no worse feeling than seeing your child in pain and not being able to fix it for them. "Hmm, well how about this: Why don't you come give me a cuddle, and we can talk about it and see if it's really as bad as all that"

"No." Paisley refuses, even as she climbs into my arms and wraps her little limbs around me. "I can't tell you.",

Kissing her wet cheeks and carrying her into the living room, I admit, "Paisley, I know something is going on with your Daddy."

"You do?" She hiccups, not letting go of me even as I lower us to the couch. I carefully untangle her legs from my middle so that they rest on the cushions and I'm able to lean back completely.

"You said it, remember?" I ask when we're finally settled. "Mommies always know."

That was all it took. As soon as the words are out of my mouth, Paisley breaks down into sobs. I don't want Daddy to die!"

My heart stops beating, and I temporarily forget how to breathe. She's just a pup. I think frantically, she probably misunderstood something. "Oh my angel, why would Daddy die?" I ask, my voice suddenly very hoarse.

"Because his legs don't work, and his wolf can't get out!" Paisley wails.

"What do you mean his legs don't work?" I inquire, feeling a flash of relief. She must have misunderstood. "He's walking around like usual."

She shakes her head. "He has these weird, fancy race things."

"Race things?" I repeat. "Braces?"

Paisley nods, rubbing her red-rimmed eyes. "He has metal all over his legs, it walks for him."

I don't want to believe her, but suddenly all the tiny clues that have been piling up around me in recent months come together. This all started at the hospital in the Southern Isles, after Ethan had back surgery. His doctors wouldn't tell me how things went because he wasn't awake yet, even though they knew we were mates. When I finally saw him again his walking gate had completely changed, and he was always holding his body away from me, even on the few occasions we'd been close enough to touch.

"He's paralyzed." I realize, understanding at last that he must have been more severely hurt in his fight with Aimon than any of us knew. Suddenly I remember the King biting down on Ethan's spine, and little by little the rest of the puzzle pieces lock into place. "He can't shift. His wolf is trapped."

"Mhmm," Paisley confirms, still weeping, "and now he's gonna have a surgery, but it's probably gonna kill him!"

No! My wolf howls in misery. No, no, no. He can't die!

"How long have you known about this?" I ask, trying to get ahold of myself.

"Since before Christmas." Paisley admits. "Is why I had to stay with him. He needed me to take care of him."

"Oh Paisley," I cry, hugging her close. "I'm so sorry, my poor sweet pup, I can't believe you've been dealing with this all on your own."

"She's not on her own." Nina's voice interrupts us, and I turn my welling eyes to the other she-wolf. I was so preoccupied with my daughter I didn't even notice her approaching us. "Paisley, you should go back to bed."

"Don't tell my daughter what to do." I growl defensively, still hugging the precious bundle close.

"I'd like to speak to you in private." Nina answers, unapologetic.

Sighing I kiss Paisley's hair, "why don't you go get in my bed, baby. I'll be there soon."

Paisley sniffles but obediently hops off the couch and disappears down the hall. Swiping at the tears on my cheeks, I stand and turn to face Nina.

"So she told you." The other woman observes coolly.

"And thank the Goddess she did." I bite. "Some one should have told me a long time ago."

"No one was going to go against the wishes of a dying man." Nina hisses. "And you shouldn't either. He's trying to do the best thing for everyone involved here. You shouldn't interfere."

"But if none of it was real-" I object.

"But it was real, Jane." Nina cuts me off. "He might have been motivated by things you didn't understand, but he thought long and hard about this. You have no idea how much he struggled with this, how difficult it's been for him to ensure your family and the pack will be okay after he's gone. This is what he wants – you should respect that."

"Oh my Goddess." I realize suddenly, her words triggering thoughts of all the good luck I've had in recent months. All the things which have occurred that have helped secure my pup's future and my own stability. "All the gifts.. the surprises. My mortgage, the lotteries – it was all him, wasn't it?"

"Yes." Nina scowls. "But that was for the pups, not you."

"But Linda and Eric and Devon.." I trail off, thinking of my friends, everyone who has taken credit for Ethan's kindness. "They were all in on it?"

Everyone knew but me?"

"Ethan didn't think you'd accept his decision if you knew the truth – but this is the way he wants it."

You need to allow him the dignity of dying on his own terms Jane." Nina intimates, never softening her tone or wavering her expression.

"But this surgery, it might work – right? There's no guarantee he'll die." I suggest, trying to understand.

"He has a 50% chance of survival, Jane." Nina informs me simply. "He's preparing for the worst because he'd be a fool not to. He has to prepare for the worst even as he hopes for the best. And if the best happens we'll all be grateful, but it won't change any of this. If Ethan had wanted your help he would have asked for it – instead he came to me."

"And you're happy are you? You're pleased to nurse a dying man even though you know he can never give you a future or a family, knowing he already has his heirs?"

"He's my fated mate." Nina growls. "I don't care what state he's in, or what he can give me, my wolf needs his – and his needs mine."

"And my daughter?" I hiss. "What are you planning on doing with her if the surgery fails?"

"That's why he's leaving her with you for the next few weeks – that way if the worst happens she'll already be with you, and that's where she'll stay."

Nina scoffs. "Haven't you figured it out yet? That's why we're here. So he can say goodbye."

"You mean it's happening that soon?" I squeak.

"Of course." Nina shakes her head. "Either he does this now, or his wolf is driven mad and his Beta puts him down."

"I can't believe this." I murmur, so overwhelmed that all my feelings wink out, replaced with a yawning void.

"Believe it, Princess." Nina derides. "This is the new reality, and we all have to live in it – for better or worse,

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