The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 196

Jane

Two months later

“Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear Paisley, Parker, Riley and Ryder, happy birthday to you!” A jumble of singing voices, both young and old, struggle to fit all four of the pups’ names into the traditional song, and the group soon devolves into giggles. This is always how birthdays have gone with my babies, and this year the list of names is even longer now that Paisley is with us – not that they seem to mind. They’re surrounded by friends, decorations and presents, about to dig into a scrumptious cake shaped like their favorite cartoon character.

The quadruplets are beaming, kneeling up on their chairs to lean over the swiftly melting candles and counting, “One, two, three!” At once they blow out the flames, waving their precious heads back and forth to make sure they get all five. Looking at them now, it’s hard to believe how much has changed in so short a time. A couple of months ago I wasn’t sure if I would ever see them again, and now they’re safe home in the Dark Moon territory in the house where I raised Parker, Ryder and Riley.

Life is finally back to normal, and I’m back to struggling with my work-life balance and lamenting how fast time flies as my pups grow up right before my eyes. My business was in good hands with my CFO while I was away, and La Louve had a record breaking quarter with all the press resulting from our adventures in the Cité de la Wuit. If you’d asked me to describe my ideal future a year ago it would have been exactly this – my pups finally together, my business thriving, and freedom from the shackles of all the secrets and lies I wove to escape Ethan so many years ago.

I even have a new baby on the way to soothe the sting of seeing my first four children grow up and need me less and less. True, they’ve needed a lot of love and support to heal from the trauma of their ordeal in the Southern Isles, but I know these days are fleeting. The more time that passes, the more they’re going to set out and forge their own paths in the world. I can already”updated by jobnib.com” see it happening, as they move further away from toddlerhood and into true childhood – they even start school this year. I’m proud of course – what mother wouldn’t be? But I’d be lying if I said part of me didn’t wish they’d stay this tiny and adorable forever.

Still -I finally have everything I’ve dreamed about for so long. So I should be happy, shouldn’t 1? It shouldn’t be a struggle just to get out of bed in the morning when I know that the day awaiting me will be nothing but bright. It shouldn’t feel so bitter and empty to mark these incredible milestones with my family. It shouldn’t be so unfulfilling to do the work I’m so passionate about.

Yet it is.

I suppose at the end of the day it’s impossible to feel any kind of joy or happiness when your heart has been completely decimated. Sometimes I wonder if there’s anything still beating in my chest, or if there’s just a black hole swirling behind my ribs where my heart used to be. I feel like a hollow shell, a shadow of my former self.

Of course, feeling so despondent just makes me feel guilty. Shouldn’t my pups be enough for me? Why does Ethan still have so much power over me after all this time? Why in the Goddess’s name did I let down my guard with him, knowing what he was capable of? Why did I trust him, buy into his lies?

He truly did get the perfect revenge on me for my crimes – slowly plying and massaging my walls down until I finally felt safe enough to be vulnerable with him, then smashing me to pieces when I was most exposed.

It was a master class in breaking a person down to nothing, and even though I was on the lookout for such tricks, I still fell for it.

I’ll never forgive myself.

A few hours later I’m on the phone with Linda, filling her in on the party and the pup’s progress, when the conversation inevitably turns back to my estranged ex. “I can’t believe him.” I murmur, carefully listening to the pups’ breathing to ensure they aren’t faking sleep as I stand in the doorway of their bedroom, watching over them. “He didn’t even call. I mean I know he doesn’t want anything to do with me, but I don’t understand how he could do this to them – especially Paisley.”

This entire situation still seems off to me, Jane” Linda muses. ” I mean it doesn’t make sense – it didn’t at the time and it doesn’t now. Ethan loved Paisley more than anything in the world, and when you and the pups returned… ‘ve never seen any man so excited to have a family.”

“You forget that Ethan is an incredible actor I remind her. “He’s a true chameleon, it’s what makes him such a skilled abuser. He puts on such a good show for the outside world that no one would ever suspect him of wrongdoing. It’s classic grooming.”

“You say that – but you weren’t there when he thought you died, Jane. And you weren’t there when Anita took you. I was.” She insists. “That was not a man distraught over some evil plot falling apart. That was a man willing to do anything to get his family back.”

“Oh I think he cares about the pups’ wellbeing, not to mention how bad it would have been for his reputation to fail, I just think he hates me more than he loves them” I reason. “I mean you’ve seen him more recently than I have, did he tell you anything more different than what he told me?”

I haven’t spoken to Ethan since that horrible day in the hospital, only communicating with his Beta and assistants during the moving process. However Eric’s new role as King of the Southern Isles now means that my best friend lives thousands of miles away, and she was there through Ethan’s recovery.

“No,” She sighs. “He was absolutely adamant that none of it had been real and it was all just some test.

But he also asked after you and the pups so much that it’s pretty hard to believe his story.”

“He probably just wanted to ensure I was suffering enough.” I bite. “And you’re sure he doesn’t know about the baby?”

“How would he?”” Linda wonders aloud. “Not being legally married really saved your as*s on that.front. Your doctor wasn’t allowed to tell him anything.”

“I know, I’m just making sure.” I sigh.

“How is the new baby?” Linda asks then, a smile in her voice.

”Good-I’ve got a check up in a few days and PU have my first ultrasound. The end of the first trimester is in sight!” I share, feeling no small relief. I’m ready to be done with morning sickness and miscarriage worries. “Though it does feel remarkably like I’m repeating history here. It’s less scary this time around because I know if I can handle quads on my own I can do anything, I just don’t know how I got here.”

“Well when a man and a woman love each other very much -” Linda begins, joking.

“Ha Ha.”’ I scoff, feeling a sharp sting at the mention of love. That might be how we explain making babies to pups, but I’m painfully aware that no love was involved in the creation of this child.

“Let’s just hope it’s not four this time” Linda adds, and I can practically see her expression – complete with waggling eyebrows.

“Oh Goddess, don’t even joke about that” I scold, ” five kids I can handle, maybe even six – but eight would kill me.”

“Hey, you’re the one who just said you could do anything,” Linda teases, and I’m thankful for her humor.

I desperately need something to lighten my mood today.

“Anything within reason.” I amend, laughing.

However it doesn’t take long for the laugh to become lodged in my throat, choked out by darker emotions.

That’s one of the worst parts of this entire situation. I seem to have lost the ability to laugh… as if Ethan hasn’t taken enough already.

“It’s gonna be okay.” Linda says, turning suddenly somber as she hears the shift in my emotion. “And I’m so excited to come visit when your due date nears. It will be just like before.”

“Thank you.” I reply honestly. Linda had been an incredible help to me when the quadruplets were born, and I love her for offering to do the same now – when her own life is suddenly so chaotic. She’s a Queen for crying-out-loud!

“Have you told the pups yet?” She asks softly.

“Not yet.” I explain, “I want to be out of the danger zone first. It will be hard enough explaining this to them, I don’t want to risk having to explain if something ends up going wrong. With my luck they’ll hold against me too.”

”They still haven’t forgiven you, huh?” Linda murmurs gently.

“No,” I confirm, my mind already spinning away into my memories of those first days after Ethan’s rejection, “they haven’t.”

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