

The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 182

Jane

When the pups are finally asleep, I slip out of their room, closing the door at my back and leaning against it. My knees feel weak and shaky, and I'm thankful for the solid wood at my back keeping me upright. I clench my eyes shut, trying to take deep breaths and calm down.

That was one of the hardest conversations I've ever had as a mother. Not because it was particularly contentious or fraught, but simply because it upsets me to no end to think my pups have been taking the responsibility for my sadness onto themselves. I haven't been doing my job. I've been so caught up in my own grief that I didn't even realize I was hurting my babies, making them stressed and anxious. Instead of taking care of them, they've been trying to take care of me.

When I finally open my eyes again, I realize that Ethan is standing in the hallway, watching me. My heart sinks – as if he needed more reasons to think I'm an unfit mother – I'm sure he overheard our entire conversation.

"Please don't." I beg, whispering so I don't wake the pups. "I feel badly enough already."

He doesn't say a word, his dark eyes boring into me with piercing intensity. Pushing myself away from the door, I stiffly stride into my bedroom, going to my closet to retrieve the gifts I have hidden for the children. I gather the boxes, bags, wrapping paper and stocking stuffers, before reemerging and heading for the living room.

The stockings are already hanging over the fireplace, and a plate of cookies and milk a resting on the hearth. I start by laying out the wrapping paper on the floor, pulling out scissors and tape so I can begin working, but then a pair of very large, very familiar feet appear beside me. "I can do this." Ethan tells me, pointedly eyeing my stomach. "You need to rest."

"I've always set up Christmas morning for the pups." I insist, feeling both defiant and near tears.

You might not want my company but I'm not going to let you take this away from me." I almost add the word "too" at the end of my sentence, but stop myself just in time.

"You're under too much stress and you're clearly upset." He remarks distantly, "it isn't good for the baby."

"What do you care, about the baby?" I demand hotly. "You barely even blinked when I told you."

"It's still my child," Ethan reminds me severely, and if you're unwell you can't care for any of them."

"Ethan, I got through newborn triplets all on my own, I think I can get through a little morning sickness and fatigue." I insist, beginning to wrap the box in front of me.

"I know that, and soon you are going to have to do it alone, but you don't right now. Let me help while you're here. It's why I agreed to this in the first place, so everything wouldn't fall on your shoulders and you'd have some space to breathe."

Ethan reasons.

"But I want to do this part." I argue, feeling my throat tighten.

He watches me closely, and for a second I think he's going to refuse me again, but after a few moments of contemplation, he simply kneels down beside me and reaches for one of the bags beside me. "I'll stuff stockings, you wrap."

When he starts to purr, I find the sound so jarring that I visibly start. "Don't do that, you don't get to do that anymore." I object, even as the soothing sound washes over me, unwinding my nerves despite my upset. Why am I protesting? I wonder.

Wasn't I just thinking I'd give anything for him to care about me again.

Because this isn't caring. I answer my own question as my wolf whines in the background. It's pity, and condescension.

"I'm sorry." Ethan sighs. "I was only trying to help."

"Has it occurred to you that I wouldn't need help if you hadn't hurt me in the first place?" I snap.

"Yes." Ethan says obliquely. "It has."

I stare at him, searching his face and wondering if he'll say any more. However he simply turns his gaze from me and focuses on his work, letting the words hang in the air. We work the rest of the evening in a silence so heavy I feel the weight of it bearing down on me from above, like an anvil sitting on my shoulders. It feels smothering, crushing, and I wonder how much longer I can make it before I collapse beneath the burden.

Eventually we finish, and Ethan ushers me to bed with a promise to try and keep the pups out of my room in the morning so I can sleep in. I want to tell him not to bother, but the truth is I'm beyond exhausted, so I go without complaint. I collapse into the bedding, asleep before my head even hits the pillow.

Christmas morning dawns bright and early, but I'm not sure I've ever been less happy to celebrate my favorite holiday than I am today. For the first time I'm not mourning Paisley's absence, but having my children together doesn't seem like enough anymore. I want Ethan. I want our family to be whole again.

Before we returned to the Nightfang pack I might have been ashamed of pining for someone who clearly doesn't want me, but I don't think I have any pride left to spare. When Ethan made me his prisoner I retreated inside myself, and when I finally left I hardened my heart against him and any other man that might come near me, but now I'm as raw and fragile as I can ever remember being. I suppose that's what happens when someone tears down your walls before shattering you.. and yet I still want him. I still crave his touch, and wish for the impossible.

So when the pups climb into my bed on Christmas morning, I have to hide the fact that I was already awake and crying. Instead I feign sleep, playing the same game we always play when the pups are particularly excited about something. They clamber around me excitedly, half snuggling, half nudging me awake. "Mommy," they whisper, poking me.

I don't respond, feigning a loud snore and sinking deeper into my covers. "Mommy!" They whisper again, shaking my arm, trying to pry open one of my eyes. "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy!"

I sigh, mumbling sleepy nonsense and refusing to open my eyes. I roll over, slinging my arm out over the pups and trapping at least one wriggling little body beneath me. "Mommy, wake up!" They exclaim, giggling delightedly. "It's Christmas..."

I mutter a bit more, groggily cracking one eyelid. "

Wha's happening?"

"Mommy, it's Christmas!" They cry again.

"Christmas?" I repeat, sitting up now and stretching. "Are you sure, wasn't that yesterday?"

"No! Is today!" Parker announces, pulling on my hands as if he might drag me from bed. I'm surprised when he single handedly manages to budge me, pulling me a few feet over the mattress.

He's still so young, but his Alpha genes are strong, and I've always been small – even for an omega. In a few years I won't stand a chance, he'll be able to throw me around as easily as his father does. "

Come on! We have to see what Santa brought!"

"Santa?" I repeat. "Well in that case, I suppose I can get up."

The pups take my hands in theirs, two on either side, and lead me from the room. When we reach the living room Ethan is already awake and cooking breakfast. I smell coffee brewing, wishing I could have a cup but knowing the caffeine is bad for the baby. He looks up when the pups and I enter, frowning when he takes in the dark bags under my eyes and my splotchy skin. "Kids, I told you to let Mommy sleep in." He admonishes.

"But Daddy, is Christmas!" To them, apparently, there can be no better argument for any manner of misbehavior.

"It's okay." I assure him, not wanting him to scold the pups just for being excited. "After all, it would be unfair to make them wait just because I'm being a lazy bones." I finish in a silly voice that makes the children laugh, but now that I'm up their attention is solely devoted to opening presents.

They're tearing into their stockings when Ethan sneaks out of the room and comes back with a box riddled with large air holes, and I big red bow holding it closed. Four little heads perk up, ears and noses twitching as the pups scent a new animal in the room. They climb to their feet and scamper over to their father, who holds the box out of their reach. "Daddy is that for us?" Paisley asks excitedly.

"Actually Santa gave it to me." Ethan says thoughtfully, rubbing his chin.

"But.. for good.. or just to babysit until we were awakes?" Riley questions slyly.

"Well he said it was to babysit, but I don't know, I think I might want to keep it now."

Four jaws drop. "Daddy, you can't! Santa gave it to us!"

"Are you sure you want it, you don't even know what it is yet.,Ethan teases, still playing keep away with the gift.

The pups are jumping up and down now, "Come on Daddy, stop playing!" Small sounds are coming from the box, scratching and snuffling, and then – a hop.

"Alright, alright" Ethan laughs, handing them the gift, "but be very careful."

The pups gather around the box on the floor, "It's a bunny, it has to be! Ryder exclaims.

"of course it's a bunny, can't you smell it!" Riley chastises him.

"Well I dunno, I've never met any bunnies in the wild." Ryder shrugs

"I don't think is a wild bunny." Parker surmises.

"Well I think we should wait and ask it rather than just jumping to 'clusions." Paisley remarks, tilting her chin up.

Ethan sidles over to me while the pups debate the bunny's origins, making his voice so low that only I can hear. "I think we should tell the pups about the baby."

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