

### Mistake - Christmas Special 2020

I watched the snowflakes drift down from the ever-darkening sky. The pack house was filled with people laughing and talking happily along with cheery holiday-themed music. It was a nice ambiance. So nice, I didn't want to ruin it with my melancholy. The truth was, Christmas was one of the harder holidays for me. It didn't matter how many years passed, all I thought about was Dad and how much I missed him. Hugging my knees to my chest, I rested my chin on them as I continued to watch the snow. The room was almost completely dark when the door behind me opened.

"Figured I find you here," Ryder said, taking a seat next to me. His scent washed over me as he laid an arm on my shoulder. He hugged me close, and I felt his body heat mingling with mine. It was a perfect sensation, and I felt a little better. "Everyone is wondering where you went off too."

"Sorry, I just didn't want to ruin everyone's good mood."

"Figured that too," Ryder said, kissing me on the temple.

I rolled my eyes, knowing he couldn't see it. I loved that he got me so well, but sometimes, it also irritated me.

"You shouldn't be here all by yourself," he said, giving me another quick hug. "Come with me. There is something I want to show you." He stood and held out his hand for me.

I wasn't in the mood to go anywhere, but I took his hand anyway. He helped me to my feet, and we left the dark room. I winced a bit at the change of lighting. I expected Ryder to lead me downstairs to the Christmas Eve Party the pack was having, but he took me down the hall.



Confused, I asked, "Where are we going?"

"You'll see," he said with a grin.

At the end of the hall, we walked to the more private living room meant for the alpha's family and close friends. Everyone was there waiting for us, from Mom to the alpha and his mate. "Hey, sweetie," Mom said when she saw me and came up and hugged me.

"What's going on? I thought you guys were downstairs?"

"We were, but my beta is taking over the festivities there," Alpha Brent replied. "I wanted to do something special since our family has grown and... tensions with Black Mountain have... dispersed."

"Ah, that's nice," I replied, though again, I wasn't in a festive mood.

"Brook, would you join us in honoring the lost?" Brent asked.

That surprised me. "What?"

"We've all lost someone, Brook. This is the perfect time to take a moment and remember them," Emily said and waved her hand at the Christmas tree, not yet decorated. "This tree we decorate and remember those who have been lost." From a large box next to the tree, Emily removed a glass ornament and handed it to me to look at it.

In gold cursive lettering, it wrote - We'll always have Paris, along with a black-and-white picture of a man that looked like he could have been one of those old school Hollywood heartthrobs. I handed it back to her, unsure of what to say.

"It's from Casablanca," Emily said, taking it back. "He loved that movie to death!" She laughed, grinning. She placed the ornament on the tree.

Next was Andy. He lifted one made of green metal, shaped like a Christmas tree. He took it in his hand. "This is Auntie Mame's," he said. "She helped me a lot growing up. Refused to let anyone tell her what to do. You remind me of her sometimes," he said, looking at me.

Surprised, I didn't know what else to say but, "Thanks."

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood," Andy said, reading off the engraving of the first line of the ornament. Andy recited the rest of the poem by Robert Frost as he placed the ornament on the tree.

Next, Alpha Brent took one. It was a small wreath made of sticks. It looked handmade. "This is for Helena, my sister. I wish you could've known her before..." he said, then cleared his throat. "She loved Christmas, but was much more patient for her gifts than I ever could." He placed the ornament on the tree. Next was Kara, talking about her grandfather.

Everyone had placed an ornament on the tree. Everyone except me. I had nothing for Dad. I shifted my weight from foot to foot. God, I was a terrible daughter. Ryder handed me a small box wrapped in red, shiny paper, with a green ribbon bow on it. "What's this?"

"It's your turn," he said, smiling at me.

Confused, I opened the gift and inside was a wooden ornament with the words -You are the spark of joy in my heart, Love you Sparkle- That was from the last birthday card my dad had ever given me. I sucked a breath and looked up at Ryder. "How?"

"He had a little help," Mom said, smiling widely.

"And the wood comes from the tree your mom and you planted for him,"

Ryder said, taking the ornament out of the box.

I stared at him in shock. "How?"

With a smug smirk, more fitting of Dean, Ryder said, "I got my ways."

I threw my arms around him, hugging him. "Thank you!"

Ryder hugged me back and whispered into my ear, "Anything for you, Brook."

With one more squeeze, I walked over to the tree and placed the ornament with the others. "My dad was one who loved to go all out for Christmas. He would decorate the entire house, sit with me when I was little to write out my Christmas list, go with me to the post office to deliver it. The whole shebang. Even after I stopped believing in Santa Claus, we'd do the whole milk and cookies thing, but we'd eat them together, leaving the crumbs and plates to 'find' Christmas morning."

"Sounds awesome," Dean said with a small nod.

"It was," I admitted, my throat a little tight, but I was in a better mood, somehow more hopeful.

We continued to decorate the tree, telling stories of our loved ones. The more stories and memories I told the others about my dad, the better I felt. I hug Ryder and looked at the others. The change from human to werewolf hadn't been the easiest for me, but for the first time since I had been introduced to this world of werewolves, I could see I belonged. I belonged. This was my family. "Thank you, so much!"

Ryder kissed my cheek. "Welcome, always."

"Group hug!" Dean yelled and tackled me and Ryder, hugging us both at

once. Everyone eventually joined him.

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Happy Holidays. Stay safe and I wish you all the best. Thank you for taking time out of your day to read my stories! I appreciate it more than you could ever know! Lots of love - Jilguera.



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