

Fragile Flower (Yeah, Right) by Dawn M Turner

Published in newsletter for June 2020

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This deleted scene slots between the end of ch 8 and the beginning of ch 10 in **Pack of Trouble**. Because neither Brett nor Kelly have a point-of-view in that novel, it didn't really fit there. Still, it's a sweet moment between the two of them, even if he's not an entirely willing participant.

Saturday, April 14, 2018

The front door snicked closed, and a floorboard in the foyer creaked.

Kelly glanced up from the parenting magazine she'd been halfheartedly flipping through since soon after her mate had stormed out about an hour earlier. She closed it and tossed it lightly onto the coffee table then wrapped her hands tightly in her lap, scooting to the edge of the living room chair. Had Brett's temper cooled any since he'd left?

The moment the door had slammed behind her mate, regret had chilled her annoyance at being treated like a fragile flower. As much as she hated to admit it, Brett had been right. Werewolf or not, a woman heavy with pregnancy had no business being on a ladder, climbing in and out through the attic access. Especially carrying boxes.

*A drunk penguin has better coordination than I do right now. I shouldn't have put the baby in danger like that. No matter how much I wanted to prove how **not** scared I am, especially when it's a bold-faced lie.*

Brett entered the room then halted when his gaze landed on her. He scowled, the muscles along his jaw tightening for a moment, then he sighed and stepped farther into the room, grasping the back of the couch, which blocked his path to her.

Silence grew, becoming more awkward with each heartbeat. Finally, unable to take it any longer, Kelly took a breath to apologize.

“I’m sorry I lost my temper,” Brett said, beating her to the punch. His gaze fell away in an unusual show of submission she’d only ever seen him offer to their alpha. Well, their alpha and the new woman who was staying at the main house and ruffling their alpha’s fur.

Setting aside that for consideration another time, she worked her way out of the chair and to her feet with growlingly familiar difficulty then waddled around the couch to stand at Brett’s side. “I didn’t exactly help the situation by being defensive and stubborn.” She grimaced. “Not to mention stupid.”

His scowl deepened instead of relenting. “I never used the word *stupid*.”

“No, but I’m sure you were thinking it.” Kelly gently gripped her mate’s arm.

“No, I wasn’t.” He shook his head then met her gaze, gritted his teeth, and murmured, “I was too terrified to think at all.” His tone suggested the words were pulled out of him by force.

“What?” Kelly stared at him, her heart kicking hard against her ribs, as remorse cut even deeper.

Brett covered her hand with one of his, his blue eyes haunted. “When I saw you coming down the ladder with that box, I nearly had heart failure. All I could see in my mind’s eye was you missing your footing and slamming into the floor before I could reach you.”

The blood drained to her feet, leaving her lightheaded, as comprehension dawned. *No wonder he reacted so strongly.* Tears filled her eyes.

He grimaced and tugged her into his arms. “Don’t cry. You know I can’t handle that,” he growled softly against her ear. “I’d rather you scream at me or throw something.”

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Kelly nuzzled his chest, wiping away tears on his shirt. "Now you tell me." With a shaky sigh, she eased away and looked up into his still-haunted eyes. "I'm sorry. I didn't think about how my actions might affect you. I just—"

"What?" Brett asked when she failed to continue after a few moments. A frown furrowed his brow.

"It's—I—" Sighing, she stepped away, circled the couch to lower her bulging frame onto it, and wadded her hands tightly in her lap.

Brett shoved books and magazines to one side and sat on the edge of the coffee table, resting his elbows on his knees to wrap his hands around hers. "Out with it. I'm staying right here until you confess, and you know I can be a very patient hunter when I want to be." A faint grin curved his lips. "Age has its advantages, even if my mate does make me feel older than Moses sometimes."

Unable to help herself, she chuckled and released the death grip her hands had on each other to turn them into his. "It's not my fault you've got, like, two-hundred years on me."

"No more than it's *my* fault that you're young and impetuous." His eyes glinted with humor for a moment, then concern returned. "But don't deflect. Why did you climb that ladder?"

She smiled, though it wavered weakly. "Because I'm young and impetuous?"

His eyes narrowed.

"Fine." Kelly sighed. "I was trying to prove to myself that I'm not scared."

Confusion wreathed his face. "Of what?"

A knot instantly clogged her throat, and tears filled her eyes all over again. "Of this pregnancy going wrong," she whispered, unable to do more. "Jeremy says everything's fine, but they thought it was with Donna last year, too. Right up until it wasn't. He told me to rest, but complying with that feels...." Kelly struggled to find the right words, and a tear slipped free, coursing down her cheek. "It's like admitting there's something wrong, and that scares me so much I can't breathe." Her chest constricting, she grasped his hands tighter. "I don't know if I can handle it... if we lose this baby..." More tears followed the first.

"Hey," Brett murmured, leaning closer and freeing a hand to cup her cheek. "Don't borrow trouble. What's that verse in the Bible? Don't worry about tomorrow, because today has enough troubles of its own. Something like that, anyway."

"It's in Matthew," she muttered.

"Worrying won't change the outcome. Trust me. I know that far too well." The tension in his face eased. "Worrying about what *might* happen tomorrow only steals the joy out of today."

"In other words, I need to let my inner wolf out and live in the moment."

"Exactly." He chuckled. "Sometimes the wolf gets it exactly right."

Kelly considered that for a moment then smiled. "Yes, she does. After all, she chose you. Even if I *did* think she was crazy at the time."

Brett laughed outright. "I think we were all in agreement on that score."

"Gee, thanks." As if only *her* wolf had been responsible.

He grinned. "You know what I mean."

"Yeah, I know." She studied his face, recalling his expression minutes prior. "Why didn't you want to tell me how scared you were?"

A grimace chased away all humor. "I'm not used to being afraid anymore. I spent most of my life afraid of one thing or another. Once I came to Christ, that changed. It's been a long

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time since I've been so terrified. I don't like it, and I didn't want to admit it. It was easier to be mad."

"I'm sorry I scared you. I truly didn't mean to."

He scowled, though amusement flashed in his blue eyes. "No more scaring me. Promise me, no more ladders."

Kelly smiled. "I promise, no more ladders."

"No more boxes either."

She grinned. "No more boxes."

"Any more lifting or climbing, you ask me, and I'll take care of it. Deal?"

"Deal. For now."

His eyes narrowed, and he growled.

"What? Do you honestly think I'll continue to play fragile flower after the baby comes? Think again, buddy."

Brett snorted. "Fragile flower? Right. That's not something I've ever associated with you. A cornered wolverine, on the other hand...."

Kelly laughed, wiping away lingering wetness from her face. "I can live with that."

If you wish to know the outcome of Kelly's pregnancy, you can find it in the short story ***Precious Gifts***, which is #3 in the ***Baby Makes Three: The Complete Collection***. It's merely mentioned toward the end of ***Pack of Trouble***.