

From Here to Paternity - 1

Rating: G

Summary: Some early morning memories

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Notes: Thanks to Pam for the late-night beta.

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Lee awoke, the soft gurgling noises from the bedside baby-monitor pulling him away from his dreams of Tahiti and a very naked Amanda, back to the land of newborns, diaper rash, and fatherhood. Exhaustion weighting his eyelids, he could barely make out the digital display of the alarm clock.

Two-twelve a.m.

The squirming bundle of needs that was his offspring, Lauren Allyson Stetson, had been asleep for approximately an hour.

A personal best and new world-record.

Groaning, Lee laid his head back into the cool softness of his pillow, silently willing his two-week old daughter back to sleep.

Just for a few more precious hours.

One hour . . .

A half hour . . .

Fifteen minutes . . .

Three point four seconds was all he got before his daughter decided to test her considerable vocal range. The piercing squall reverberated through the monitor's speaker, into the darkened room, and seemed to bounce off the walls, growing exponentially louder with each passing second.

Lee bolted upright as Amanda, seemingly still asleep, rolled from her side of the bed and staggered from their room. Tossing the covers aside he slipped from the bed and followed his apparently comatose wife down the hall and into the nursery.

Leaning against the frame of the door, he watched as Amanda plucked Lauren from the bleached pine crib, that, only two weeks ago, had stood so cute, so innocent - so quiet- in the corner of the bunny and bear adorned nursery that had once been their guest room.

His daughter quieted the moment Amanda touched her and Lee let out a soft sigh, glancing first one way down the hall, then the other. It appeared that the boys were getting used to the ear-piercing screams that erupted from their baby sister every few hours. They could also, he reasoned, as teenagers, function on less sleep. and as Phillip pointed out, what was homeroom and study hall for if not a nap.

Lee watched as Amanda, seated in the rocker by the nursery window, cradled Lauren in the crook of her right arm.

"She's hungry?" he asked, perplexed. "Again? So soon?"

"She has her father's appetite," Amanda muttered through a yawn. She opened the neckline of her gown and her daughter wasted not a second latching onto the offered nipple, suckling strongly.

Lee sat down, cross-legged, next to the chair, watching intently as Lauren nursed, her tiny fist kneading Amanda's breast.

"You know you don't have to get up when I feed her," Amanda yawned again, a finger stroking her daughter's cheek and around the fragile curve of her ear.

"I know," Lee smiled sleepily. "I just don't want to miss anything."

"The only thing you're going to miss by getting up at two a.m. is some spit-up, a burp or two, and a messy diaper." Amanda's eyes twinkled back at her husband. His interest in everything that happened with his newborn daughter was charming - and quite a change from her experience with Joe and the boys. While she teased him at times, his eagerness to be part of Lauren's life on even the smallest level never failed to touch her.

"Yeah, well, soon enough I'm going have to be back at work - while I don't have to worry about sleep, I want to get as much quality time in as I can." He ran a hand through his already tousled hair, then moved to kneel beside the rocker. He leaned in and kissed the top of Lauren's head, the silken hair tickling his nose, and the sweet powder scent of her filling his senses.

Amanda reached out to squeeze his shoulder and he looked up at her. The soft light of the lamp on the dresser highlighted the tangled chestnut strands of her hair. She looked like an angel sitting there, her gown hanging off her shoulder, Lauren snuggled to her breast. He leaned in and pressed his lips softly to hers, his hand threading through the length of her hair.

A soft kick in the stomach drew him back and he looked down to see his tiny daughter staring up him. Milk dribbled from the corner of her mouth, and Lee used the cloth diaper Amanda had tossed over her shoulder to dab it clean.

She continued to stare at Lee, her cupid's-bow mouth pursing open and closed as she scrutinized the person who had interrupted her meal.

"I'm sorry," Lee murmured, leaning down to press a tender kiss to her forehead. Her eyes widened as his face drew closer, then she blinked twice, as he pulled back to watch her.

"Time to switch sides, anyway." Amanda said, repositioning Lauren and offering her other breast. Lauren began to nurse again, but this time kept her eyes focused on the face of her father.

"She seems to find you fascinating," Amanda chuckled, tossing the cloth diaper back over her shoulder and shooting Lee an amused look.

"What's not to be fascinated by?" Lee offered with a crooked grin, then looked back at his daughter. "I have it on good authority that women think I'm cute."

"Well, cute is good. but I think she just loves her Daddy," Amanda smiled softly.

Lee glanced again at Amanda, their eyes meeting and holding for a brief moment, before sitting back on the floor to watch his family. "Yeah, well," he beamed, "the feeling is more than mutual."

**TBC**