

Chapter 13 I want mommy to be happy

Jane

This isn't happening. Riley is grinning up at me and waving a magazine with Ethan's handsome face plastered across the cover, and all I can do is stare down at her in horror.

"Ma'am," The coffee vendor prods my elbow, trying to catch my attention, "Ma'am, your latte?"

Closing my gaping mouth, I blindly extend my hand towards the man, and he presses the warm cardboard cup into my palm. I can't explain it, but tears are burning in my eyes. We should have never come here. This is all too much. My wolf is whining in my head, as if the mere sight of my former mate is too much to bear.

When I saw him in the restaurant I'd been so focused on retrieving Riley and getting out of there unseen that I didn't let myself truly process seeing Ethan again after so long. It's almost like my body went into survival mode. Now that I'm staring at his picture, held aloft in my daughter's tiny hands, it's all coming back to me. He'd looked every bit as handsome and dashing as I remember, and the worst part is that he was holding one of my babies, a sight I've secretly dreamed about more

often than I'd like to admit.

"Mommy?" Riley asks again, tilting her head to the side.

It's just a question. I think in frustration, stop being silly and answer her.

"It does look sort of like him" I agree, taking the magazine from my pup and replacing it on the rack. I hate lying to them, but in my heart I know it's the right thing to do. I'm protecting them.

"Mommy, what's wrong?" Parker pipes up on my other side, "You look sad."

"How could I be sad?" I reply, "I'm with you."

"But Mommy, you look really pale." Ryder frowns, exchanging an uneasy glance with his siblings.

"I suppose I'm a little tired... and it's awfully cold out." I improvise, shivering in the chilly autumn air. "I'll tell you what, instead of the park, why don't we go back to Linda's and curl up in front of a nice big fire with some hot chocolate?"

The pups are still looking back and forth between each other as if they're unsure how to read my strange behavior. I know they're not convinced by my weak cover story, but I can also see they don't want to upset me.

"Okay Mommy, but maybe you should take a nap." Riley suggests, reaching up to hold my hand.

"That's a good idea." I answer warmly, squeezing her paw.

When we get home the children bend over backwards to

make me feel better, dumping half a bag of marshmallows into my cocoa and telling jokes until I'm smiling so wide my cheeks hurt. Once we're settled in front of a roaring fire, the kids pile on top of me and take turns reading aloud from their favorite books. I truly hadn't planned on taking a nap, after all, my excuse about being tired was just a lie. Even so, my eyes grow heavy as my pups' beloved voices weave stories of far off places, and before I know it, I'm asleep.

After Jane dosed off, Parker, Riley and Ryder tip-toed away into their temporary room. "That was bad." Parker sighed. "Mommy was really sad."

"I think she must miss Daddy and our sister lots." Riley suggested.

"But then why did she run from them at the restraurant?" Parker questioned.

"Someting must've happened to split them up." Ryder reasoned, "After all the int-net said she died."

"We have to help her find 'em again." Riley insists. "I want Mommy to be happy."

"We should all be together." Parker added, thinking of the father and sister they never knew existed.

"We'll think of someting." Ryder announced, "We'll make it better. We have to."

Meanwhile, across town Paisley struggles with a dilemma

of her own. While Ethan was at work, Eve arrived at the penthouse to help Paisley get ready to go out that evening. They were celebrating her Grandmother's birthday, and as much as Paisley adored Ethan's mother, she felt very differently about Eve. The she-wolf clearly liked her Daddy a lot, but she never hid her hatred for his pup.

Even now, when she promised to care for the child as if she was her own, she simply tormented her. After dismissing the babysitter, Eve promptly locked Paisley in the bathroom so that she "wouldn't have to see her ugly little face." Knowing she had at least an hour until Ethan would arrive home, the cruel woman strutted away into the luxury apartment and helped herself to a bottle of wine.

At first Paisley simply slumped down on the floor and waited, but the more time that passed, the angrier she grew. It wasn't fair, and she hadn't done anything to deserve a punishment. Why was Auntie Eve being so mean? After a while her thoughts turned from sulking to revenge. A lightbulb soon clicked on in her mind and Paisley jumped to her feet with a grin.

Pounding on the door and begging to be let out didn't work, so Paisley started to scream and cry instead. Not wanting anyone to hear the infuriating brat and certainly needing the pup to be calm by the time her father got home, Eve stormed to the bathroom just as Paisley hoped

she would. Listening to the she-wolf's footsteps approach, the clever pup scampered over to the bathtub and turned on the taps, snatching up the hand-held shower head.

Just as Eve stormed in, Paisley aimed the shower head at the door and giggled gleefully as water splashed all over the glamorous woman's designer dress. Eve screamed bloody murder, soaked head to toe and turning as red as a tomato. A stream of obscenities flew from her mouth, "You've ruined my clothes!" She shrieked. "I'll kill you, you hateful little brat!"

She tried to lunge forward, but was blinded by a fresh stream of water. Dropping the faucet, Paisley skirted around Eve while she wiped her eyes and ran out of the bathroom. She was still laughing when Ethan walked in a little while later, her mirth peaking when he asked Eve why she was all wet. The she-wolf tried to get Paisley in trouble, saying the pup played a terrible trick on her, but the Alpha didn't take the bait.

Unfortunately Paisley's good-humor didn't last long. At dinner her grandmother gushed on and on about how wonderful Eve was, retelling the story about how the brave she-wolf almost died saving her from rogues. Then, to the young pup's horror, she asked when Ethan was finally going to marry Eve.

"All right you two." The elegant woman grinned, "When's the wedding?" Reaching over to pat Paisley's cheek, she added, "I want more grandpups while I'm still young

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enough to enjoy them.”

Paisley looked back and forth between Ethan and Eve, certain she must be hearing things Her Daddy couldn't marry the horrible woman, especially not now that she knew her real Mommy was out there waiting for her. When Eve only offered her a conniving smirk and Ethan shot his mother an annoyed look for spoiling the news, Paisley burst into tears. Sobbing and climbing into Ethan's lap, she begged him not to marry Eve, “Please don't Daddy! I don't want her to be my Mommy!”