

Chapter 20 Ethan Steals a Drunken Kiss

Ethan

"I'll tell you what." Jane offers silkily, "I'll go back to my room, and you go back to your daughter's. I'm sure she needs you more than I do."

Her words strike a cord in my heart, and for once I concede. Though this is absolutely not a defeat. I may be surrendering the battle, but I'm certainly not losing the war. After all, her near-fall allowed me to finally collect the evidence I needed to confirm she's Paisley's mother. In my palm rests a strand of her long hair. By this time tomorrow, I'll have all the proof I need to confront my naughty little mate. We'll see if she's still so defiant then.

3 days later.

How is this possible?

I was so sure Elise Carrington was Jane. I was so sure the beautiful she-wolf I met in Eve's Atelier was my long lost mate. I know she smells different, but she's a perfume designer, it would be only too easy for her to fake the scent change.

Still, there was no denying the DNA report in my palm, which states in no uncertain terms that the two samples I submitted were not a match. Elise Carrington was not

which states in no uncertain terms that the two samples I submitted were not a match. Elise Carrington was not Jane Blackwell, no matter how alike the two women looked... no matter that she appeared to be mother to three other children who looked so like me, and no matter how many lies she spun. It didn't make any sense, if she wasn't Jane, then what explanation was there for her actions? How could this be?

Something must be wrong. I feel so distraught that I stumble straight into a bar. I need a drink.

(Jane)

An emergency surgery arose just before Paisley was scheduled to go under, so her procedure has been delayed a few days until the next opening can be booked.

They're keeping her under observation until then just to be safe, and I can't stand the idea of not seeing my baby one more time before the big day.

Fortunately, Ethan hasn't been around the hospital much the last two days – no doubt too busy dealing with Eve or grappling with the forged DNA results.

I knew what he intended when he stole a few strands of my hair, but I decided to let him think that he succeeded, rather than risk him making another attempt.

It cost me a small fortune to pay off the lab tech responsible for running the DNA test. But money always works. This is why I work so hard to earn as much as I can. It's my best hope to protect and care for my pups.

While Ethan is away, I sneak into Paisley's room to steal some precious time alone with her.

"Are you scared?" I ask Paisley, using all my willpower not to climb into bed with my pup.

"No." Paisley shook her head, "I've had lots of surgeries afore."

This blithe statement cracks my heart right open. "Brave girl." I croon. "Is there anything you want or need, anything I can do for you?"

Paisley flushes, staring at her lap and clearly withholding some request she feels too shy to share.

"What is it, little one?" I press sincerely.

"Can I sit in your lap?" The pup requests, so quietly I almost don't hear.

My eyes widen as I realized what she's saying, and my heart flickers with pleasure and pain.

"Of course darling." I try hard to hold back my tears, gathering up the precious being in my arms and settling her in my lap.

She looks up at me with wide eyes and an impossibly sweet smile. Goddess, am I dreaming? I swear, I've had this dream before.

I try to restrain my tears and return her beaming grin. I wish I could tell her how much I love her.

Can she feel it?

Paisley cuddles closer, clutching the silky fabric of my top.

"Will you sing to me?"

"I'd love to." I confirm, beginning to hum and slowly raising my voice to the low volume of a lullaby.

Paisley slowly doses off to sleep. She's still smiling in her dreams and I'm certain she's the best gift I've ever received. How long have I been praying I could hold her this way? That I could simply be a mother to her.

I tuck her into bed with a tender kiss before quietly quitting the hospital.

When I'm finally ensconced in the privacy of my car, I let the tears fall, weeping the entire way home. It's hard to get myself together. But I can't let other pups see me crying. They're so smart and sensitive. They'll certainly pick up on my heightened emotions.

As I walk to the elevator, I wipe my tears, straightening my hair in the mirror, and trying to smile.

Paisley is going to be okay, I tell myself. Everything is going to be okay.

However, as I reach the hallway outside my apartment, I suddenly smell a strong odor of alcohol, and another – all too familiar – scent.

Ethan!

Why is he here?

I freeze where I stand when he comes into view.

He's leaning against the wall, his handsome face flushed from the alcohol. He narrows his eyes slightly as he

gazes at me, unbridled lust clear in his dark eyes.

"It is you – I know it is." He slurs, staggering forward. "You little liar. What you've done is a crime! You should be punished... how could you? You have to come back to me..."

He's barely coherent, so overwhelmed with drink that his words are slurred and muddled.

"I don't know what you're talking about." I avoid his eyes and try my best to keep calm.

"I loved you more than anything, you know that?" Ethan rumbles, moving towards me in a zig-zag. "I know it's you... and those pups... Paisley needs to have her mother back... I'm not enough for her."

His words make no sense to me. Maybe this is just another one of Ethan's ploys to control me, or maybe it's genuine, either way it will only result in pain for me. I have to leave.

"You're drunk." I inform him coolly, "You need to go home. Your daughter is having surgery tomorrow, she needs you in one piece."

One of Ethan's massive hands shoots out to capture my arms. "How do you know that?"

"We met in the hospital." I reminded him, "You told me about Paisley then."

"I never told you her name." He growled. "And her surgery was postponed. As far as you should know, she

already had it.”

His dark eyes bore into me, full of questions and accusations. “You’ve clearly downed enough spirits to tranquilize an elephant.” I argued, “Can you really trust your memory right now?”

“Tell me the truth!” He commands, pure Alpha authority bleeding into his deep voice, “tell me what’s going on.”

I assume he wants an answer, but before I can open my mouth to reply, his lips are descending on mine. They collide with devastating force, erasing all thought from my mind.

Ethan groans into the kiss, slanting his mouth hungrily over mine and delving deep.

He claims me inside and out, rocking his hardness against my already sodden center and drawing soft moans from my lips. In that instant it seems as if no time has passed at all, as if we have no fears and concerns, as if the world is as simple as it was when we were sixteen and head over heels in love.

If the Alpha has his way we’d continue like this all night, but the soft nip of his teeth on my neck jolt me back to reality.

We are not hormonal teenagers anymore. We aren't in love. We aren't mates. We are an Alpha and his former slave, and if I let this continue, I will pay the price, and lose my pups in the process.

I reach out for the decorative vase positioned on the hall

table outside of Linda's apartment, and smash it over Ethan's head without a second thought.

Crash—

