

Chapter 29 The kiss at the tunnel

Jane

Looking down at Paisley's sweet face, I know I can't deny her anything. "Of course I'll come." I promise, avoiding Ethan's gaze.

"Yay!" Paisley exclaims happily, looking back and forth between Ethan and I. Something seems to strike her then, and her little nose crinkles in confusion and concern.

"Wait, what 'bout your game?"

Ethan's gaze zeroes in on me. I don't need to look at him to know, I can feel the weight of his eyes on me like a pair of hundred pound weights. I should have foreseen this, I should have remembered the story I told the little girl about the hide and seek game. Now she'll think I can't ever be her mother because Ethan clearly found me. Panic bubbles up inside me, I don't know how to answer her and keep up my lie for Ethan at the same time.

"We put it on pause." Ethan supplies, surprising me.

"For you." I add gently, "because of your surgery."

"Oh." Paisley chirps, accepting our answer without further question. "Good." She smiles toothily up at me.

"I'm glad."

"Me too." I admit, unable to stop myself from running my fingers through her dark hair.

I'm painfully aware of Ethan's warm, hard body beneath me, and still hiding from his penetrating gaze, however, I'm also completely preoccupied by Paisley. Every time I see her it feels like a dream come true. I've waited so long to hold her in my arms and hear her call me Mommy, I'd put up with Ethan for hours on end if it meant I got to spend more time with her like this. I just have to remain conscious of the fine line I'm walking. I can't reveal too much in front of my ex, and I can't let him trick me into revealing the truth.

When we depart Paisley's room a couple of hours later, he keeps his arm locked around my waist, forcing me to physically remove the powerful limb. I'm mildly shocked when he doesn't stop me, but my victory is very short lived. "Would you care to tell me what that was about?" His deep voice sounds behind me.

Belatedly I realize he allowed me the victory of pushing him away, only so that my guard would be lowered when he made his next move. "Your daughter is very sweet." I inform him simply, not truly answering his question.

"You've visited her before." Ethan rumbles, stating it as a fact, rather than I question.

"I met her when Riley was here." I shrug, "the children's

ward isn't very big."

"Why didn't you say?" He questions, pulling me to a stop just inside the building exit.

"Because," I inform him coldly, "It would only have encouraged you."

I expect him to fight back, instead he simply chuckles, "stubborn thing."

I freeze momentarily, shaking off my reaction as soon as I realize he caught me off guard again. He used to call me that all the time, in precisely the same way - never as a criticism or accusation, always as a term of amused endearment. I continue walking without responding, praying he'll let the matter drop.

Naturally he thwarts me again, "Paisley's mother was stubborn too." He says to my back. "In fact, she never even told me she was pregnant."

"She sounds like a smart woman." I reply, trying not to take his obvious bait.

"Oh she was." He agrees, a sharp edge lining his silky tone. "It's only too bad Paisley never got to know her. She's really needed a mother these past few years, and she's going to need one as she grows up even more."

Tears are burning in my eyes, no matter how I try to fight them. If I stop now or look at him, he'll see, so I simply continue moving towards the car. "Then you

ought to marry Eve and be done with it.”

Ethan

Marry Eve? That's not possible, I've never had any interest in Eve.

I just want to get all the answers I can possibly get from Jane right now. However until then I have to focus on simply making her admit her true identity. Only then can I bring her and my pups home where they belong.

When we get back to Linda's apartment, the kids are begging to go out on an adventure, with Riley suggesting the nearby amusement park. Jane was only too happy for an excuse to get the kids out of the house and away from me so she readily agreed. Of course she was considerably less pleased when the pups turned to me and asked if I would come too.

“He can't!” She yelped far too quickly, flushing and then amending her words. “He's on bedrest.”

“Actually I'd love to come.” I correct her, making the pups cheer triumphantly.

“If you're well enough for an amusement park, you're well enough to go home.” Jane narrows her eyes. “Don't you have Alpha business to take care of?”

“I haven't had a vacation in years, besides, I'm going to

be off for Paisley's surgery anyway." I explain, "this way I'll just start a day early."

"But your head!" Jane sputters, beside herself.

"I won't go on any roller coasters," My head is still aching enough to make the idea make me feel mildly ill.

"That's okay!" Riley immediately replies, "Mommy doesn't like them either so she can keep you company while we ride."

Jane shoots her daughter an exasperated look, but I can only grin at the clever pup. "That's a great idea."

My high spirits only last a little while. Make no mistake, I'm thrilled to be spending time with Jane and the pups, but I can't stop thinking that this is wrong. Poor Paisley is stuck in a lumpy hospital bed while I'm out in the sunshine chasing her siblings around an amusement park.

"Are you thinking about Paisley?" Jane asks softly. We're standing at the exit of an alarmingly tall roller coaster currently whizzing her pups through the air, and my mate has clearly noticed my subdued mood.

Sighing and dragging a hand through my hair, I admit. "I feel guilty being here without her."

She nods in understanding, "I don't know any parent

who wouldn't feel that way." She shares, "But you can bring her when she's well again."

"Or," I suggest, for once being completely sincere without a single thought for scheming, "We could bring her together. The pups did say they want to meet her."

Jane frowns, looking so tempted my heart beats a bit faster. "She probably won't be healed enough in time." She finally answers, "We're leaving after the fragrance launch, remember."

A growl bursts out of me before I can stop it, and Jane jolts in surprise, dropping her gaze and belying the alpha scent layered into her perfume. There's my little omega. "Shhh, I'm sorry." I soothe, reaching out and pulling her under my arm. "My wolf simply doesn't like the idea of you leaving."

"Well he's going to have to get used to it." Jane replies stiffly, "Because it's going to happen."

Before I can reply the pups are racing towards us, their cheeks red and hair windswept. "How was it!?" Jane asks excitedly.

"So fun, Mommy!" They answer together.

"I'm so glad." She answers, hugging them, "where do you want to go next?"

The kids look around, thinking hard, then Riley catches

sight of something that makes her eyes go wide, and begins whispering to her brothers. The next thing I know they're pointing across the park, "let's go on that one!" Parker suggests.

Turning to follow their line of sight, we both blink in surprise, "the tunnel of love?" Jane asks in confusion, eyeing the cheesy ride normally reserved for couples. "Why would you want to go on that ride? It's for grown ups."

"Yeah, but it's really slow 'n' gentle." Ryder explains, "So you two can come on it with us."

"Come on, Mommy, please!" Riley adds, "we haven't gotten to go on 'nything with you yet."

Jane exhales as if she's heading to her own execution rather than a silly boat ride. "fine."

"Yay!" The kids cry, dragging us towards the heart shaped entrance.

When we reach the front of the line it becomes obvious that we can't all fit in a swan boat together, but when Jane suggests we split up and each sit with one or two of the pups, they object again. "No, we want to sit together!" "I guess that settles it." I shrug, climbing into one of the cars and pulling Jane behind me.

As the ride sets off down a dark, artificially starlit tunnel, Jane tries to huddle in the corner so that our bodies

won't touch. Rolling my eyes, I drag her across the bench towards me. However I must have used more force than I realized because instead of sliding over so that we're side by side, Jane ends up halfway in my lap, looking up at me with wide eyes.

Her small palms are braced against my chest, and our faces are only inches apart. I drag my knuckles across her cheek, cupping her face in my hand. I was too drunk to really remember our last kiss, but I'm determined to remember this one.

Closing the final distance between us, I lower my mouth to hers.

