

Chapter 31 Paisley's Surgery

Jane

The expression on Ethan's face terrifies me.

When he answered the phone all color drained from his cheeks, and his jaw went absolutely rigid. His eyes clenched shut as if he was in pain when the person on the other end of the line spoke, and the next thing I knew he was urgently telling me we had to go.

"What's wrong?" I ask, leaping to my feet.

"It's Paisley." He answers, his voice like gravel.

The room begins to spin as dread ties my stomach into knots, "Is she okay?" I gasp, reaching for the counter to suddenly swaying body.

"They've rushed her into emergency surgery." Ethan explains, moving for the door. "I don't know any details yet."

Glancing helplessly at Linda, I find my friend already pushing my purse into my hands, "Go, I'll take care of the pups."

"Thank you." I mouth, following Ethan. "I'll take you." I announce, "You shouldn't drive with a head injury."

He guides me through the door with a hand at my waist

and closes it behind us, pulling the keys from my hand, "Of course you're coming." Ethan says, as if that was a given, "but you aren't driving when you're shaking that way."

"What are you-" looking down at my hands, I realize he's right, I am shaking like a leaf.

I want to argue, I want to insist I'm not upset and only worried for his sake, but the truth is that I'm a second away from collapsing. Instead of spreading more lies, I simply obey, letting Ethan lead me to the car and not even arguing when he keeps a steadying hand on my thigh throughout the drive.

"How are you so calm?" I squeak when we stop at a red light.

Ethan whips his head toward me, and I see the rage and fear swirling in his eyes. "I'm not calm." He growls, "I'm terrified." He admits, revving the engine impatiently. "She can't... we were so close... It was just one more day." "I'm sorry." Tears well in my eyes, as the light turns and we surge ahead. "If I hadn't hit you with that vase you never would have had to postpone." I confess, breaking down. "This is all my fault."

To my utter shock, Ethan pulls the car over, "What are you doing?!"

The Alpha isn't listening, he's taking my face in his

oversized hands, glaring at me so ferociously my wolf whimpers out loud. I'm about to apologize again, when he cuts me off. "This isn't your fault, Jane." He declares sternly. "If I hadn't gotten drunk and kissed you, you never would have hit me. And if the Goddess hadn't given Paisley a weak heart, none of that would even matter."

Tears leak out of the corners of my eyes as I clench them shut, trying to fight my sobs. He doesn't realize it, but Ethan just struck my deepest fear right on the head. Yes Paisley was born with this condition, but maybe if I'd been a stronger mother, maybe if I'd been more careful in my pregnancy or done things differently, she would have been as healthy as her siblings.

"I'm not angry with you, sweetheart." Ethan continues, misreading my reaction. "I'm angry at the universe... It isn't fair. Paisley's never hurt anyone, she doesn't deserve this."

"Of course she doesn't." I agree, squeezing his hand and trying to take enough deep breaths to get myself under control. I can't fall to pieces this way, it will give everything away. "I'm sorry, this isn't about me, we should keep going."

"Us being there won't make the operation go any faster." He reasons, though he directs the car back onto the road

anyway. I'm not sure what to think of his behavior. The Ethan I knew had a temper like a bear, and while he never directed it towards me until everything went wrong with Eve, he certainly didn't show me this kind of sympathy afterwards. It seems unfathomable he could suspect all my deception and still be so kind.

"What do you think happened?" I ask after a moment, "she seemed so strong yesterday."

"I don't know." He grimaces, "I really thought we were out of the woods."

By the time we get to the hospital I'm clutching Ethan's hand in both of mine and silently doing breathing exercises in the vain hope of calming myself down. Of course, every time I try to think a comforting thought to pacify my frayed nerves, some horrible intrusive counterpart comes along to send me spiraling back into despair.

She has to be okay. I begin manically, feeling marginally better before musing, I'll never forgive myself if she isn't. She can't die when we've never gotten a chance to be together. I've only spent a few hours with her and half of those I spent lying to her face. She's never even met her brothers and sister. I never got to tell her she's right, that I am her mother. What kind of monster does that to a dying child? By the time I reach this point I'm back on

the verge of collapse, and I have to start all over again.

Ethan helps me from the car, tucking me under his arm but racing for the entrance so quickly I practically have to run to keep up. In the end he gives up trying to keep an arm around me and just drags me by the hand, but I'm not complaining - if his long legs can get us there faster I'd let him carry me like a sack of potatoes.

Unfortunately there's no good news awaiting us upstairs. The nurse that comes to update us in the OR waiting room looks as if she's coming from a funeral. "I'm afraid Paisley had a heart attack."

My knees really do give out then, and it's a blessing Ethan is there to catch me. "What does that mean for the surgery?" He asks, hugging me so tightly I can't breathe, "Can they save her?"

"Dr. Hastings is doing absolutely everything he can. We'll know more soon." The nurse explains apologetically.

"I don't understand how this happened." Ethan continues, rubbing my back and sounding as if he's on the verge of tears himself, "She was doing so well." He chokes, voice thick with emotion.

"I know." The nurse answers in a sympathetic tone, "I promise we'll find out everything we can."

"Thank you." He rumbles as she retreats.

The next thing I know he's cradling me in his lap, rocking me and kissing my hair as I sob into his neck. "She'll be okay." He insists, sniffing. "She has to be."

Ethan

As the hours drag by, Jane and I slowly shift positions, drying our tears and trying to keep our hopes up. I've taken to pacing the corridors like a man possessed, only pausing to touch base with the nurses and check on Jane. I keep telling myself that no news is good news, but guilt and helplessness eat away at my sanity little by little.

Jane's words in the car ring in my ears and I realize she was right, if I hadn't been such an idiot and gone to the bar the other night, Paisley's surgery would have gone ahead as scheduled. All the triumph I was feeling a few hours ago about my progress with my mate is long gone. If Paisley dies, it will be all my fault. My wolf has been whining non-stop since I got the phone call, and as I think these fateful world he positively curls his tail between his legs, something I can never remember happening before.

More than anything else, I can't stand not being able to do anything to help my little girl. There's nothing worse than knowing matters are out of my hands. As insane as it sounds, I'd rather she was lost or kidnapped because at least then I could do something. In that way it's a

blessing Jane is in such bad shape. I hate seeing her so distraught, but taking care of her is keeping me busy and giving me some kind of purpose in this horrible situation.

Just before midnight, Dr Hastings finally comes through the OR doors, and I rush over to him while Jane hesitantly rises to her feet. Ice clogs my veins as I see the look on his face. Surely if she pulled through he would be smiling right now. Why isn't he smiling?

"Alpha," He sighs, shaking my hand and shooting a confused glance at Jane. He knows Paisley's mother died delivering her, but only a fool could miss the resemblance between the she-wolves.

Pulling Jane to my side, I don't pause for introductions, I need to know whether my daughter is alright. "How'd it go?" I prompt the man impatiently.

"Paisley did beautifully." He announces, his words so opposite from his tone and expression, I think I must be hallucinating.

"She's alright?" Jane hiccups, as confused as I am.

"She's going to be just fine." Dr. Hasting's confirms.

"Oh thank the Goddess," Jane whimpers, turning away from us and covering her face with her hands.

Hearing Paisley survived makes me want to weep in sweet relief, but my instincts are warning me not to relax just yet. I've known Dr. Hastings for years, and I know

he's not telling us everything yet. "Dr. what is it?" I demand.

"Maybe we should speak in private." He suggests gently, gesturing to Jane.

Jane immediately turns back and glares at the man, "No. You shouldn't." She announces, "I want to know too."

Glancing at me for permission, he sighs, "Well, Paisley didn't have a heart attack after all."

"That's a good thing, isn't it?" I question in confusion.

"It would be," He concedes, "If it weren't for the fact that someone tried to murder her."

