

Chapter 32 Paisley Wakes Up

Ethan

“What did you just say?” I demand, certain I’ve misheard the man.

“Well, when we got into the operating room, we discovered that Paisley wasn’t actually in cardiac arrest.” Dr Hastings shares. “Her system was shutting down, but there were no signs of severe stress on the organ itself. We ran a few tests, and it appears someone administered a lethal dose of a drug called digitalis to Paisley mere minutes before we went into surgery.”

“What’s that?” Jane asks, her little hand clutching my arm.

“Well it’s actually used to treat heart conditions in small doses,” He explains, “but in the quantity Paisley received it can be deadly, and it’s not one of her prescribed medications. Whoever did this, did it on purpose.”

“You’re sure?” I press.

“Quite.” He nods, “the drug wouldn’t be tested for in a normal autopsy, we only checked because we could see that something was very wrong. Paisley was poisoned, and whoever did it probably assumed it would happen too quickly for us to save her. Luckily they were wrong.”

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“I don’t understand.” Jane says, looking very pale, “who would poison a child, why would anyone want to harm that angel?”

“I don’t know.” Dr Hastings admits, “but if I had to guess I’d say their real target wasn’t Paisley, but you, Alpha.”

I have to admit it makes sense. No one could have any reason to harm my daughter, other than to harm me. The thought is enough to make me sick, but right now there’s only one thing on my mind. “Can we see her?”

“She’s in the recovery area right now and won’t wake for a while, but of course.” He replies with a gentle smile. “In the meantime, I presume you’d like me to call law enforcement?”

I pause, thinking over my options for a moment. “Actually, I think I’ll have a private investigation conducted. I want whoever did this to think they got away with it, and a big investigation will make that harder.”

“Yes sir.” He nods, leading me through the heavy swinging doors at his back.

It only takes me a fraction of a second to realize Jane isn’t beside me, and when I backtrack I find the silly little wolf wringing her hands back in the waiting area. “What are you doing?” I ask her, “Don’t you want to see Paisley?”

"Of course." She replies defensively, "But it isn't appropriate, I'm not family."

"Really?" I question incredulously, "Jane, you were just sobbing your eyes out over the pup."

"It's Elise." She reminds me haughtily, turning her nose up. Now it's her turn to pace, and she offers me a weak shrug before explaining, "and I'm just an empathetic person, that's all."

I move to tower over her, "So we're back to playing pretend now that the danger has passed, is that it?"

Jane glares up at me, "only a monster wouldn't feel afraid for such a sweet pup, especially not when I helped delay her surgery. It doesn't mean anything." She peeks around my shoulder, her brilliant green eyes gazing longingly after the doctor as she gnaws her lower lip. "Besides, the danger hasn't passed if someone tried to kill her."

"Exactly," I agree, realizing that the stubborn creature isn't going to let herself see Paisley unless I give her an excuse, "which is why we should both go so she can have as many people keeping an eye on her as possible."

She only thinks about it for a second. "That's a good point." She nods in agreement, already darting past me, "If you're sure." Despite her objections, she doesn't pause to give me time to answer, already racing down the hall towards the recovery wing.

When I reach Paisley's bedside Jane is already there, stationed at the end of the bed and watching over the precious pup like a guardian angel. Seeing Jane lovingly gazing at the sleeping child, something finally clicks into place in my mind. Since all this began, I've never been able to figure out why Jane would leave Paisley with me and take the other pups. However now it seems obvious. In fact, I can't believe I was so stupid. Of course she left Paisley with me, she didn't have the money to cover Paisley's medical bills herself.

So it wasn't that she didn't want Paisley, it was that Paisley wouldn't have survived without my money. If the pup hadn't been born with a heart condition, I never would have known any of my children - or even that they existed. I would have lost my mate without any silver lining to comfort me, and Jane would have disappeared once and for all.

As the realizations wash over me, another hits me square in the heart. Jane must truly hate me if she would go to such lengths to hide from me, and she isn't here now for my sake. She's putting up with me for one reason and one reason only: Paisley.

Jane

I don't know what to think.

I'm so overwhelmed with emotion I think I might burst. I'm elated that Paisley's surgery was successful, horrified that someone tried to harm her, and very nervous about how much I might have revealed to Ethan amidst all the chaos. When I turn to look at him, he's watching me with the strangest look on his face. He's barely entered the recovery room, hovering in the doorway as though uncertain what to do.

I extend my hand to him, "Come on."

Wiping the curious look from his face, he takes my hand and steps up beside me, turning his attention to our daughter. She looks so perfect, sleeping peacefully even though she's connected to about a dozen different machines.

"I never get tired of watching her sleep." Ethan confesses, his love for the sweet pup palpable.

"I know." I agree, "it never ceases to amaze me how much time I can pass just like this."

As if she heard our voices, Paisley stirs, blinking open her bleary eyes and moaning sleepily. "Daddy?"

Ethan's at her side in an instant, "Hello little one." He greets her warmly, "welcome back to the world."

"Daddy, what happened?" She mumbles.

"You had your surgery a little early, angel." He explains.

Paisley scrunches up her face in confusion, "Why early?" She asks, rubbing her eyes.

"Well you got a little sick earlier so they took you in." Ethan summarizes, holding her tiny hand in both of his and kissing her knuckles. "But it's all over now. It went well and you're all better. You don't have to do this anymore. No more medicine, no more hospitals."

"That's nice." Paisley decides dreamily, still under the influence of the anesthesia.

"Yes, it is." Ethan agrees happily.

A new thought seems to strike Paisley then, and she looks around as if searching for someone or something. Her eyes widen when she sees me at the end of her bed, and I know in my heart it was me she was looking for. "Mommy, you came!"

I don't even have the heart to correct her about my name. Now that she's in front of me, safe and sound, I want to indulge her every whim. "I said I'd come, didn't I?" I grin, moving to stand opposite Ethan. "How are you feeling?" "Funny," She tells me, staring up at me with a silly smile, "I dream'd I had a pet unicorn."

"You did!" I exclaim, bending to rest my elbows on her mattress, "What else do you remember?"

"Not much." She shrugs before yawning widely, "my chest itches."

"I'm sure it does, honey." I cluck sympathetically, "it might feel that way for a while."

"I love you, Mommy." She mumbles, yawning again.

She's asleep before I can even think to respond, and it's a good thing too. There's no way I could have resisted telling her I love her too - not after everything that's happened. Instead I turn my attention to Ethan, who's watching me with that same odd expression as before.

"I hoped she might remember something about the person who gave her the drug." I share, hoping to distract him.

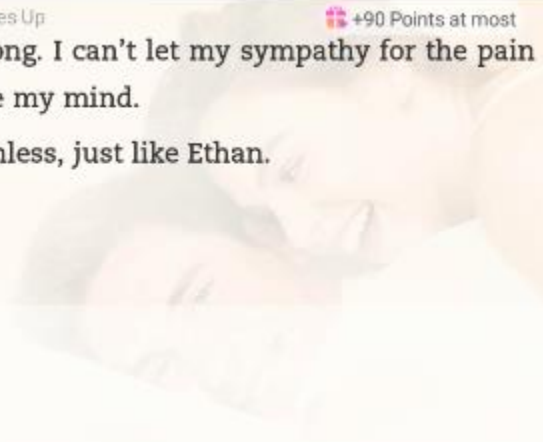
"It was a good idea." He agrees, taking the bait, "We should ask her again when she's not so loopy."

It doesn't escape my notice that he says "we", and it makes me internally writhe with discomfort - not because I don't like it, but because I like it too much. If I didn't already have a hundred reasons to take Paisley home to be with her siblings, the murder attempt gave me one more - and a very large one at that.

Right now my wolf is feeling much too affectionately towards Ethan, and if I'm not careful I'll buy his charming act and fall victim to him once more. Of course the moment I do, I'll lose my freedom and my pups. I can't be a mother if I'm his Omega slave, and my pups need me.

I have to be strong. I can't let my sympathy for the pain
he'll feel change my mind.

I have to be ruthless, just like Ethan.



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