

Chapter 42 Eve Earns a Win

Jane

I don't think I can handle any more emergency phone calls notifying me that my pup is in grave danger. This is the second time it's happened in a single week, and I already feel like my nerves are completely raw. I'm becoming afraid of hearing the phone ring, just one shrill chime is enough to send me jumping out of my skin.

When I arrive at the scene of the accident, it takes me a moment to find Paisley. I see Ethan first, talking with a law enforcement officer and looking very grave indeed. I run up to him, asking, "What happened?" but almost as soon as the words are out of my mouth, I finally catch sight of Paisley. She's sitting in the back of an ambulance, looking shaken but mostly unharmed as an EMT picked shards of glass from her clothing. I start to change directions, but Ethan catches me first.

"Eve was taking her for ice cream and she says the brakes went out on her car." He explains swiftly.

"Eve?" I repeat, righteous indignation swelling in my chest, "You trusted Eve with m- your pup?"

"I left Paisley with my mother." Ethan clarifies, "She trusted Eve to take her, but I guarantee it won't happen

again." He sidles closer, but unlike in the past when he's used his proximity to unsettle me, now I can tell he's doing it to prevent us from being overheard. "Listen, Eve says Paisley was in the back seat, but the truck that hit them says Paisley was in the front."

"And the passenger seatbelt was disabled." The officer on our left adds.

"What?" I gasp, horror freezing me in place.

"I know." Ethan sighs, "it's hard to believe anyone could intentionally harm such a young pup, but we need to find out the truth. Every time I go near Paisley Eve turns up and I think it's to prevent us from talking. I'm going to work with the officers to get traffic camera footage, can you talk to Paisley?"

"Of course." I promise, already heading her way. However, before I can get two steps away, Ethan stops me again, "Jane, wait."

To my immense surprise, Ethan wraps his big body around me, enveloping me in a hug so warm that I feel my body heat up at least three degrees. I sink into his arms instinctively, taking comfort in his solid strength while his lips graze my ear. "I'm sorry, you know I would never forgive myself if anything happened to her." It's only too tempting to let him hold me this way until my heart stops hammering in my chest and my pulse ceases

to race, but I know how dangerous it would be to give in.

I slip out of his hold as soon as I find the willpower, trying and failing to shrug off his words. "I don't know why you're apologizing to me. She's your pup." The words are like acid on my tongue, bitter and corrosive. I hate myself for saying them, but I can't help it. All my past experience with this man has taught me to protect myself at all costs, and until the day comes that I can take Paisley away from here, that includes denying her importance to me.

Ethan's handsome face shuts off, his expression transforming from open and sincere to closed and foreboding. "You know, this is getting really old, Janey." "What's getting old is you insisting I'm someone I'm not." I counter coolly.

"You don't want to push me, sweetheart." Ethan growls, crossing his muscular arms over his chest. "My patience only extends so far."

Memories flash through my mind's eye, images of those terrible days after my graduation trip - when my loving marriage changed into something unspeakable. Hardening myself against Ethan, I reply, "Believe me, I know exactly what you're capable of, Alpha."

His dark eyes flash, and I wonder if he knows precisely what I'm thinking. But I don't give him the chance to

respond, I turn on my heel and stalk away, heading straight for my pup.

Paisley's eyes light up when she sees me, and she starts fighting the EMT trying to clean her up. The young male wolf attempts to hold her still, but Paisley whines and struggles, trying desperately to get to me. Speeding up, I call to the EMT, "It's okay, I've got her."

"Come here angel." I scoop her up into my arms, squeezing her tightly before pulling back to look her over for injuries, "Are you alright? Tell Mommy what hurts."

I say the words without thinking, going into autopilot just as I would with any of my other pups.

Paisley's lip quivers dangerously, "Everything." She sniffles, "It was really scary, Mommy."

"I'm so sorry, my love." I profess, "But you're safe now. I'm not going to let anything happen to you, okay? I promise - as long as I'm here, nothing and no one will hurt you again."

I know that Parker, Ryder and Riley didn't understand why they were coming back to the hospital, but I couldn't bear to have them out of my sight when someone clearly has it out for my family. When Linda brought them to meet Ethan and I, we both hugged them tightly and gently explained about the accident, before

taking them inside to see Paisley.

We watched as Paisley recounted her story for her siblings, and I felt a rush of comfort seeing how happy their visit was making her. She'd been so shaken after everything that happened, especially after I made her relive every detail. I felt terrible doing it, but we needed to know exactly what happened. When she finished her story, Riley, Ryder and Parker, crawled into bed with their sister and curled up in a puppy pile, whispering words of comfort and snuggling close.

Ethan, Linda and I slipped outside to talk, staying where we could see the pups, but trying to speak quietly enough so my clever rascals wouldn't overhear us. I told them exactly what Paisley described to me, which certainly made it sound as if Eve had forced her into the trip and the precarious front seat.

After a few minutes I notice Linda glancing into the room, then feel her furtively nudging me with her elbow, nodding in the direction of the bed. I gasp, clamping my hand over her mouth at the sight of all four of my pups fast asleep in each other's arms. I've seen thousands of cuddle piles between Ryder, Parker and Riley over the years, but to see Paisley included as well was something I've only experienced in her dreams.

Ethan follows my gaze and his stoic expression

completely melts. "Look at them." He murmurs, his hand twitching as if he wants to reach for me. "I've never seen anything so sweet."

"I know." I breathe, clearing my throat. "They certainly made fast friends."

Ethan rolls his eyes, but his attention lingers on the scene in the room as we continue our conversation. If anything, the idyllic image made the macabre nature of our discussion all the more disturbing. "The traffic cameras confirmed what Paisley told you. She was in the front, and Eve didn't look the least bit frightened about the brakes, she actually looked annoyed it took them so long to be hit."

"What are we going to do?" I ask nervously. "Do you have enough to arrest her?"

"For the car accident, yes. But we don't have any proof about the poison yet." He admits, dragging a hand through his thick hair. "I think it's best if she thinks she's gotten away with it, that way we can catch her red handed."

"You can't be serious." I quip, "You're suggesting she be allowed to go free to make another attempt on Paisley, so we can catch her in the act?"

"Jane, if you have her arrested for the car accident she'll go to trial and put on a show for the jury every bit as

convincing as the one she put on for the crowds today, and they'll let her off." Linda reasons, "If you want to put her away for good, you need more evidence. You need something that can't be written off as an accident, something she can't pretend to be a victim of."

"Linda's right." Ethan agrees, "I know it sounds horrible, but we have to play this smart. Trust me, I'm not going to leave Paisley alone with her ever again, but this is for the best."

"If you're sure." I finally concede, eyeing Ethan suspiciously, "You promise you won't let her out of your sight?"

"Of course." Ethan retorts, his sharp gaze zeroing in on me, "She is my pup, after all."

We were still standing there bickering when the TV over the nurses station flipped on and the sound of the nightly news filled their ears. At once, all three of us turn toward the screen, shocked and appalled by the images dominating the monitor.

Footage from the immediate aftermath of the crash was playing on a steady loop, the reporters oohing and aahing over the image of Ethan, Paisley and Eve huddled in each other's arms on the street. At the bottom of the screen, a single line of scrolling text sent Jane's heart sinking into her stomach: Saint Eve, People's Choice for NightFang's

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