

Chapter 44 - The Pups Pull a Switch

3rd Person

After almost a full month sharing a bedroom in Linda's apartment, Jane was finally able to move herself and the pups into their own apartment. Of course, she had no idea that making this change would open the door for her children to hatch a new scheme with their sister.

Little did any of the adults know that on their last visit to the hospital, they'd exchanged walkie talkies so they could stay in contact with one another. Of course, Linda's apartment was much too far away from the Alpha's penthouse for the devices to connect to one another, but Jane's new apartment was only a block away. It hadn't been her first choice, but it was the best she could get on such short notice.

It took a few days of trying since Ethan initially took Paisley to his country house to avoid the media circus, but on the fifth day of trying to reach their long lost sister, Ryder, Parker and Riley finally made contact.

"Paisley, come in, over." Parker said into the speaker, holding down the talk button while his siblings huddled with him under the blankets on his bed.

"Copy!" A familiar voice sounded after a moment, "I've

been waiting ages to hear from you guys.”

“Are you okay?” Riley asked urgently, “has Eve tried anything else?”

“No, Daddy’s pretty mad at her.” Paisley answered promptly, “I haven’ seen her since da accident.”

“Good.” Parker sighed. “She’s evil.”

The other pups nodded in agreement. Riley hadn’t met her yet, but she’d heard enough from the others to understand how terrible the she-wolf was. Besides, she overheard her Mommy talking to Auntie Linda about Eve the other day, and it was very clear that she was not a fan.

“Listen, we have a plan.” Ryder explained to Paisley, “we’re going to ask Mommy for a play date, and da next time we see each other, you and Riley are going to switch places.”

“Really!” Paisley exclaimed in excitement, “You mean I could come live with you and Mommy for a little while?”

“That’s right, and I’ll get to spend some time with Daddy.” Riley chirped happily. “It’ll only be for a little while, but ‘ventually we’ll all be t’gether forever.”

“So what do you think?” Parker questioned eagerly.

“I’m in!” Paisley cried. “But what’d we do once we switch?”

Just then Jane knocked on the bedroom door and pushed

it open, "You three don't sound like you're sleeping." She scolded good naturedly, flipping on the lights and eyeing the three lumps beneath the blankets on Parker's bed.

Quickly turning down the volume on the radio, all three chorused, "Sorry Mommy."

"If you want to sleep together that's find." Jane chuckled, pulling down the covers to reveal the sheepish faces and tousled hair of her pups, "but you have to actually sleep."

"Yes, Mommy." The kids said obediently.

Jane straightened up and narrowed her eyes, the corner of her mouth twitching upward. "Why are you being so good? Are you up to something?"

Three sets of wide eyes looked up at her innocently, "Course not." Riley lied without batting an eye.

Jane didn't appear convinced, "You better not be." She leaned down and dropped a kiss on each of their heads, "goodnight my little rascals. Sweet dreams - I don't want to hear any more noise from you tonight, got it?"

"Goodnight Mommy!"

Three days later, Jane was reluctantly meeting Ethan for another so-called date, again with her pups in tow. When the kids requested a playdate with Paisley, she knew she couldn't resist the chance to see her youngest daughter

again and anyway, she would take any excuse to make these outings as unromantic as possible.

Of course, Ethan was fuming when they arrived. Jane's engagement announcement had just been published that morning, and though it wasn't front page news, it had certainly caught Ethan's attention without any problem. He had a filter set up on his computer's search engine for any news featuring her name as well as her alias: Elise Carrington, so he'd spent his entire day out of sorts after waking up to the breaking story.

Luckily for the pups, both adults were so excited to see their estranged children that they were able to put off their argument until after the kids had run off to play. Not to mention their preoccupation with each other meant it was going to be much easier to pull off their planned switch. So after exchanging hugs and hellos with their parents, the pups scampered off, leaving the former mates alone together.

"I saw your press release." Ethan announced by way of greeting, towering over Jane.

She shrugged, offering him a smug smile, "Is that your way of saying congratulations?"

"You know it isn't." Ethan rumbled. "You're really going to keep up this act with Eric?"

"It's not an act." Jane lied effortlessly, "We're in love. You

know what that's like, don't you? After all, your own press conference made it sound like you understood completely."

To Jane's surprise, Ethan laughed out loud, "you always were too clever for your own good."

"You haven't known me long enough for me to 'always' be anything." Jane sniffed, keeping one eye on her kids as they dove into a ball pit. They'd chosen a children's themed restaurant with an attached arcade, just about the least sexy place imaginable – thank goodness.

"Come on now, I won't deny I used the opportunity to my advantage, but you know I had to make a public statement. Eve was paying every news outlet in town to name her my future bride." Ethan explained.

"Well I'm glad you've finally gotten wise to her." Jane couldn't keep the bitterness from her voice, "I mean it would be impossible not to after everything with Paisley, but it certainly took you long enough."

"Now who's talking about timespans we're not supposed to share?" The Alpha asked cryptically.

"Finally' is subjective," Jane replied, realizing her mistake, "As far as we're concerned it means these past few weeks." She could feel his eyes on her like a brand, boring into her skin with relentless heat. Jane determinedly kept her attention forward, seeking out the pups and breathing

again when she sighted them near a bouncy house. "Are you sure Paisley is well enough for this? It's a lot of physical activity."

Ethan wasn't listening. "What happened back then, Jane?"

Jane wanted to ignore him, she wanted to deny any knowledge of what he was referring to, but she was also curious. If she tried now, so many years later, would she still be inexplicably tongue-tied, or could she finally defend herself? She'd wanted to explain what happened for so long, the idea of finally being able to do so was too inviting to deny.

However when she opened her mouth to speak, the words got caught in her throat. It was exactly as it had been in the immediate aftermath of the attack, like some magical force had hold of her vocal cords and was squeezing them too tightly for her to make a sound. In all the time that had passed, she had never been able to speak about the events of that day with anyone. She didn't know what Eve did to her, but clearly it was powerful enough to hold her prisoner no matter how much time passed.

Clearing her throat, she repeated. "I'm worried about Paisley, are you sure she's up to this?"