

Chapter 46 - Fallout

Truly crying now, Riley nodded. "Okay." As Eve retreated, searching the apartment for her phone and cackling to herself over crushing a small child's feelings, Riley couldn't help but think she and her brothers couldn't have planned this better if they'd tried. Riley wasn't as talented with technology as Ryder, but she knew how to send a text message easily enough. Quickly copying every contact in Eve's address book, she sent the voice memo off with a rush of triumph.

The next part of the plan took on new meaning with Eve's parting advice. Riley had always planned on returning home once her task was complete. She, Paisley and the boys would get to enjoy some quality time together and could relax knowing they were all safe. However once her conversation with Eve was received by Ethan, Jane, Petra, and all the various contacts Eve used to leverage her position in the pack, when Ethan came home to find Paisley missing he'd naturally assume the little girl had run away at Eve's instruction.

If they played this right, they wouldn't even get in trouble with their parents for spirited Paisley away because Eve would take all the blame. As she ran down

the block to their new apartment, eager to share her success with her siblings, Riley could only think one thing: it was perfect.

Ethan

"Foxgloves, sir." The lead investigator says grimly, "they're the flowers digitalis comes from, and Eve has a whole plot of them in her greenhouse."

We're sitting in my office about halfway through the workday, when the stress of everything I've let fall by the wayside in the midst of my constant family emergencies is slowly piling on top of me, but I still can't give priority to anything else.

"You're certain?" I question, wondering how it's possible that my judgment could possibly be so poor. If this is all true, if Eve has been behind these murder attempts, then I've trusted a monster for years, even over my own mate. Some Alpha you are. I think sourly, fooled by a damsel batting her eyelashes. You don't deserve to lead anyone.

"Easy, Alpha." The investigator cautions, "I can see where you're headed and I'm telling you now it won't help anything. This is about more than instinct or judgment, if she's responsible, she's got more than cunning on her side." He sighs heavily, as if he feels silly for suggesting his next words, but can't ignore their validity. "These poisons are not known to common men, this reeks of

witchcraft.”

“Witchcraft?” I scoff, “What is this, a fairy story?”

“I’m simply telling you that the blame does not belong solely on your shoulders, sir.” The investigator amends.

“It does, whether there is some magical component to this or not, I’m the one who missed the warning signs. I’m the one who let it happen.” I correct him.

Before he can respond, my phone buzzes, and I look down to see a voice memo from Eve. At first I ignore it, certain it’s just another cloying attempt to win me over, but after a few minutes pass, more than a dozen people have sent me the same message and I let my curiosity take hold. Baffled, I press play and the sound of Eve’s voice floats up to my ears. Only this time, it’s not the saccharine tone she normally uses to try and seduce me. It’s unvarnished, unmasked and completely horrid, and it’s clear she’s talking to my daughter.

Little by little the investigator and I lean forward in our chairs, listing with rapt attention and growing disgust as the woman I once considered a friend tells my four year old to disappear rather than continuing to ruin my life.

“Where did you get this?” The investigator asks.

“She sent it to me herself, and then a dozen others did too.” I explain, completely nonplussed.

“I don’t think so.” He answered, “I have a feeling your

pup had a hand in this.”

“But she’s only a little girl.” I argue, “she wouldn’t know how to do something like this.”

“Well it makes more sense than Eve outing herself publicly.” The investigator counters.

Suddenly I realize he’s exactly right, and as soon as Even realizes what Paisley has done, my daughter will be in even greater danger than before, “I have to get home - Now.”

Jane

There’s an old shifter saying, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” However, as I listen to the recording of Eve abusing my youngest child, I decide that generations of my ancestors have gotten it wrong. As a woman I would have been infuriated to hear such horrible things. But as a mother? Let’s just say hell hath no fury like a mother scorned.

I rush to Ethan’s Penthouse the moment I get done listening to the message, only to find Ethan already there shouting at Eve in a fury like I’ve never seen before. She’s cowering on the ground at his feet, tears streaming from her eyes while Petra looks on in horror.

“You will never, never, set foot in this house again!” He thunders, “How dare you speak to my daughter that way,

how dare you say those horrible things!"

"Please Ethan, she tricked me, she was trying to make it seem like I'm the bad guy, but-"

"She's four years old!" Ethan explodes, "If she can trick a fully grown adult into saying things they don't mean then you're an absolute imbecile." His hands are shaking, and for one delirious moment I think he might strike her.

"And I can't imagine any trick she could possibly play to justify such wretched things even if she did outsmart you. She didn't do anything but ask you why you were so cruel and you treated her like she was vermin. How long have you been speaking to her that way, how many other abominable ideas have you put in her head?"

Part of me loves seeing Ethan lay into Eve this way, but part of me is also afraid of what he might do when he's lost his temper so completely. Personally I wouldn't mind ripping Eve limb from limb, but I know if Ethan truly loses control and harms her, he'll regret it for the rest of his life. He may be ruthless, but he also has a very strict code of honor. Stepping up behind him, I latch onto his arm, leaning my body against him so he can feel my warmth. "Easy Ethan." I breathe, "Don't let her get the best of you."

His powerful hand covers mine, clutching my slender fingers so tightly I fear they might break. His ragged,

shallow breaths slow slightly and he leans into my touch.

Every place our bodies touch I feel like I'm on fire, but there's no denying it's what's right. I feel him coming back down to earth a little more with every moment that passes. Very gently squeezing his hand, I murmur, "you're hurting me Ethan. Not so tight."

He instantly softens his hold, and I feel some of the balance return to the room, until of course Eve looks up at me with undiluted rage blazing in her eyes. She jabs an accusatory finger in my direction, keening, "This is you! This is all your fault! You bitch!"

"You leave her out of this!" Ethan roars, tucking me under his arm.

"She's never done a single thing to that child-"

"Except abandon her!" Eve reminds him fiercely, her crazed expression making her seem truly insane. "she threw her out the second she saw she was a runt, like a baby with the bath water!"

"How dare you!" Now it isn't Ethan's temper we have to worry about, it's mine, I'm lunging towards Eve, claws and fangs extended, when Ethan catches me around the waist and pulls me back.

"Woah there." He soothes, wrestling my struggling limbs into submission by locking my arms to my sides and holding me tight. "Remember your own advice, Janey."

"Let me bite her." I demand, thrashing violently against his hold. "Let me scratch her despicable little eyes out!"

Ethan purrs, the low vibrations in his chest sending shivers down my spine, "All in good time, baby." He promises. "But we need information from her first."

"What kind of information?" I hiss, still struggling even though it's useless. Deep down inside of me my omega is positively quivering with the pleasure of being overpowered by him, and suddenly I feel very twisted. What kind of mother gets distracted from defending her child by a few muscles and a deep voice? How can so much heat be pooling in my core when we're in the middle of such dire straits? I swear, no other Alpha has ever had this effect on me. If I didn't know any better I'd think we were fated mates, not chosen spouses with a very grim history.

Instead of an answer, silence greets my ears, and a feeling of dread ties my insides into knots. For the first time I realize I cannot hear my pup. I cannot smell her either. Her smell is here, but only a trace, not the strong scent of a wolf who is present in the same moment. I was so taken aback by the dramatic scene when I arrived that I failed to realize the first thing that should have happened, was my daughter running to greet me.

"Ethan?" I breathe shakily, "Where's Paisley?"

"It serves you right you dumb bitch." Eve cackles, "I hope she gets kidnapped. I hope -"

"Shut your fucking mouth before I shut it for you!" Ethan commands, turning me gently towards him.

I know then, when I see the pained expression on his face, complete with red eyes and a jaw clenched so tightly it's twitching. All my worst fears are being realized in that very moment, still I try to cling onto my anger, it was so much more preferable to this fear.

"Please don't." I beg, knowing he's about to tell me something even worse than the horrible recording that brought me to his doorstep. "Please don't say it."

"I'm so sorry, Janey." Ethan professes, pulling me into the protective sphere of his arms. "Paisley is missing." He admits, sounding more broken than I've ever heard him.

"Eve told her to disappear, so she did."

