

Chapter 48 - Jane Weighs her Options

Jane

I think I'm having a stroke.

My kids really are too smart for their own goods. Not only did they figure out my deepest darkest secret, but they've clearly been scheming behind my back. I'm used to Ryder and Parker trying to switch places on me, but I never dreamed it would happen before I ever told the girls they were related. Honestly, most four year olds are still just trying to master tying their shoes, mine are masterminding intricate plots and fooling fully grown adults along the way.

My heart is beating so quickly and so loudly that I can't even hear myself think. "What?" I utter inanelly, needing Parker to repeat his words just to make sure I didn't imagine it. When he does I sink onto the couch in defeat, staring at their hopeful faces in complete shock. "How long have you known?"

"Since the restraint." Riley answers happily.

"I..." I squeak helplessly. "I don't know what to say."

"Why didn' you tell us 'bout Paisley?" Ryder asks, and

though there's not an ounce of accusation in his voice, to me it feels like an interrogation.

"An' why did you leave me with Daddy?" Paisley asks, her green eyes wide and vulnerable, "Didn' you want me?" "Of course I wanted you!" I exclaim, snatching her into my lap and squeezing her so tightly she yelps. Softening my grip I amend, "I'm sorry angel. Leaving you was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my entire life. You can't possibly understand now, but one day when you have pups of your own you'll see. If I'd had any other choice, I never would have let you out of my sight. You were so sick that I couldn't afford to keep you, but your Daddy could. If I hadn't left you with him, you would have died."

The other pups climb onto the sofa on either side of us, their young faces full of questions, "but why did you leave Daddy a'tall?" Parker asks, "Why didn' he know 'bout us?"

Unraveling my arms from Paisley only long enough to wrap them around the others, I try to find the words to explain. "Listen, your Daddy is an amazing Father." Except for leaving my baby with a crazy woman, I think bitterly. "He loves Paisley more than anything, and I'm sure he would love you too, but our relationship wasn't good. I know you get tired of hearing that you'll

understand when you're older, but adult relationships are very complicated. We'd already divorced when I found out I was carrying you, and I was very unhappy when we were together. I thought if he knew about you he'd force me to stay."

"But didn't you love each other?" Riley questions with a frown.

"Yes baby." I sigh, "But love doesn't solve everything, and sometimes the people we hurt the worst are the ones we love the most. It can make you do crazy things. Your Daddy and I were happy when we were younger, but then something bad happened and... well things were just never the same."

"But if you love each other you can get through anything." Paisley tells me dreamily. "I want to be with you and Daddy - together!"

"So do we!" The others agree in unison.

"I'm so sorry kids, that just isn't going to happen." I announce firmly.

All four pups seem to deflate, and the next thing I know they're scrambling off of my lap, stealing their warmth and sweet smells and lining up in front of me. They link their little arms, forming a united front against me and scrunching their adorable faces into identical glares. "Well we don't wanna be separated." Riley declares.

"That's right." Ryder agrees. "We're staying t'gether!"

The worst part of this entire ordeal is that I don't want them to be separated any more than they do. I've been planning to take Paisley back from Ethan from the moment I gave her up, but I haven't figured out how to do it yet, especially now that I know how attached they are. ①

It's truly tempting to think about simply not taking her back, fleeing with her here and now and never looking back. After all this is the opportunity I've been waiting for and I'm angry enough with Ethan that I'm tempted to keep Paisley with me both out of spite and for her safety, but I also remember the look on his face.

"Okay kids, just give Mommy a minute." Closing myself into my bedroom, I head out onto the terrace and hurriedly dial Linda.

She answers after only a few rings. "Hey lady!"

"Hey," I breathe, trying to catch my breath. "I have a problem."

"What's up?" Linda asks, immediately on alert.

"So..." I gulp, trying to figure out how to relate this strange turn of events, "the kids figured out Paisley is their sister. She and Riley switched places, then Riley tricked Eve into bullying her on tape and ran away. Basically, Ethan thinks Paisley is missing, but she's

actually sitting in my living room with the others and they're begging me not to take her back."

A pregnant pause meets my ears. "Are you serious?" Linda finally replies, her question clearly rhetorical. "I swear Janey, I'm beginning to think your kids are mischief prodigies."

"What am I going to do?" I ask her desperately. "They're refusing to be separated, and I don't want to take her back either. I'm still furious with Ethan for endangering her and she belongs with me anyway. I mean is it completely crazy to consider taking her now?"

There's another big pause as if Linda is trying to decide whether or not I'm serious, but when I don't say more she cries, "Yes it's completely crazy!" She exclaims, "Jane, that would be actual kidnapping. As far as the law is concerned, Jane Blackwell died years ago, and Ethan has a DNA test attesting that she isn't your daughter. You can't admit she's yours without also admitting the crimes you committed to stay in hiding all this time. If they caught you, and trust me, Ethan would never stop searching for her and you would be caught, you'd be arrested and lose all four of the pups."

Her words dashed my hope to pieces. "You're right." I agree morosely, "I know you're right. It's just... you should see them all together, this is everything I've been

dreaming of for four years.”

“I know honey, but you have to take her back.” She tells me gently. “It was different before he knew you were still alive. Now that he’s figured it out, the only way you’re going to be able to get her back is if you fight him head on.”

“How am I supposed to do that when you just said that I’ll be arrested?” I moan.

“If you kidnap her. If you take him to court you can make a case that you left out of fear for your own safety and the children belong with you.” Linda reasons.

“No court is going to take an Alpha’s children from him, no matter how valid my argument. I’ll be seen as a liar from the start and be deemed completely unreliable.” I remind her.

“Then you’re going to have to convince him to let her go on his own.” Linda suggests, “unless of course you’re willing to give him another chance. That’s why I’ve been pushing you to reconsider being with him all this time, Jane.”

“I know,” I admit, “This is all so much more complicated than it was supposed to be. I shouldn’t ever have come here.”

“Don’t say that.” Linda scolds, “you saved lives by exposing Eve. You got to meet Paisley, you being here

might have saved her life. Yes things are more complicated now, but you'll figure it out, you always do."

"Thank you." I murmur, making my decision. "Okay, I'll take her home, and starting tomorrow I'll begin working on how to get her back for good. I just hope the pups understand."

Linda laughs in my ear. "Sweetie, they're four, of course they're not going to understand."

"Yeah, yeah." I huff, emitting a begrudging laugh.

"Have fun with the quadruple tantrum!" She says in a sing-song voice.

"Bye Linda." I state pointedly, hanging up the phone.

Sure enough, ten minutes later I'm carting a wailing Paisley out the door while her siblings throw themselves on the ground, crying and beating the floor with their fists and feet while the babysitter looks on helplessly. "I'm sorry." I tell her sheepishly, "I promise I'll give you a big tip when I come home."

Thankfully Sadie only smiles and shrugs, "Don't worry about it, some of the kids I nanny do this at least once a day. Yours really are very good."

It's hard to believe her when the sound of their fits follow me all the way down the stairs, but by the time we reach the street Paisley has stopped fighting and is simply crying pitifully into my neck, tugging at my heartstrings

painfully. "I'm so sorry, my love. "I promise we'll be together one day, it just can't happen yet."

She only hiccups and continues to sob. All I can do is rub her back, kiss her hair, and prepare myself to face Ethan. This isn't going to be fun.



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