

Chapter 49 - Paisley Comes Home

Ethan

"Ethan please!" Eve wails, still huddled on the floor and sobbing like an actress in a soap opera.

If I'd been angry before, my fight with Jane had pushed me completely over the edge. Her words cut me incredibly deep, mostly because I know they were true. This was all my fault. Yes, Eve is clearly an unforgivably cruel, borderline heartless woman, but I'm the one who let her stick around even after I knew what she was. The law enforcement officers had agreed it was for the best, but now I can see only too clearly that what was best for their case and what was best for my child were two very different things.

"Stop your sniveling this instant." I command, my booming voice echoing around the room. "I want you out of my house within the half hour, anything that's still here after that is going to be thrown out on the street."

"No!" She keens, "You can't, you don't understand. I don't have anywhere else to go!"

"Then you should have thought of that before you abused my pup!" I bark.

"I didn't! I never touched her!" Eve exclaims, "and she provoked me into saying those things."

"She's a toddler!" I snap, "if she can trick you then you deserve to be tricked. And no amount of provocation could ever forgive saying such horrible horrible things. You might not have physically harmed her but I swear to the Goddess, Eve. If you do not get out of this house I will have you charged with emotional abuse."

"Please," she begs again, "I'll do anything to make it up to you, just say the word."

Clenching my jaw, I squat down to her level, letting my wolf glow through my eyes and relishing her tremble of fear. "Do you have any idea where she might have gone?" She sniffles hesitantly, "If I tell you will you let me stay?" A savage snarl bursts from my chest, and it actually takes serious effort not to let my wolf take over completely. "I'll tell you what, if you know something and you don't tell me it won't matter whether or not you have a place to live or not – because you will no longer be breathing!"

She flinches, rolling onto her back to expose her belly despite being in human form, and clenching her eyes shut as if in pain. "I don't!" She sobs, "I swear I don't know anything."

"Then get out of my sight!" I thunder, taking true relish

in watching her scramble to get away from me.

Rising to my feet again, I begin to pace, trying and failing to catch my breath. I catch sight of my mother out of the corner of my eye. Her arms are wrapped around her body, and she's frowning deeply. "Do you have a problem with the way that was handled? I question, more roughly than I intended.

"No." She whispers, looking truly devastated. "I still can't believe this happened. I always thought Eve loved Paisley."

"Yes, well she's a very good actress." I grouse, turning my attention to Frank. The bodyguard is standing by the door with his hat in his hand, the normally stoic man looking very grave indeed. "If you want to fire me sir, I'll understand."

"If we don't find her, you will be." I rumble, barely able to stand the idea of Paisley never coming home. She's so small, and still so fragile. Anything could happen to her in a city of this size. Law enforcement is already scouring the streets trying to find her, and they advised me to stay at the house in case there was any news – like Paisley coming home or Goddess forbid, a ransom call.

"I can't stand just waiting here." I admit, scrubbing a hand over my face. "Think - where would she go?"

"She's too little to get anywhere on her own." My mother laments, "I mean even if she wanted to go somewhere

specific, it's not like she can call a cab or buy a metro card."

The more I think about it, the clearer it becomes that there may not be one place she would try to find, but there's certainly one person she would seek out. "She'll be looking for Jane." I murmur, trying to put myself in my daughter's shoes, she'd only ever met Jane out in the city, she wouldn't know how to get to Linda's apartment or even Jane's new one.

"She might try to get to one of the places where they've met, the hospital or the park." I reason.

"I'll go to the hospital, and Frank can go to the park or anywhere else she's seen her." My mother offers, "You should still stay here though." I open my mouth to object, but she raises her hands defensively. "You need to make sure Eve actually leaves, and somebody does need to be here if she comes back."

"Fine." I force the words out through clenched teeth.

Eve leaves shortly after Mom and Frank depart, slinking out the door with a suitcase and her tail tucked between her legs. As soon as she's gone I pace into Eve's room, realizing there is one advantage to staying behind. With the house to myself, I'm finally free to vent my rage the way I so desperately need. Roaring like a wounded animal, I throw my arms out and swipe everything from

her dresser, then move on to tearing down bookshelves and overturning the room's heavy furniture until the entire space is in complete disarray.

With my office laid completely to waste, I feel slightly better, but no amount of destruction can heal the gaping hole in my heart. Just as I'm exiting the room and beginning to contemplate tearing my office apart too, I hear a knock on the door.

Scenting the air, I immediately recognize Jane's scent, and with her – "Paisley!"

"What happened?" I ask Jane a little while later, after Paisley and I have both stopped crying and my pup is now napping safely in her bed. "How did you find her?"

"That isn't important." She evades smoothly, "just that she's safely home."

"I thought she might be looking for you." I admit, "Did she find you?"

"Ethan just let it go." Jane encourages, brushing off my questions and moving towards the door.

"Why won't you tell me?" I ask, following her. "What are you trying to hide?"

"I'm not trying to hide anything." Jane replies stiffly, "I simply don't have any interest in staying here and

talking to you.”

“Jane, I’m sorry about what happened.” I sigh, the honest words wrenching my insides, “I thought I was doing the right thing.”

She turns back, eyeing me narrowly. “For who?”

“For all of us.” I grind out. “I had no idea this was happening. I never would have let Eve stay here if I had.”

“Meaning you were so wrapped up in yourself that you didn’t notice someone hurting your child, you never taught her how she should expect to be treated or to tell you when someone crossed a line.”

“I’m sorry I’m not a perfect parent, like you.” I remark, clenching my hands into fists, “I’m trying to figure all this out as I go, I didn’t even know I was a father until she was placed in my arms.”

“That’s no excuse!” Jane mutters, “all parents are just figuring it out, but they don’t all make mistakes like this. And that has nothing to do with perfection.”

“Well forgive me if being a single father to a pup with as many medical problems as Paisley has distracted me from other dangers. If you’d ever been here in the past, you might understand what that’s like.”

Jane looks like she’s biting back a sharp retort. I’m not sure what she wanted to say originally, but she settles on, “Why on earth would I have ever been here in the past?”

"You know why!" I growl. Her fair skin is becoming flushed with color, whether in anger or discomfort I'm not sure. "You wouldn't be this upset if Paisley was just another pup! Tell me, are you attacking me this way because you actually blame me for what happened, or because you feel guilty about leaving her in the first place?"

"I'm not-" she begins angrily, undoubtedly preparing to offer up another lie.

"Just admit it, Jane!" I explode, advancing on her. My wolf is clawing to get out again, but this time for very different reasons than with Eve. "Stop lying, stop all the games, just admit that you're her mother. Admit that you were my wife!"

"Fine!" She bursts, her voice louder than I can ever remember her raising it in the past. "It's me! There is no Elise Carrington. I intercepted your DNA test and switched out the samples so you'd get a false negative. Paisley's mine and I was your wife - but I'm not anymore, and I never will be again!"

