

Chapter 6 I found Mommy

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My daughter leans forward and wraps her tiny arms around my neck without hesitation, hugging me tightly. "Thank you!"

My throat feels thick with emotion, and I have to fight to keep tears from my eyes as I return Paisley's embrace.

Lifting the precious bundle off the ground and cuddling her close, I scan the street around us for signs of my ex-husband. Though I fully intend on returning my pup to Ethan, I can't allow him to see me.

He can't know I'm alive, and while my custom perfume might hide my scent from everyone else and convince them I'm an alpha, I seriously doubt my former mate will be fooled. After all, he is a true alpha, the most powerful leader the Nightfang pack has seen in generations.

Striding away down the street, I fantasize about running away with my daughter this very moment. If I did, my young family could be reunited within the hour. My other pups don't even know that they have a sister, and I despise keeping them apart.

Of course, if I took Paisley now then she wouldn't be able to get her surgery. I might be able to afford the most cutting edge medical care now that my fragrance empire is so successful, but there is only one surgeon in the world who can perform the procedure my daughter requires, and he is firmly in Ethan's pocket.

"Where did you last see your Daddy?" I ask once Eve's atelier is out of sight.

Paisley peeks shyly up at me. "In the car."

"In the car?" I repeat curiously, watching the little girl

closely. She's wearing exactly the same expression my other pups don when they've been making mischief.

"And how did you get out of the car?"

Offering me an impish grin, she explains, "I couldn' help it."

"Couldn't help what?" I reply, arching my brow fighting the urge to smile.

"I was bored!" Paisley bursts. "Daddy left me with Mr. Frank, and he never lets me have any fun."

Recalling that Frank was Ethan's personal bodyguard and now probably performs the same role for Paisley, I press,

"So where is Mr. Frank now?"

Another mischievous grin, "the car."

"I see." I proclaim. If Paisley is anything like her brothers and sister, Frank is probably handcuffed to the steering wheel. "Am I to understand that you snuck away from your minder, young lady?"

"Daddy said we were gonna play in the park." Paisley answers with a pout, "I just wan'ed to explore while he finished working."

"I'm sure it was very boring waiting in the car." I frown, leveling her with my best 'stern mom' look. As thrilled as I am to be holding my baby in my arms at long last, I can't help but think of what might have happened if I hadn't come along. "But running off was very dangerous,

my love. What if someone had found you instead of me?"

"But you did find me." She argues, resting her soft cheek on my shoulder as if the matter has been settled.

"And I hope I always am here to find you." I murmur.

"But there are never any guarantees in life. You have to be safe."

Despite my cautioning words, my daughter isn't listening. She's too busy snuggling in for a nap, as if she's as soothed by my presence as I am overjoyed by hers. Paisley sighs contentedly when she gets comfortable, her sweet breath ruffling my hair. "You smell nice."

Pressing my lips to her temple, I breathe in her pure, fresh scent. "So do you." I admit, hugging her a little closer.

"I'm hungry." Paisley announces then, trying to speak through a wide yawn. Poor thing, I think, she's had so much excitement. Getting lost when she's already unwell.

"Then we'll have to find you some lunch." I decide, moving towards a small cafe off the side street.

A huge stack of syrupy pancakes rallies Paisley's energy, and soon she's sitting across from me positively overflowing with excitement. "And another time," She shares, recalling stories from her young life, "Daddy and I wen' to the zoo and I pet an ocotopus!"

"That's wonderful!" I exclaim, chuckling at her

mispronunciation. "You must love your Daddy a lot." I can't help but pry into her relationship with Ethan. I know I did the right thing leaving Paisley with him, but I can't rest until I know she's truly happy.

"Lots and lots!" She agrees, gulping down some juice before looking at me intently. After a moment she cocks her head to the side in the exact same way Riley does when she's thinking hard about something. "You look like my mommy."

My heart stops in my chest, how does she know that? "I do?" I feign ignorance, "Where is your mommy?"

I regret the question the moment the words leave my mouth. Paisley looks so sorrowful I want to kick myself. "I never met her."

I'm about to apologize, both for my question and her loss, when an idea strikes the pup and she looks up at me in excitement, "Can you be my mommy?! Daddy has lots of money, he'll give you as much as you want!"

"Sweetheart, money can't buy everything." I laugh softly. "Daddy told me he can buy me anything I want." Paisley's brow furrows, "So can't he buy me a Mommy?" "You can't buy people, Paisley." I explain with a sad smile. "But I promise, you'll find a Mommy one day."

I promise. I repeat in my head. I'll come for you as soon as you're well.

For now I need to call Linda so she can take Paisley home. I doubt Ethan will remember my friend, and if I stay with my pup any longer, I'll never be able to let her go.

Ethan

"Paisley!" Leaping forward and pulling my pup out of the strange woman's arms, I hug her close. "Where have you been, I've been so worried!"

"I'm sorry, Daddy." Her little voice replies. "I got lost."

"Thank you so much!" I say to my daughter's rescuer, doing a double take when I catch sight of her familiar face. "I'm sorry, have we met?"

"No." She answers gruffly, nodding towards Paisley. "Is there a reward?"

Growling under my breath, I yank my wallet from my back pocket and extract some cash, wanting the coarse woman out of my sight as quickly as possible.

When she's finally gone, I turn back to Paisley.

"Sweetheart you've got to stop running away from Frank! It isn't safe for you to be in the city on your own."

"Daddy, I was perfectly safe." She answers, as if I'm being very silly indeed. "I was with Mommy."

What? I can't believe what I'm hearing. Is she hallucinating? Or am I?