

Chapter 8 Why would she fake her death

Jane

"She was so perfect." I moan, taking a sip of wine while Linda listens sympathetically. "I wanted to run away with her then and there."

"It's a good thing you didn't." My friend advises. We're out on her front porch, enjoying a late afternoon cocktail and discussing the shocking events of the day. "It was risky enough just spending time with her. If you took her, Ethan would hunt you to the ends of the earth."

"I'm going to have to figure out a way to take her eventually. She belongs with me, with her siblings." I insist, feeling positively overwhelmed after everything that's happened over the last few days.

"We'll figure it out." Linda assures me. "For now we should just be thankful he didn't figure out you're alive."

"What if he did?" I ask anxiously.

"Honey, you have to trust the death certificate the coroner forged for us was enough." Linda reminds me, "We covered our bases. You're safe."

"There's no such thing as safe when it comes to alphas." I remind her. "That kind of power... it knows no limits. Besides, it's not only that, it's Paisley... she knew what I

look like, she told me I look like her Mommy." As much as hearing the precious creature say those words tugged at my heartstrings, I'm terrified of her repeating the sentiment to her father. "How do we know she didn't tell Ethan what she suspected?"

As the mother of three young pups, I know better than anyone how children tend to parrot everything they hear. The last thing one should ever do is assume kids aren't listening or capable of understanding conversations - especially my children, who are much too smart for their own goods.

"If she told him about you, he would already be banging on our door." Linda replies, trying to comfort me. "I'm sure he doesn't know."

Instead of soothing me, her words evoke a thousand terrible possibilities. The image of Ethan crashing into Linda's home in a fit of rage melds with my nightmarish memories, resurrecting ghosts of the life I left behind. That same fate would await me if Ethan ever found out I'm alive. I can't go back to being a slave, a tool for some power-hungry alpha to use and abuse like I mean nothing at all.

Tears well in my eyes, "He can't find out, Linda. He'll take my babies, he'll make me his property again."

"Jane, listen to me." My friend insists. "You aren't the same woman you were back then. You are so much more than you ever were or wanted to be. Ethan only has

power over you if you give it to him.”

Swiping tears from my cheeks, I nod in agreement. It's just in time. At that moment my driver pulls up, delivering my pups from the daycare center I booked for our time in the city. The back door of the sleek SUV opens, and one by one my pups are released from their car seats, running towards me with open arms.

“Hello my babies!” I cry, hugging Ryder, Parker and Riley as close as possible and showering them with kisses. “Oh, I missed you so much! How was your day?”

As predicted, my young pups pick up on my distress immediately, each child trying their best to soothe my overwrought nerves. Parker climbs into my lap and begins singing a silly song he made up with his teacher today, spouting lyrics about a “frog on a log in a bog, who went for a jog but got lost in the smog and then met a hog - who was completely agog.”

Meanwhile Riley spins around on the porch, performing effortless pirouettes and leaps to her brother's tune, “Mommy look at me!” Clearly her ballet classes are paying off, though I imagine her dance instructor wouldn't approve of the ribbets and oinks she's incorporating into the otherwise graceful routine.

My other son, Ryder, is busy conducting them both, standing in the middle of the porch steps and waving his hands like a composer. Every now and then he calls out an instruction to his siblings, encouraging them to give

their best performance.

If they were anyone else's children I would assume they planned this, but my pups are so precocious I have no doubt they're improvising. Before long Linda and I have collapsed in a puddle of laughter, the pups climbing on top of us in a giggling dog pile. I squeeze them tightly, silently thanking the Goddess for bringing them into my life.

In these moments I can almost forget my young family is incomplete. Ryder, Parker and Riley give me more joy than I ever dreamed was possible. They're the greatest gift I've ever received and if it weren't for Paisley's absence, I'd have everything my heart desired. Of course today was a stark reminder that one piece of my heart is still missing, and I'm more determined than ever to get it back.

Ethan

The glass cases lining the bakery window overflow with delectable pastries, each one making my mouth water. A cursive gold "D" has been painted onto the triangles of chocolate sticking out of every dessert, the trademark flourish of Cafe Dulce.

Jane and I used to come here every weekend, ordering strong coffees and incredible sweets. I still come whenever I can, but I never bring anyone with me - not even Paisley. In my mind this is Jane's special place, and

I can't bear the idea of bringing anyone else here. It's almost as if I think making new memories here might erase those of her, as silly as that is.

As I look past the display case to the inside counter, I'm certain I see my beautiful mate. She's tiny and slender, with long blonde hair cascading down her back. Surging toward the glass doors, I charge inside just as she slips out the back, evading me so perfectly I'm almost impressed. Almost, because I'd much rather have her in my arms than chase her to the ends of the earth.

I can't deny how strongly she resembled Jane, and there - it's the same scent Paisley was covered with when she came home yesterday. Maybe my daughter was right after all. Maybe her mother has been out there all this time, staying hidden from view but watching over us every step of the way.

The question remains as to why?

Why would she hide this way? Why would she fake her death? And most baffling of all, how could she leave Paisley?

Running out the back door, I search the street for signs of the blonde woman, but she's already gone. I try to follow her scent, but it disappears at the end of the street. She must have gotten in a car. Turning back to the cafe, I march up to the counter and demand to speak with the manager. A portly wolf appears a moment later, "Alpha, what can I help you with today?"

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"I want to see your surveillance footage from the last few days." I demand, turning to the waitress who served the mysterious blonde, "And I need you to tell me about the woman who was just in here."

My heart is beating so fast as the security footage loads that I can scarcely breathe.

Goddess only knows what I'm expecting.