

## Chapter 9 Ethan is different

The waitress recounts her transaction with Jane's lookalike as my eyes stay locked on the screen.

Fuck. Why won't it load faster!

"She was beautiful, and very friendly. I wish all customers were like her." She gushes, "She bought a box of cookies and asked if she could use the service exit, because she parked in the side street. The young woman glances back and forth between her manager and me, uncertainty painting her features. "Was that wrong?"

"No, you didn't do anything wrong." I assure her, trying to keep my voice gentle even though her decision has actually inconvenienced me greatly. If only she'd said no! The blonde would have been forced to walk out the front, right past me. "Have you ever seen her before?"

Unfortunately the waitress is too young to have been working here when Jane and I were married, but maybe she's seen her on other occasions. "I'm sorry, no." She replies. "I think she was from out of town."

"Why do you say that?" I question sharply.

"Well, she said she loves our pastries but she never gets to eat them anymore because she moved away." The waitress explains.

"Can you tell me anything else about her?" I implore,

keeping my fingers crossed that she'll remember some small clue to the woman's identity.

"Well, I can tell you she has money." She answers, "Her clothes were designer and the perfume she was wearing costs thousands of dollars."

I leap at the detail, "What was the perfume brand?"

"La louve." The young woman flushes, "I've been saving up for a bottle for months. I think it was the signature line."

"Thank you." I breathe, turning my attention to the security tape. We all watch with bated breath, but the grainy footage doesn't reveal any helpful hints. In addition to the oversized sunglasses obscuring the woman's features, she kept her face averted from the cameras the entire time she was in the store. It's almost like she did it on purpose.

Sighing in disappointment, I return home without ordering anything for myself. The mysterious woman stole my appetite completely, and now my only thought is of my one-time bride. When I get back to my penthouse, I head straight for my closet, reaching up to the high shelves above the clothing racks and extracting a worn shoe box. Opening it, I sort through a stack of well-loved photos until I land on a landscape shot of our wedding party.

There, standing beside Jane in a bridesmaid's gown, is the woman who brought Paisley home after she ran away

Linda

When I hear a knock on my office door, the last person I expect to find waiting on the other side is the Alpha. Nonetheless, there Ethan stands, a neutral expression on his handsome face. Blinking in surprise, I choke, "Alpha, to what do I owe the honor?"

"Hello Linda." He greets me coolly. "I came to thank you for bringing Paisley home safely."

"Oh, of course." I smile, trying to hide my unease. That can't be the only reason he's here, I'm only thankful he chose to come to my work, instead of my home. The entire house smells like Jane and the pups at this point.

"I also have to ask," the Alpha continues shrewdly, "Why did you say we'd never met?"

Shrugging uncomfortably, I say, "You clearly didn't remember me, I didn't want to make things awkward."

"I'm sorry I didn't remember you." Ethan frowns, "I should have - you were Jane's best friend after all."

"That's okay." I flush, desperate for the imposing wolf to stop looking at me like I'm a puzzle he's determined to solve.

"You've done well for yourself." He compliments, gesturing around at my law firm. "Though I wonder - why did a high-price lawyer need a reward for returning

a lost child? It's not like you're hard up for money."

Because you were looking at me much too closely and I wanted you to stop. I think dryly. "You know what they say about lawyers." I quip, chuckling softly. "We're a greedy bunch."

Ethan nods, nonchalantly scanning the titles on my bookshelf. "And the woman who actually found Paisley?"

I freeze. Oh no, oh no, oh no. "What do you mean?"

The Alpha's eyes narrow, pinning me in place. "Paisley told me another woman found her near Eve's shop, but she asked you to bring her home instead."

"Oh!" I offer him a wide smile, an inspired thought striking me just in time. "You mean Isabel. You remember Isabel - she was one of Jane's bridesmaids." I remind him, describing another one of our friends. Like Jane, Isabel is a small blonde who moved away for work a few years ago. "She's in town on business and had to get to a meeting, so she asked me to bring Paisley home instead."

"I see." Ethan nods, looking unconvinced. "It must be hard for you to think about Jane."

He looks so sad when he says her name, triggering a deep pang in my chest. "Not at all. Jane is-" Damn it! I catch myself just in time. I came this close to saying Jane is doing well. Instead I dab at my eyes, pretending to be caught up in emotion. "She wasn't the type of person who would want her friends to go on mourning her

forever. I know she'd want me to be happy, so I focus on the good memories - not the bad."

Ethan looks disappointed, and sweet relief washes over me. I usher him out of my office before I can slip up again, returning to my work and trying to figure out how on earth I'm going to tell my friend about my near slip up.

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Jane

I know something is wrong the moment Linda walks in the door. Her expression is tense and her shoulders rigid, she looks as if she's had a terrible day. "Hey, are you okay?" I ask, setting down the knife I'm currently using to chop vegetables, "Did something happen on your case?"

"No." Linda sighs, striding into the kitchen and heading straight for the uncorked bottle of wine on the counter.

"The case is fine."

"Then what's wrong?" I press, genuine concern lacing my voice.

"Ethan came to see me today." She murmurs, so quietly I can scarcely hear her.

"What!?" I exclaim, my pulse beginning to race.

"It's okay." She raises a placating hand, "at least, I think it is. He asked me why I pretended not to know him and wanted to know about the woman who found Paisley, but I lied and said it was Isabel. I think he believed me."

"You think?" I repeat, fear holding me completely hostage.

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"I admit I'm not certain, but he seemed convinced and he left without any argument." My friend assures me. "But Jane..."

