

Chapter 24 Where is their Dad

I return my gaze to Elise, a sense of triumph building in my chest. Mommy. Just as I thought. Clearly these aren't Linda's pups after all.

If Elise realizes that her daughter has just revealed her deception, she doesn't show it. She doesn't even look at me because her full attention is on her pup. She crosses the kitchen and scoops up the little girl, humming sympathetically. "Poor baby, you've had too much excitement this week."

The child peeks over at me with wide eyes, cuddling closer to her mother but also unflinchingly curious. "Hello there, little one." I greet her warmly, instinctively stepping closer. "What's your name?"

Elise's arms tighten on the girl when I move closer, betraying her maternal instincts even further. "I'm Riley." The pup yawns, resting her cheek on Jane's shoulder and watching me intently.

"I'm sorry if your Mommy and I woke you, Riley." I state honestly, desperately wanting to reach out to the sleepy girl, who reminds me so much of Paisley it hurts. "But I'm happy we got to meet again."

Riley frowns, "You hit your head."

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“I did.” I agree, “we were just talking about that.”

“Is it better now?” She asks with obvious concern.

“Yes, thank you.” I smile, giving in and brushing the hair back from her eyes, even as a low growl rumbles in Elise’s chest. I flash a wolfish grin at the protective mother wolf, loving her ferocity even if her concerns are completely ridiculous. How could she think I would be any threat to such an angel.

“You should stay here ‘nyway.” Riley suggests drowsily, her eyes falling shut.

“He can’t stay.” Elise decrees firmly.

“He should.” Riley repeats dreamily.

Ignoring her, Elise carries the pup back to her room, glancing over her shoulder and glowering when she sees me following. My attention is riveted on the child in her arms, if I didn’t know better I’d be absolutely certain it was Paisley. There is no way the two girls are not related; resemblances this similar simply don’t happen by coincidence, especially not when her mother might as well be Jane’s twin, and when her brother’s look so much like me. The boys are tucked in and sleeping soundly in the nursery, their little heads poking out of the covers as their chests rise and fall in slumber.

I know I'm staring at my pups, and Elise knows it too.

I'm waiting when she returns from settling Riley, leaning against the kitchen counter and sharply monitoring her approach. Now that her pup is resting peacefully, the stunning she-wolf seems far more unsettled than before.

"So Mommy," I remark dryly, enjoying the way she stiffens defensively. "They're not Linda's pups after all."

"No." Elise admits, "They're mine."

"And their father?" I prompt,

Her eyes narrow. "He's not in the picture."

"Why did you lie?" I interrogate, every predatory bone in my body on high alert. If I'm right and this is my mate in front of me, she has a lot to answer for: Not only did she hide my pups from me and fake her death, she forged DNA results and knocked me out cold when I came to confront her about them.

Yet Elise simply shrugs as if the lie was no big deal, "Technically Linda lied, not me."

"At your direction." I bite back.

"You've already shown far more interest in me than I'm comfortable with. I didn't want to give you more leverage."

She answers coolly, staring me straight in the eye. Interesting, either she's a better liar than I thought, or she's telling the truth.

"Strange, I don't know many mothers who wouldn't want to brag about such wonderful kids." I bait her.

"Then maybe you have met many single mothers who have something to protect." Elise snaps back.

"And what exactly are you trying to protect?" I ask, stalking forward and loving the way she squirms when I come near. "Do you believe I'm some sort of threat to you, Ms. Carrington?"

"Of course not." She drops her gaze, any inclination for truth telling clearly gone, "but you are an alpha wolf with a dominant streak a mile wide. In my experience your kind don't take well to the idea of their potential mates having another man's pups."

"My kind?" I growl, before her words truly sink in. Of course when they do, my anger spikes. "Are you suggesting I would harm innocent children, simply because they belong to another man?"

"You wouldn't be the first." She remarks coldly.

For a moment my outrage swells so powerfully I have to count to ten just to get my temper under control. Once I do, I realize she's intentionally baiting me, riling me up to distract me from the matter at hand. Clever little mate.

Abruptly changing tracks, I try to catch her as off-guard as she caught me. "Tell me, Elise, are you single by choice?"

Her eyes widen almost imperceptibly. She then turns her back to me, hiding her face even as I can see a flush working up the back of her neck. "I didn't say that."

"You said their father isn't in the picture." I begin smoothly, dragging my eyes from her throat before I lose control and start kissing it. "And I can't imagine any man would be foolish enough to leave you." I'm moving forward despite my attempts at control, she's simply too ravishing to resist. Elize trembles as I brush her hair away from her neck, standing so close behind her I can feel her heat. "What's his name by the way? Maybe I know him?"

She tosses her long hair back into place, glowering at me over her shoulder. "I wasn't even going to tell you I have kids. You think I'm going to give out names."

I'm not staring into her pretty green eyes, instead I'm staring at the crescent shaped scar where her neck meets her shoulder. A mating mark - my mating mark, I'm sure of it. Her perfume clearly hides much more than her omega scent and sunny fragrance, it also hides my own scent marking.

You can divorce me and run to the ends of the earth Janey, I think hungrily, but nothing can erase my mark. Well, nothing but another wolf's mark on top of it, and Goddess am I glad to see she hasn't been with anyone

else in our years apart.

"Have you noticed how closely our daughters resemble one another?" I question.

"I only saw your daughter for a moment." Elise deflects, "I didn't have long enough to make an impression."

"They were similar enough that I mistook her for Paisley." I share.

Jane snorts. "That speaks more to your parenting ability than their likeness, no?"

Chuckling deeply, I trace my fingers down her arm, "That's one explanation." I agree. "But I have another."

"I'm sure you do." Elise concedes, "And I'm sure I don't want to hear it."

"Why not?" I demand, "You're not scared are you?"

Her little body winds up like a spring, and my immediate instinct is to make her unwind the best way I know how: with my hands, mouth and... well, let's just say it would be a full body workout. But I know this isn't the time. When she turns back to face me, Elise looks more furious than I've ever witnessed. "I am not scared of you, Alpha." She snarls, "but I am scared of any man who refuses to listen when a woman tries to tell him no, and right now, you're doing a damn good job of pushing my limits."

"Clever girl." I praise her, letting my own anger shine

through. "You should be afraid, because I don't take kindly to being lied to."

Elise defiantly bares her teeth, "If you can prove I've lied about other than my pups being Linda's, I'll gladly submit to whatever punishment you see fit. But I won't apologize for protecting my family."

My eyes flash. She knows I cannot prove that she is Paisley's mother. She speaks so confidently, as if she knows I attempted to test her DNA and got failed results. Either I remember even less of last night than I realize and let the truth slip, or she knew about the DNA test beforehand. I'm betting on the latter.

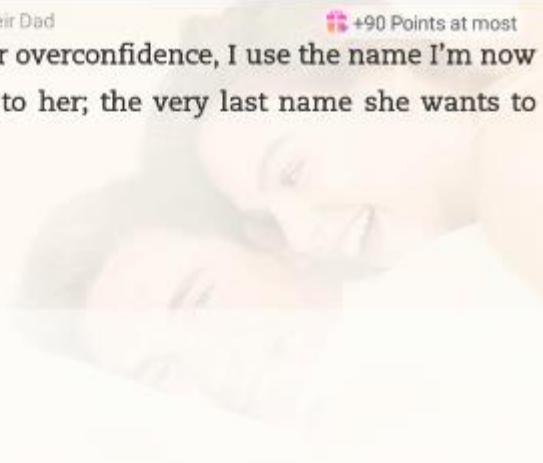
"You've told so many lies." I assert, relying on my instincts rather than verifiable fact, "Are you so certain you haven't slipped up?"

Her eyes widen almost imperceptibly, and the next moment I think she might run. However at the last second she gathers her wits, and plants her hands on her hips. "As I said, if you can prove something, go right ahead. Otherwise, leave me alone."

She watches me closely as I consider my response, her confidence growing every moment that I let pass in silence. Finally she scoffs and turns her back on me, muttering, "That's what I thought."

Before she can leave the kitchen, I call after her. Taking

advantage of her overconfidence, I use the name I'm now certain belongs to her; the very last name she wants to hear. "Jane!"



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