

Chapter 69 - Paisley Asks a Question

3rd Person

Jane's heart sank when she saw Ethan's angry expression. Glancing nervously at the door, she wrapped her arms protectively around her body. However instead of answering she simply backed away from Ethan, unable to bring herself to focus on her alibi until she knew exactly what had happened. "What else did he say?"

"He told me about the evidence connecting you to the crime scene." Ethan explained, following her slowly.

"The dress?" Jane asked, gnawing her lower lip.

"The dress, plus the hair and bloody footprints." Ethan elaborated.

"He never told me about those." Jane breathed shakily, turning away from the Alpha to try and collect her thoughts without feeling his searing gaze on her. Of course, all this meant was that she could feel it on her back instead of her face, lancing through her like a laser beam.

"That's typical." Ethan told her, "they never tell you how much they have against you, he probably has other things he didn't tell me. That's how they get you - they

open the door for you to lie by making you think they only have a little bit of information, then see if your story matches up with the other evidence.”

“My footsteps were there before I found her.” Jane whispered, appearing so helpless and vulnerable it hurt Ethan to look at her. “I don’t know how the dress or the hair got there, but I didn’t do it, Ethan.”

This completely baffled the Alpha. He wasn’t stupid, of course he knew she didn’t do it. Surely she didn’t think he believed she was guilty? She flinched when he took hold of her shoulders, forcibly turning to face him. “Goddess, Jane. I know that.” He ducked his head, trying to catch Jane’s eyes even as she determinedly averted his gaze.

Jane peeked up at him from beneath her eyelashes, “You do?” She squeaked, disbelieving.

Cursing under his breath, Ethan pulled her into his arms, hugging her tightly. “Of course, sweetheart.” Jane tried to stop herself from giving in to his warmth, but when he started to purr she couldn’t help but bury her face in his neck and breathe in his incredible scent. “That’s it.” He praised, stroking her spine. “No wonder you’ve been wound tight as a spring lately.” When Jane was finally a little calmer, he pulled back and caught her in his crosshairs.

"I need you to tell me where you were that night." He pressed gently.

"I was with Eric." Jane murmured, "we went to dinner together."

"Why did you lie about it?" Ethan inquired, trying not to jump to any conclusions about what they might have been doing that she would have wanted to hide.

"Because I was afraid if you knew that you'd get jealous and you two would be at each other's throats again. I wasn't even thinking about it when the detectives asks, I was just on auto-pilot and repeating what I'd told you." She shared, pulling out of his hold.

"I suppose I deserve that." Ethan admitted, letting her go.

"Ethan," Jane sighed, slumping onto the edge of the bed in defeat. "Eve has gotten away with everything she's ever done. She's going to get away with this too."

"No she isn't." Ethan vowed.

"Ethan, if they arrest me, what will happen to the pups?" Jane fretted, speaking her fears aloud even though she wasn't sure she could actually trust him.

"They're not going to arrest you, Jane." Ethan growled, "I promise, I won't let that happen."

Even as he comforted her, Jane couldn't stop hearing Eric's accusations about the Alpha echoing in her

mind: If you're blamed for the murder, then Ethan will have the perfect excuse to hurt you all over again. He'll make you think he's on your side by protecting you from prison, all the while making you his slave again. He'll get everything he wants – you and the pups together.

"I'm going to take care of everything, of you and the pups." Ethan vowed, making the knot of fear writhing in Jane's chest constrict even more tightly. "You have my word."

Outside the door, the pups listened with their keen ears pressing to the wood, their puzzle completely abandoned in the other room. They didn't really understand everything that was happening, but they understood Petra hadn't just gone away on her own, and they knew the word "arrest" was very bad.

More than anything else, their sensitive instincts were picking up every ounce of Jane's fear and sadness, as well as all of Ethan's tension and anger.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you about Eric." Jane was saying now, "I'm just so anxious about all this aggression between you. It's not good for the pups."

"It's okay." Ethan answered, "And I know, I'm worried too – about all this. Kids are like sponges, they sense something wrong no matter how hard we try to shield them from it." The sound of soft movements inside was

punctuated by a heavy exhale from Jane, and a few smacks in quick succession like Ethan was pressing a series of kisses to her skin. "Come on. Baby." He encouraged a moment later, "Let me finish dinner. Why don't you go have a nice long bath and try to relax."

As the sounds of their parents drew further away into the master bath, the pups dashed back down the hall to talk about what they'd discovered. "What was the mean man saying 'bout ev... ev.. evdence? Parker asked.

Riley scanned the kitchen, seeing her mother's phone abandoned on the counter. She dashed over and grabbed the device, returning to the living area and typing a very badly spelled version of the word into google. Luckily auto-correct . saved her, and a moment later the definition was staring up at her from the screen. "It means proof of a crime."

"Try googling Granny now." Paisley suggested "They're not telling us 'nything. I don't undstand how she just went away."

"It says she was murdered." Riley reads in a horrified tone.

"Murdered?" Parker murmured, "like on those grown up TV shows?"

"It means when someone kills someone else." Riley explained, reading the second definition off the screen.

"And they think Mommy did it." Ryder summarized.

"They think Mommy killed Granny."

"That's why Mommy's so upset." Parker frowned, "murders on TV go to jail."

"They were talking 'bout Eve." Riley reminded them. "I bet she's the one who did it, and she's fwaming Mommy."

"We have to stop her." Parker decided, "we stopped her once already, we can do it 'gain."

"You're right." Ryder agreed, "but how're we going to do it?"

"We can go to the police and tell them she didn't do it." Parker suggested.

"They won't b'lieve us." Riley stated promptly, shaking her head. "Grown ups never b'lieve anything they can't see with their eyes."

"So we need proof." Parker nodded, "but it won't be easy to get."

While Riley, Ryder and Parker murmured amongst themselves, overcome with worry, Paisley sat back on her heels. She knew Jane was innocent just as much as the others, but as they began discussing ideas to try and help her somehow, Paisley could only feel overwhelmed. Everything in her life was changing so much so fast. A month ago she was awaiting surgery with no clue she had a mother or siblings; now they were all there, her

grandmother was gone, her greatest tormentor had disappeared after trying to kill her multiple times, and everyone around her was constantly scared and angry.

There was also one question she simply couldn't get out of her young mind. She loved being with her Mommy and the other pups so much – but why hadn't they been together all along? Why were Mommy and Daddy playing hide 'n' seek all that time instead of staying together like all her friends parents? Why did Mommy leave her and keep the others? Didn't she want her?

So when she heard the bedroom door open again and Ethan walking back down the hall, she jumped up to meet him. Paisley ran right up to him with her arms raised over her head, and Ethan instantly scooped her up the same way he'd done a thousand times before. His mother used to scold him for carrying Paisley all the time, convinced he would spoil the little girl. However, now more than ever, he was determined to show her and soak up as much affection as he could in these precious years when she wanted to be with him constantly. Besides he figured that if a child had to be spoiled with something it should be love, rather than material items.

"What's up buttercup?" He asked with a smile.

"Daddy I has to ask you a question." She announced, her little face scrunched up in a frown exactly like the one

Jane had been sporting a few minutes before. "A serious question."

"Okay." Ethan agreed, putting on his listening face. "Is everything okay?"

Taking a deep breath, Paisley gazed up into her Father's loving face, and finally voiced the question that had been haunting her from the very first day she met Jane outside Eve's atelier. "Did Mommy leave cuz she didn't want me?"



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