

## Chapter 81 Eric Meddles

### 3rd Person

"We need to find evidence to help mommy." Riley mused, looking around at her brothers and sister. Though the pups had been distracted by the news that Jane was planning on taking them back to the Dark Moon pack, as well as devastated by their failure to change her mind, her arrest had certainly reminded them of how dire her situation truly was.

"Maybe if she's safe, she won't be so 'fraid to stay here." Parker added, sensing the direction of his sister's thoughts.

"Xactly." Riley agreed, "I don't think she was telling the truth when she said we're going just because her bizness is there. I think she's scared."

"That p'lice man was really mean." Paisley added with a little shiver, "he scared me too."

"Your Mommy isn't afraid of the police." Eric's deep voice sounded behind them, and all three kids turned around to look at him. He was babysitting again. Jane and Ethan hadn't felt comfortable sending them to pre school with all the press lurking around every corner, so Eric offered to watch them while they were both at work.

"What d'you mean?" Ryder questioned, sure his uncle was wrong. Jane had definitely seemed frightened by the investigator who accused her of murdering Petra, they'd even heard her telling Ethan she might go to jail.

"She's not afraid of the police." Eric repeated. "She's afraid of your Daddy."

"No she's not!" Paisley promptly objected.

"She is." Eric stated firmly. "That's why she left him in the first place, and why she's so determined to leave again."

"We don't b'lieve you." Riley replied with a stubborn glare.

"Well you should, because your Daddy is a monster." Eric insisted. He knew Jane wouldn't approve of him telling them this, but he believed every word he was saying with deep conviction, and he truly believed the pups should know Ethan wasn't worthy of their admiration. After all, if Ethan was willing to enslave his own mate, why not his pups? They needed to be protected from him, and if his words helped convince them to come back to the Dark Moon pack without complaint? Well, that would just be icing on the cake.

"No he isn't!" Paisley cried in protest. "You're a liar!"

"You wanna bet?" Eric asked, arching one dark brow.

"When they were married, he betrayed your Mommy with

Eve. Do you know what an affair is? What it means to cheat?"

"Like in a game or on a test?" Parker inquired curiously.

"No honey, not exactly." Eric corrected gently. "When two people are married, they promise they'll only..." He paused to search for a toddler appropriate term, "kiss each other for the rest of their lives. But Cheating is if one of them breaks that promise and kisses someone else, and an affair is when they keep kissing that other person for a long time."

"And Daddy did that with Eve?" Ryder questioned, wrinkling his nose in distaste.

"He did." Eric confirmed, "Both when they were married and since she came back too."

"I've never seen Daddy kiss Eve." Paisley frowned, narrowing her eyes at the man her siblings seemed to trust so much.

"Well he has." Eric told her curtly, "Because they made a baby together."

The pups exchanged confused glances, "How'd they do that?" Parker asked, the concept of baby making still very much a mystery to he and his siblings."

"Well..." Eric grappled for a response, realizing too late the error of revealing this particular piece of information.

"That's a question for your Mommy and Daddy, but the

fact is it's proof of his betrayal."

"But why would that make Mommy scared of him?" Riley wondered aloud, not sure if she believed Eric, but wanting to understand his accusations.

"Because that's only half the story." Eric revealed, pleased to be holding each of the pup's rapt attention. "Back when they were married, Eve framed your Mommy for a crime, just like she's trying to do now – and your Daddy believed Eve. He took her side."

"Why would he do that?" Ryder objected, "Eve's evil."

"Because she was very convincing." Eric informed them.

"And sometimes when grown ups are... kissing each other, they can't see people for who they really are."

"So what happened?" Ryder pressed.

"Yeah, what did he do?" Riley added.

"He locked your mommy up in his rooms and never let her leave." Eric announced, adopting the tone one might tell a scary story over a campfire.

"Like a time out?" Parker suggested.

"Like a time out that never ends." Eric corrected. "He made her his prisoner. He didn't let her go anywhere or do anything. He stole her freedom even though she didn't do anything wrong."

"I don't believe you." Paisley repeated, "Daddy would

never do that.”

“What has your Daddy told you about their marriage?”

Eric asked, “Did he ever tell you why they split up?”

“He said he made a mistake.” Paisley murmured, not really wanting to admit this to Eric. “A mistake that hurt Mommy and made her leave.”

“Well this was his mistake.” Eric declared triumphantly.

“Ask him yourself – ask your Mommy. He made her his slave. That’s why she ran away, and why she hid you all from him.” He added, nodding to Riley, Parker and Ryder.

“Now she’s afraid he’ll do it again.”

“But Daddy loves Mommy.” Riley proclaimed, crossing her arms over her chest.

“He wants her – that’s not the same thing as love.” Eric explained, “And the question you should be asking is whether your Mommy loves him. Think about it – she was already afraid before Eve framed her. She’s been afraid ever since she ran into your Daddy again.”

The pups looked at one another with identical frowns. Now that they thought about it, Jane had been behaving oddly ever since Ethan turned up. She knocked him out when he kissed her in the hallway, then ran away crying. She was always arguing with him and calling herself other names, pretending to be someone else. She’d even told Paisley she was hiding from him.

Was it possible Eric was telling the truth? Had they been so distracted by everything going on with Eve, Paisley and Petra, that they'd missed the signs. The more they thought about it, the more Eric's words made sense. The wolf in question was watching them closely, reading their tense expressions and sensing their gradual acceptance. Deciding to hammer one final nail into the coffin, he continued, "The last time I shared something with you and you accused me of lying, you went to your Mommy and Daddy and they told you I was right." He reminded them. "It's the same this time. I'm telling the truth."

Paisley was still stubbornly shaking her head. "You're jealous of Daddy, you want us to think he's bad so we'll go home with Mommy."

"I won't pretend I like your Daddy because I don't." Eric admitted. "But the reasons I don't like him are precisely because of the things I'm telling you now. I care about your Mommy, I want only the best for her, and knowing how badly your Daddy hurt her is more than enough reason for me to dislike him."

Paisley sort of deflated, looking to her siblings for help, "you don't believe him, do you?" She asked them anxiously.

Riley, Ryder and Parker stared back at their newfound

sister with wide eyes. They loved Paisley and they didn't want to believe such terrible things of their father, but they couldn't deny Eric's story fit. "Paisley, you weren't there in da beginning." Riley uttered softly, "Mommy's been upset ever since she saw Daddy at the restraint."

"She's more scared now," Parker concurred, "but she was 'lready scared before Eve."

With a sinking heart Paisley realized that her siblings weren't going to take her side this time. It hurt worse than she expected. She'd always dreamed of having brothers and sisters, imagining that they would form their own little pack, always there to help and support each other. However now it simply felt like three against one. Her young mind assumed siblings meant never being alone again, but she couldn't remember I time when she felt more alone than in this moment.

"But you don' know Daddy like I do." Paisley argued pitifully, making one last attempt to convince them. "He's the nicest man in the world."

"I'm sorry, Paisley." Riley professed, "We don' wanna b'lieve it, but we hafta ask. If Daddy says it isn't true, we won't argue."

"We owe Mommy that much." Ryder added. "But we'll understand if you can't agree."

"Well I don't agree!" Paisley burst out, stomping her little

foot. "Why did you even come here if you didn' want to be with Daddy!?"

"We did." Parker insisted, "We do... we just need to know the truth."

"Fine." Paisley pouted, "Have it your way, but don't come crying to me when you're wrong." The distraught pup stormed off to her bedroom, not wanting to look at Eric or the other pups for a moment longer. Still, deep down in the back of her mind, her worst fear was growing bigger and bigger: what if they weren't wrong? What if they were right? What if Daddy was as bad as Eric said? She prayed he wasn't – or she'd never be able to look at him the same again.

