

Chapter 1 - Betrayal

Paisley POV

Day Before the Bonding Ceremony

Miles and I are snuggling on the couch. I don't know how I got so lucky. He is so good to me and treats me like I'm a treasure. My eyes sting as moisture wells. "Hey! What's this about?" Miles tips my head back. "Why are you crying? I promise nothing is going to happen tonight at the bachelor party. I want no one but you." He smiles at me and dips down to press the sweetest kiss on my lips. "I won't have a bachelor party if it upsets you."

"No. It's not that, Miles." I blink. "I just love you so much. I don't know what I did to deserve such happiness." My heart is full. The past year with Miles has been a dream. He is kind, considerate and responsible. I am so blessed.

"Aw, baby." He pulls me onto his lap. "I love you. I am so glad I finally found you. You hung the moon, my little mate." We spend the afternoon entwined in each other. The first day we met, we mated, made it legal and have lived together since. But we decided because of his past, we would wait one year to complete the bonding ceremony and mark each other. I wasn't fully on board with that idea, because I felt it left things open for her to return. Miles swore it didn't, but I wanted to stake my claim. The bond is dangerous to attempt to remove and he didn't want me stuck with him and all his baggage.

He told me about his past. He had been with his ex for ten years. They knew each other for years prior. But she never treated him well. From the very beginning, she would treat him like an erthought, dumping him when she got bored. Then she would come running back after she had sowed some wild oats. She doesn't sound like a very good person. Miles is too good for her. I will take him, baggage and all.

Our relationship has been great. For the last year, I have been

teaching high school students, but I am also taking courses and writing my dissertation so I can teach at the community college level. There is a potential to lead some online college classes in the fall. I have always been advanced in my studies, having graduated high school at the age of 16. I have an eidetic memory, in that I have an extraordinarily accurate and vivid recall, especially of visual images. Therefore, education and learning has always been easy for me. On the other hand, I am slightly socially inept. So I have been taking training on how to be a Beta's mate, and learning other societal niceties. I have come a long way. At least I can speak my mind now. Opening my mouth in public used to be impossible. I have come a long way.

Our pack house structure is similar to other packs. Our apartment is on the third floor. This is where the Alpha and Beta quarters, offices and a couple of visitors' suites are located. Second floor is the singles quarters and a few small family suites. The main floor has the pack gathering areas, living room, kitchen and dining hall. The basement has the prison cells, security offices and medical bay. Unfortunately, we don't currently have a licensed and trained doctor, just medical assistants. Wolves are relatively healthy, but if someone needs serious medical attention, we have a chopper to fly out patients to the nearest hospital in Sparksburg.

Suddenly, the sound of banging interrupts our lovemaking. "Come on, Paisley, send Miles out! It's time for his bachelor party." One of his friends yells through the locked door. I blush furiously.

Miles kisses me gently. "I'm sorry little mate. I promise, you'll be having so much fun at your bachelorette party, you won't even miss me. Then I will see you tomorrow night and we will be bonded forever." His smile reaches his eyes. I have never felt so cherished.

"Tomorrow night." I whisper. "I miss you already." My heart aches in my breast at the thought of not spending the night together like we always have.

The banging continues unabated. "We know you're in there, Miles. You can't hide from us."

Miles sighs heavily and kisses me one last time. Sitting me from his lap, he puts on his boots and stands. "I love you, little mate."

"I love you, Miles."

"All right! All right! I'm coming!" He yells at the door. Tromping over, he opens the door and six males come crashing to the floor. "Looks like you started without me." They hastily get to their feet and grab Miles by his arms and drag him out the door. He throws one more smile to me and mouths, tomorrow love and the door is shut behind them.

My bachelorette party is more sedate. Neither Miles nor I wanted any kind of party, but wolves are social beings and any time they have a chance, they party. So, some of my girlfriends have decorated the main room downstairs and we plan on good food and good company.

The evening flies by and we are all having a great time, when I start to feel sick. I sit back in my chair and clutch my stomach. "Oh goddess." I choke out. I make a run for the bathroom. I barely make it to the toilet before I immediately begin throwing up. Hot pulses of fire start throbbing through my abdomen. I feel hands in my hair, as one of my girlfriends, Syn, pulls my mane back and fastens it with a hair tie.

"You pregnant, babydoll?" She coos, stroking my back.

I spit and lean back on the wall and slide down. The pain is excruciating. The fire engulfs me and I begin to sweat. "I don't think so." I pant. I lean forward and press my head to the cool tiled floor. "I think I am dying." The pain continues to increase as fire envelops me. I ride the waves of pain for about thirty minutes, rotating between writhing on the floor and dry heaving in the toilet. A cold wet towel is pressed to my face. Someone offers me a couple of pain capsules but it they are useless, I can't even attempt to swallow them. I have never felt anything like this in my life.

Syn calls out to the living room. "Hey Rach." Rachel is a med assistant and the closest thing we have to a doctor.

She appears at the bathroom door. "Paisley, are you okay?"

"No!" I croak.

"Are you pregnant?" She asks.

"I don't think so." I manage to gasp as I thrash on the floor in pain. I begin to tremble and can't control my limbs.

"I'm going to go to the med bay and get you a pregnancy test and some pain meds. If you are pregnant, you could be having a tubal pregnancy and we would need to fly you out."

"She tried to take a couple of pain tablets, but she couldn't swallow them. I doubt she could keep them down." Syn volunteers.

"I'll get a shot. That should help." Rachel concludes. "And something for nausea."

The nausea finally subsides, but I am left weak and trembling. Rachel reenters the room, sitting down beside me. "Here, take these." I reach out my shaking hand as she deposits a couple of pills there. "These will help with the queasiness, and may knock you out for a couple of hours." She hands me a bottle of water and I gulp the pills down. She then takes an alcohol swab to my thigh. After cleansing the area, she administers an injection. Swiping again with the alcohol, she says, "There, that will help the pain."

I nod, nearly comatose. Thankfully, the fire has subsided, along with the debilitating pain.

"Let's get your shorts down and get you on the toilet, hun. I need you to take this pregnancy test." Rachel pulls on one side, while Syn pulls me from the other. After managing to get me bare butt and on the toilet, Rachel pulls on a glove and holds the stick between my legs. They continue to steady me as it is all I can do to keep my body upright.

After I urinate on the stick, Rachel places it on the sink. As they are pulling up my underwear and shorts, my shirt rides up. "Holy goddess, Paisley!" Syn shouts. "What have you done to your stomach? Did you fall?" We all stop as Syn jerks my shirt up above my bra and my entire torso is covered in black welts. Everything clicks into place. My stomach sinks with a different sensation. Betrayal. I recognize this.

About a month ago, I went to Stone Mountain City for a teacher's continuing education seminar. During the week-long conference, we were inundated with information. Having an eidetic memory, I clearly pull up the PowerPoint presentation by Dr. Skye Roberts in my mind. She was educating attendees about Cheating Mate Syndrome. She showed stats, photographs, case studies, and symptoms. The same exact symptoms I am experiencing. Miles has cheated on me at his bachelor party. My heart is shattered. I can't believe this!

"Well, you're not pregnant, thank the goddess." Rachel's voice rings hollow in the echoing stillness of the bathroom.

Standing there before the toilet, with my friends holding me up, my stomach begins to roil again. Red hot pokers are jabbing me repeatedly. Fire snakes up my body. Oh goddess, no! One time, would be a mistake. Forgivable? But a repeat? That's no mistake. How? How could he do this to me? To us? He said he loves me. Everybody and I mean EVERYBODY warned me about him. But would I listen? No! I believed EVERYTHING he said! I trusted him.

"Paisley. Don't jump to conclusions. We don't know where Miles went or what he is doing. Juneau, my wolf chimes in.

"Don't give me that BS, Juneau! We both know exactly what he did. What he's doing!" She rears her head back and howls in pain. She was always supportive of him. Always first to forgive any slight.

I remember that Dr. Roberts gave us all a 12 pill blister pack sample in case we ever experience symptoms. I kneel to face the toilet once again and begin retching. When the wave of nausea allows me to speak, I spit out, breathlessly. "Guys, in my nightstand is a blister pack of pills called Amra. Someone run and get it real quick. I think taking a couple will help me."

Syn darts out and is back in just a few minutes carrying the silver foil pack. She snaps two out, handing them to me with the bottle of water. I quickly chug the pills and struggle not to vomit as the pain assaults me and fire breathes down my throat. I pull my shirt up and watch as wounds begin to form and blood leaks down my abdomen. Rachel gasps as she sees the lesions' appearance.

Reflecting back on the seminar, I realize my situation is becoming dire. "I know what is wrong." I sob. "I need a chopper to take me to Stone Mountain City to see Dr. Roberts, ASAP."

Rachel gives me a quizzical look. Then her lips form a thin line and her brows crease in anger. She nods and leaves the room. She comes back with her radio com. "Chopper One Team, Chopper One Team. This is Home Base do you copy?"

"Go ahead, Home Base."

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"We have an urgent transport to Stone Mountain City for Dr. Roberts. Copy?"

"Copy! ETA 5 minutes. What do we have?"

"Paisley Reid, Beta's mate. Um...bleeding lesions on her stomach that are worsening, nausea and vomiting, weakness and sporadic convulsions."

"Goddess! We are on the way. Chopper One Team Out." We hear the whir of chopper blades starting in the background as he speaks. I think those guys sleep on the chopper.

The pain blessedly begins to fade, but just as soon as it eases, the nausea sets in and the cycle begins again. "Goddess, I am going to die right here!" I scream as the pain tears through me. Tears stream down my face. Blood is running down my shorts and legs, pooling in my shoes. I am weakening. "Rachel," I whisper. "I don't want anyone to know where I have gone. I request my medical records to be sealed." Ironically, the party in the main room has never slowed. It seems to be getting louder. The only people who know something is wrong are me, Rachel, Syn and whoever is on the chopper team. "Please advise those on the chopper team." I plead as my body gives out and blackness encroaches.

I hear Rachel shriek like she's talking through water. "She's seizing!" Conversations shrink like she's. "I hear you're seizing!"

Male voices join in the cacophony, as Chopper One Team has arrived. I feel a pin prick on my neck. Tears still coursing down my temples, my heart aches like it has never before. At this moment in time, I am bereft, soulless, adrift in misery and pain. My body stills as a euphoric feeling of numbness envelops me and the fire finally abates. My unseeing eyes refuse to close as I am bundled up and carried to the chopper.