

Chapter 33 - The Pups Make a Plan

3rd Person

Ryder, Riley and Parker were beside themselves.

All the adults were in an uproar, running around and whispering behind closed doors, trying to keep the truth a secret. But they knew - they always knew. They were wide awake when their Mommy ran out with the Alpha the night before, they knew their sister was in trouble and they could feel the grown ups' fear as if it was their own.

They'd stayed up as long as they were able to keep their eyes open, but it hadn't done any good. There was no more news while they were awake, and when they got up this morning, Mommy was nowhere to be found. Now Jane had finally called Linda for an update, so they huddled outside her bedroom door with their keen ears pressed to the wood, listening intently.

"Hey honey, how's it going?" Linda was asking, sounding as if she was preparing herself to hear the worst.

Their Mommy's voice was very faint on the other end of the line, but they could hear her exhaustion clearly. "She's alright." Jane answered, "but it was really touch and go for a while there."

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"Thank the Goddess." Linda breathed. "What happened?"

"Oh Linda, it's too awful." Jane hiccuped. "They're saying someone tried to kill her."

"What?" Their Auntie exclaimed in disbelief. However Parker and Ryder exchanged a heavy glance, remembering the cruel woman who'd been in Paisley's room the day they met.

"She was poisoned." Jane said, "they just barely managed to save her."

"Who would do such a thing?" Linda demanded.

"I don't know." Jane confessed, sounding as if the uncertainty was more tortuous than anything else. "I can't believe this is happening but I'm not taking my eyes off of her anytime soon."

"What do you want me to tell the pups?" Linda asked anxiously.

"Tell them I love them and I'm sorry I'm not there, but something came up at work." Jane's wince was audible in her voice, she'd always hated lying to her children. "Is that terrible?"

"No." Linda assured her, "they don't even know about Paisley, and this would probably only scare them. You're doing the right thing."

"Thank you." Jane sighed, sounding truly exhausted.

"You've got it, just let me know if you need anything at all." Linda encouraged.

The pups scurried away from the door as the grown ups ended the call, retreating to the blanket fort they'd built in their bedroom. Safely ensconced behind walls constructed from colorful pillows and sheets, they convened their emergency meeting.

"It's that witch, Eve." Parker decided, earning nods from the others.

"We knew she's evil." Riley reminded her brothers, worry for her newfound sister pouring off her in waves.

"We have to do someting." Ryder insisted, pulling a coloring book out of the bookshelf and flipping it to a blank page. "If Paisley stays there, she'll try to hurt her 'gain."

"An escape." Parker agrees, "We can help her 'scape, then we lie low 'til Mommy 'n' Daddy deal with the bad lady."

"But how'd we get her out?" Riley asks, rubbing her chin in thought.

"I think I have 'n idea." Ryder announces, beginning to sketch out a plan for his siblings. One by one they added their bits and pieces to the plot, drawing a map and deciding what role they would each play. It wouldn't be easy, and it would definitely have to adapt as events unfolded in the moment, but the three young masterminds were resolved. They would save their sister if it was the last thing they did.

Jane

Paisley has been sleeping constantly, waking for a few minutes here and there and muttering about her drug induced dreams before returning to dreamland with a silly smile on her face. The doctors assure me this is perfectly normal and the more she sleeps, the faster she'll heal, but I'm sure I won't relax until she's up and back to normal.

Ethan has been hovering at her bedside like a particularly

grumpy guard dog, watching her like a hawk and growling at anyone who sets foot in the room - even her nurses. I can't really blame him, the murder attempt has us both on edge, and I'm glad to have Ethan here watching out for my pup. Still, I'm afraid if he doesn't sleep soon he's going to slip up and actually hurt someone.

Almost as soon as I think the words, a lab tech enters to take a few vials of Paisley's blood, and Ethan lunges for the young man with a vicious snarl, "Get away from her." The poor tech throws his arms up in surrender, "I'm sorry Alpha, it's protocol, we're supposed to test her blood every four hours."

Forcing my way between their bodies, I reach up and take Ethan's face between my hands, pulling his attention down to me. "Ethan, it's okay." I say firmly, "He's not going to hurt her."

It takes him a minute to register my words, his dark eyes flitting over my face in confusion even as his possessive grip closes around my arms. Breathing heavily, he glances back at the tech, baring his fangs, "Keep your hands where I can see them."

The petrified man does as he's told, moving very slowly and making sure Ethan can see everything he's doing in detail. I try to pull away from the Alpha once the danger

has passed, but he holds me tight, sliding his arms around my waist while the tech works. I would push him away, but I have a feeling my nearness is the only thing keeping his feet on the ground at the moment.

As soon as the boy leaves I decide enough is enough. "Ethan," I broach tentatively, "you've got to get some sleep."

"I'm not leaving." He rumbles, settling back into his armchair and opening his arm to me, inviting me to join him.

Swatting his hand away, I argue, "You made me sleep - why is it different for you?" It was true, I'd been dosing on and off through the long night, gradually succumbing to my exhaustion then jerking awake in terror every five minutes or so. Eventually Ethan put his foot down, pulling me into his lap and stroking his strong hands up and down my spine until I passed out in his arms. Granted there wasn't anyplace for him to rest so comfortably here, but I also think a change of scenery would help calm him down.

"I've trained for this." Ethan remarks coolly, "You haven't."

"I'm sorry," I scoff, "you've trained to have someone try to murder your critically ill four-year-old?"

"You know what I mean." He gripes, "I've trained for

battle, I've carried the pack through disasters. It's in an Alpha's nature to push the body's limits to the very brink of health and sanity in order to protect the pack."

"Well I have news for you," I deride, "you've reached the brink of sanity and you're seriously pushing it."

"Jane-" He sighs, cutting his eyes to me. "I-"

"No." I interrupt, crossing my arms over my chest and glaring down at him. "You're not at war, you're not the Alpha right now - you're a father whose child has been through something horrible. It isn't the same situation, and you won't help anything or protect anyone by attacking the people trying to take care of her."

"Whoever poisoned her -" He tries to argue.

"Was probably someone you know!" I exclaim in exasperation. "Someone who has motive to hurt you or get her out of the way. The people in this hospital don't fit that profile. So for the love of the Goddess, go home and take a nap, have a shower and eat something. You can't help Paisley in this condition."

Ethan unfolds his big body from the chair, coming to tower over me. His handsome face is hard and full of foreboding, but I don't back down, I glare up at him with all my might. "I'll stay with her until you're back." I vow. "No one will lay a hand on her." I almost add 'unless it's over my dead body' but I stop myself just in time. That

idea probably wouldn't help calm him.

A low rumble sounds in Ethan's chest, and the next thing I know he's cupping my cheek in his hand, dragging his thumb back and forth across my full lower lip. "Are you trying to get formidable with me, little wolf?" He purrs, the corner of his mouth twitching upward.

"I'm not trying." I correct him, "I am, and you're going to let me because you know I'm right."

He studies me for a long moment, his heated gaze lingering on my mouth and making me want to squirm beneath intense scrutiny. "Just this once." He finally decides, "but only if you ask nicely."

Narrowing my eyes, I counter. "That would defeat the point."


He shifts nearer, and his delicious scent washes over me, tempting me to no end. "Say please." He instructs silkily, "Say please and I'll go home and take a nap."

Understanding slams into me: he'll only back down if I make my own concession. He'll listen to reason, but he's not going to give me control either. My wolf rails at the idea of obeying, especially when he so obviously relishes making me submit. Part of me knows it's not worth the fight; this is about convincing a thick headed Alpha to act against his instincts for the benefit of us all - not my own pride. Yet the very idea grates against my nerves

like a wild thing - and he knows it.

Ethan offers me a knowing smirk. "Well Jane, what's it going to be?"



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