

Chapter 70 - That's Not How Daddy Does It

Ethan blinked, shocked and horrified by his young daughter's question. "Of course not, Paisley." He assured her. "I don't want you to ever think that."

"Was it because I'm a runt like Eve said?" Paisley asked, her lower lip trembling.

Ethan feels a fresh burst of rage towards the horrible she-wolf but tries to soothe his fraying temper for his pups sake. "Sweetheart, listen to me very carefully." He began, searching for the right words to explain such a complicated situation to one so young. "Your Mommy wanted you more than anything in the world. It's my fault she left – it's only ever been my fault."

Paisley's little nose crinkled in confusion. "How?"

"I know it's hard to understand, but she couldn't take care of you then, and I could. I forced her to go away, but she left you with me to save her life." Ethan confessed.

"How'd you force her?" Paisley questioned, not understanding one bit how her wonderful Daddy could ever do anything bad.

"Angel, one of the things you'll learn as you grow up, is

that people make a lot of mistakes.” He explained. “Now, smart people learn from their mistakes and do better in the future, but doing the right thing later can’t erase the harm our mistakes do in the first place – and Daddy made a lot of mistakes when your Mommy and I were married. I wasn’t a very good man, and she left because I did something bad.”

Sharing this with Paisley was harder than he ever could have imagined. The sweet pup thought he hung the moon itself, and it killed him to think she might not look at him the same way again. He’d learned a long time ago that nothing had the power to make a person feel remorse for their past indiscretions more than having kids, but this was on another level entirely. He wanted to live up to her image of him so badly it hurt, and he knew the old him never would.

“But the day you were born was the day I got a second chance, Paisley.” He continued huskily. “That was when I decided to always try to do the right thing from then on out. You were and always will be my rainbow baby, the miracle that taught me how to be a better man.”

“But Mommy still felt hurt?” Paisley inquired, looking overwhelmed with information but not frightened or angry.

“That’s right.” Ethan confirmed.

"Does she feel hurt now?" Paisley wondered aloud.

"I'm afraid so, sweetheart." Ethan admitted.

Paisley's eyes welled up, "Does that mean she's gonna leave me 'gain?"

Ethan decided that, his good intentions to help Jane relax aside, this wasn't a conversation they could have without her. "Never." Ethan vowed, carrying her back into the bedroom. Knocking on the bathroom door, he waited until Jane called out her okay to push it open.

She was already in the bath, surrounded by bubbles with her long blonde hair pinned up on top of her head. In any other circumstances Ethan would have been having to smother his arousal, but right now he felt nothing but concern for Paisley. "Janey, there's something you and Paisley need to talk about."

Jane smiled up at the little girl, immediately sensing her distress, "Come here, my love. What is it?"

Paisley suddenly felt too shy to voice her deep fears in front of Jane, and Ethan couldn't really blame her, since Jane was the source of her fear. When he put her on the ground she turned her wide puppy dog eyes up to him, begging for a rescue. Ethan squatted down and turned her to face Jane. "She just asked me if you left because you didn't want her - and if you would ever leave her again."

A look of such anguish crossed Jane's face that Ethan wished he could have spared her the question, but he knew Paisley needed to hear the answer from her mother. "Absolutely not." Jane said, her voice thick with emotion. She sat up straighter, and reached out her hand to Paisley, and Ethan gave the child a little nudge forward. There were tears in Jane's eyes by the time Paisley reached her, and Jane took her small face in her foam covered hands. "I have wanted you from the first moment I found out I was carrying you, and I have wanted you every day since. I'm so sorry I left you, Paisley, but it was never because I didn't want you or love you every bit as much as I love your brothers and sister."

She glanced up at Ethan helplessly. "I thought I was doing what was best for you. You wouldn't have lived if you stayed with me, so I gave you up so that you could get better and I could come back for you one day. And now that I have I will never, ever leave you again."

Paisley nodded, her own tears filling her eyes. Jane wanted to hug her desperately, but realized she couldn't do so without soaking the pup to the skin. "Do you want to have a bubble bath with me?" She asked instead.

Paisley wiped her eyes, and shakily hiccuped, "uh-huh." Ethan quickly helped the little girl out of her clothes, and

lowered her into the bath on Jane's lap. Paisley snuggled in, skin to skin with her mother for the first time since her birth, and cried her little heart out against Jane's breast. Jane shushed and pet her, wondering how long the sweet pup had been holding onto this fear. "I don't want you to ever be afraid to ask or tell me anything." She told her. "Even if you think it will make me mad or sad or scared, I always want you to tell me what you're feeling. Because there's nothing you could ask or say that would ever make me love you any less, okay?"

Paisley nodded with a snuffle. "Okay."

Ethan was still there watching, mesmerized by watching his daughter bond with her mother this way. He was mildly surprised when Paisley looked over at him, and asked, "You'll never leave me either, right Daddy?"

He didn't bother looking at Jane, because he would never lie to Paisley - not about this. "Never." He vowed, "I will never leave you."

The next day, when Ethan and Jane went out to run a few errands, Eric came over to watch the kids. In Jane's mind it was something of a test, to see whether the two men could actually be around each other without their lives devolving into chaos.

The kids were napping when he arrived, so he settled in

the living room with a book and waited for them to rouse. Paisley was the first to emerge from her slumber, toddling down the hall and rubbing her eyes. "Hello there sleepyhead." Eric greeted her. He'd babysat the other three kids a thousand times before, and he was eager to get to know Jane's youngest so that he could prove to her how well they were suited.

"What are you doing here?" She yawned, "Where's Mommy and Daddy?"

"They went to do a little shopping. I'm going to watch you until they're back." He explained. "Are you hungry? Would you like a snack?"

"Can I has an apple?" She asked shyly.

"Of course you can." He agreed. "Do you want me to cut it up for you?"

"Yes please." Paisley confirmed, following him into the kitchen. She watched him as he pulled out an apple and began to slice it. "That's not how Daddy does it." She objected fairly promptly.

"Oh I'm sorry, how does your Daddy do it?" Eric asked.

"He peels it first." She informed him.

"Okay," Eric grabbed a second apple, resigning to eat the first himself, then promptly peeled it. After slicing and plating it, he placed it at the table in front of Paisley.

"Voila!"

Paisley eyed the plate suspiciously. "I change my mind."
She announced. "I don't want that."

Eric sighed heavily, not unfamiliar with the ways of toddlers, but lacking the patience of a true parent.
"Honey, you asked for it."

"I don't like apples." Paisley insisted, but the corner of her mouth twitched up, leading Eric to believe this was less about her fickle tummy, and more about thwarting him.
He sat down next to her and gave her a long look. "You know Paisley, I'd really like for us to be friends."

Paisley stared right back at him. "That's too bad."

"Why?" He inquired.

"Cuz I don't like you." She replied matter-of-factly.

"Well that makes me sad. I like you." Eric countered.

"You fought my Daddy and bit my Mommy." Paisley accused him.

"I didn't mean to bite your Mommy." He explained apologetically.

"But you did mean to fight Daddy." Paisley insisted.

"Yes I did." He confessed.

"So, I don't like you." Paisley repeated, thinking he must be very slow for not understanding.

"Well I still hope we can be friends." Eric frowned. "After all, when you come to live in the Dark Moon territory

you'll be seeing me all the time."

"What are you talking 'bout?" Paisley asked warily.

"Didn't your Mommy tell you?" Eric questioned. "You're moving away in a few months. Your Mommy's bringing you home to live with your brothers and sister."

"But what 'bout Daddy?" Paisley said.

"Oh - he's staying here."



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