

Chapter 94 Evidence

Riley, Parker, Paisley and Ryder slipped into Eve's old bedroom while Ethan scrubbed dishes after dinner. They were supposed to be brushing their teeth and getting ready for bed, but they knew their father would be distracted long enough for them to try and sneak in some investigating.

In all honesty, their efforts had hit a few stumbling blocks in the last few days. As badly as they wanted to clear Jane's good name, they couldn't very well do that when they were staying at Linda's. And even now that they were back home, the police had been through the apartment, so they assumed they wouldn't find anything at all.

Eve's room was at the end of the hall next to Petra's, and while the huge penthouse had so much space that they'd all managed to move in without clearing out any of the previously occupied rooms, they had to figure the adults had been through almost everything before them. Slipping into her former living space, they blinked around at the gaudy decor and tacky furnishings.

"This is really ugly." Riley declared, staring at the overabundance of neon pink leopard print and fake gold

crown molding.

"Tell me 'bout it." Paisley answered in reply. She and her siblings had been on somewhat wobbly footing lately. They loved each other dearly and always had fun playing, but she couldn't get past the fact that they couldn't forgive Daddy for what he did to Mommy. It hurt her too, but she'd grown up without a mother, and after discovering she was alive and well, she'd started to realize how complicated adult matters were in a way her siblings had not.

"Do you know where she might hide bad things?" Parker asked, wrapping an arm around Paisley as if he could sense how uneasy Eve's rooms made her.

"Uh huh," Paisley confirmed, "She didn' think I knew, but she has a safe under the bed."

"She probly cleaned that out when she left." Ryder frowned.

"I dunno." Riley countered, "Daddy was really mad, I bet he didn' let her outta his sight."

"That's true." Paisley agreed, "she'd hafta be pretty dumb to open it in fronta him."

The four pups crawled under the mattress and box springs, gasping in excited unison when they laid eyes on the silver cube. It took both Ryder and Parker working together to pull it out into the open, and then the young

wolves were faced with a new problem. "And ideas about the comb'nation?" Ryder asked.

"How 'bout her birthday?" Riley suggested.

"Or Daddy's." Parker added.

"Well I dunno hers," Paisley grimaced, "I do know Daddy's... but she really wasn' smart. It mighta been something real simple."

"Try one, two, three, four." Riley instructed, watching as her brother entered the numbers into the key pad and shaking her head in defeat when it made an angry buzzing sound and flashed red. Next they tried Ethan's birthday, but when that didn't work, they entered a string of four zeroes instead. Still nothing happened, and the pups were beginning to get discouraged.

"I think we should get Daddy." Paisley declared, "He might know the number, and we can't do much without him 'nyway."

"I dunno." Parker scowled. "I don' trust him."

"That isn't fair!" Paisley objected, "I've known Daddy since as long as I can member, and he's only ever been great. And I know what bad looks like." She reminded them. Unlike their sister, the other pups had never been subjected to abuse like Paisley had survived from Eve, and every now and then she thought they didn't realize just how good they had it.

"Okay." Riley agreed, reaching out and squeezing her sister's hand. "If you trust Daddy, I trust Daddy."

As if he could sense them talking about him, or perhaps he'd simply finished the dishes and realized the pups weren't actually getting ready for bed, Ethan appeared in the doorway at that very moment. "What are you guys doing in here?" He asked, his dark gaze locking in on the safe, "What is that?"

"Is Eve's safe." Parker announced happily, drawing Ethan deeper into the room.

"We're trying to open it." Ryder added, scooting over so that Ethan could kneel down in front of the silver box.

"How did the police miss this?" Ethan mused aloud, "Where was it?"

"Just under the bed." Paisley explained, climbing into his lap before he was even sitting down fully.

"What numbers have you tried?" He asked, rearranging himself so that his daughter could settle, and pleasantly surprised when Ryder climbed onto his folded knee next to his sister.

Riley rattled off the answers, leaning against Ethan's side without even realizing what she was doing. "We wanted to try her birthday, but Paisley didn' know it." She explained.

"Well I can solve that problem." Ethan announced,

leaning forward and punching in the numbers. All five of them gasped when the keypad chirped and blinked green, shortly followed by a loud click!. "Good job, you guys." Ethan praised, pulling the door open.

Parker leaned in over his shoulder as he began pulling papers from the interior, and for the first time in weeks, Ethan had all four of his pups snuggling close. It lifted his heart even though he knew it wasn't entirely intentional, but he wasn't going to risk ending it now. He opened the first file he extracted and held it close to his body so the pups would have to stay close, scanning the contents so quickly the young children couldn't keep up.

"Oh my Goddess," He muttered on the fourth page, which included musings about how to frame Jane for the rogue attack on her graduation trip. "Why would she keep this for so long?"

"What is it, Daddy?" Paisley pressed.

Ethan tried to come up with an explanation they would understand, "It's just something bad she did a long time ago, something I can't believe she would keep for so many years afterwards."

"Why not?" Ryder inquired.

"Because it's proof she's guilty." Ethan murmured, studying the "marionette spell" Eve had placed on Jane in order to force her to do her bidding. Unfortunately for him,

her notes indicated that Petra had been in on it all along. In fact, she was the one who paid for the gag spell they placed on Jane afterwards, which might explain why Jane had suddenly been able to speak about the events after her death.

"Paisley did say she was dumb." Parker added sagely.

"She's right about that much." Ethan confirmed, flipping ahead. Part of him was afraid that if the police found out Petra had been involved in framing Jane, they'd see it as more motive for her murder. He needed to find something condemning Eve once and for all.

Fortunately it didn't take long to find. There was a notebook in the bottom of the safe, one that spelled out all of Eve's evil brainstorming, from the plot to poison Paisley at the hospital, to the scheme to murder Petra and frame Jane. It would seem Eve had already been planning this before Petra betrayed her, which made Ethan feel sick to his stomach.

He'd come to terms with the fact that Eve was vengeful and evil, but he'd always imagined there was some logic to her schemes. This made it seem like she was completely without conscious, doing whatever it took to further her aims. Did she ever care about his mother at all? Was she capable of caring about anyone?

"I need to get this to the police." Ethan stated, more to

himself than to the pups.

"But I thought the p'lice b'lieved Mommy did it." Parker questioned.

Ethan blinked down at his pups, both unsurprised and disturbed by how much they were aware of. "They do, but this should be more than enough proof that she's innocent."

"Even to that mean 'nspector?" Ryder asked.

"If it isn't, then there's even more going on here than Eve's schemes." Ethan admitted, looking at each of their adorable faces in turn. "But I promise you this, if something's up, I'm going to get to the bottom of it. I won't rest until your Mommy's safe and sound."

"Once she's safe, is she gonna take us 'way?" Riley questioned, looking up at Ethan curiously.

"I thought that's what you wanted?" He clarified, studying Paisley's identical sister closely.

Riley shrugged noncommittally, reminding the Alpha so much of Jane in that moment he had to blink. "I dunno ... I kinda like it here."

"Well," He began, wrapping one strong arm around her shoulders and the other around Parker's so that he could hold them all close, "I love having you all here, so as long as you want to stay, you'll always have a home here."

Paisley grinned up at him, "thanks, Daddy."

Ethan's heart swelled when one by one the others thanked him too, each calling him Daddy in turn. If he hadn't been decided before, he certainly was now: he wasn't ever going to let them go – not for anything in the whole world.



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