

## Chapter 112 Confirmation

Ethan

I'm worried about Jane.

She's out of the car the moment we get to the police headquarters, and it's all I can do to keep up with her. Her emotions have been all over the place the last few days; she's so tense and tightly wound that I can no longer predict how she's going to react to anything – one moment she's laughing, the next she's crying. But no matter how she tries to endure, underneath there is always a bottomless well of pain that will never be healed until the pups are home.

While my mate's anguish is magnified by her manic behavior, my own is only too evident in the numbness consuming me. I refuse to feel anything until I know whether we have to mourn or celebrate. At first my fear and anger had wholly consumed me, but I quickly realized it wouldn't help anything to give in to those emotions. I pushed them down and threw myself into the search, barely sleeping or eating, but knowing that I wouldn't be able to distract myself if I stopped moving.

I hate that I can't fix this for Jane. I hate that's she's torturing herself with blame, and I'm beyond concerned by how quickly she seems to be spiraling. Catching up to her, I loop my arm around her waist and pull her into my side, slowing her pace and frustrating her to no end. She instantly yanks against my hold, urging me to speed up. "Ethan, come on."

"Breaking your neck running up the stairs isn't going to help the pups, sweetheart." I remind her, taking comfort in the feel of her small body safe beside me. She starts grumbling mutinously, but this is what I hoped. The more she's distracted by being annoyed at me, the less she's fretting about the pups.

A few minutes later we're standing in front of Jackson and the Commander. Jane is still pouting, but our decreased pace allowed Eric and Linda to catch up, and they now flank us on both sides. After a few somber greetings we're ushered into a conference room, but Jane refuses to sit down. Our hosts eye her warily, and the Commander invites her to take a seat when she simply stands over the table like a particularly lovely gargoyle.

"This isn't a tea party." Jane snaps, "Just tell us what you learned.

Sighing, I drag her into my lap, forcing her to settle when she instinctively squirms to escape. "Just settle, little wolf." I instruct, sensing how desperately she needs me to take control. The more she lashes out, the more obvious it becomes that she's feeling too overwhelmed to cope on her own.

If the investigators are uncomfortable with our intimacy, they don't show it, instead they take a pair of identical deep breaths and announce, "We've confirmed the pups were taken by traffickers." Jackson begins, "CCTV caught them at the port, being boarded onto a ship by a local gang."

"The good news is that I know the culprits well." The commander explains, "the foot soldiers are idiots, but their leader is not. Anita is as shrewd a criminal as I've ever met, and she undoubtedly realized the gravity of their situation."

"And the bad news?" I press immediately, holding Jane just a little tighter.

"The ship they boarded was bound for the Southern Isles." Jackson shared, "Anita's intelligence cuts both ways. She knew better than to try to traffic them here, and she knows where to find a buyer."

"But that's a good thing, isn't it?" Linda interjected, clearly recalling my words from the car. "It will mean they aren't being harmed."

"It means they're safe for now, but only until they reach King Aimon." The commander states grimly, "once he has them, all bets are off. He wants this territory, he wants your power, Alpha. That means he'll do whatever he can to provoke you."

Jane whimpers, intuitively leaning into my warmth. "How long will it take them to reach the Isles? How long ago did the ship leave?"

"The ship left the morning after they were taken." The commander answers simply, "Anita doesn't waste any time. I'm afraid they'll have landed by now."

Jane whips around to Eric, "how far is your father's palace from the coast? What will he do with them?"

"It's a few hours by car." Eric explains, "And I'm not sure how he'll treat them, but if you want me to reach out to him before they arrive, I need to do it right now."

"Do it." I order, knowing how suspicious it will seem to Aimon for his son to reach out just hours before my pups arrive, but also believing we have no other choice. Looking down to the trembling bundle in my arms, I nuzzle her sweet smelling hair. "I'm going to go after them." I proclaim, kissing Jane's temple. "Eric is going to have to return to the Southern Isles if he wants to convince his father he's loyal, and I'm going to go with him."

Jane nods in agreement. "Then I'm going too." She declares, sitting up slightly. "We know where they're headed now, there's no reason for me to stay home and wait for a ransom call."

"Janey," I sigh, all of my reluctance seeping into my voice. "I don't think that's a good idea."

"Excuse me?" She growls, pushing away from me. "Why is it a good idea for you but not for me? You can't honestly think I would stay behind and twiddle my thumbs while you and Eric run off to rescue my babies."

Glancing around at our audience, I take a steadying breath. "Could we have the room for a moment please?"

One by one the others filter out, and as soon as the door closes behind them Jane is off my lap, towering over me with a lethal glare. "Don't even think about telling me it's for my own good, or that you won't be able to focus on the pups if you're worrying about me." She hisses, anticipating my arguments with more accuracy than I'd like to admit.

Rising from my chair, I look down at my beautiful, stubborn mate. "It's not that." I exhale, deciding to focus – not on the fact that she's unraveling at the seams or on the pack's need for a leader while I'm away, but on my greatest fear. "Aimon is about to get his hands on four out of the five most important things in my entire world. I can't risk him getting you too."

Jane opens her mouth to argue, but I press a finger to her full lips. "No, listen Jane. He already sent Eric thousands of miles to spy on you, maybe to kidnap you. He's known you're my biggest weakness from the very beginning, and if you come with me, we'll be putting you within his reach."

"Good!" Jane exclaims, surprising me completely. "If my babies are in captivity, I should be there with them. They shouldn't have to go through this alone. So let him take me! Let him take me so I can at least protect them from the inside, while you work to free us."

Her words send me staggering backwards, right back into my chair. In a million years, I never would have expected Jane to suggest something so unbelievably reckless. Then again, what mother wouldn't do the same for her pups? Still, when I respond, I don't handle it well. "Have you lost your mind!?" I thunder, "that's not a solution, it's a suicide plan!"

"Then yes, I've lost my mind!" Jane cries, "My pups have been stolen from me, sent thousands of miles away to Goddess knows what fate. They could be dying at this very moment, you can't expect me to remain sane when my children are in danger!"

"And that's supposed to convince me to let you come with me?" I snarl ferociously, looming over her with bared fangs. "By admitting that you're not in your right mind?"

"I wasn't asking your permission." Jane bites back, "I'm telling you that I'm coming, and there's nothing you can do to stop me!"

For one brief, irrational second, I consider proving her horribly wrong. The fact is that I could stop her if I wanted to, I could lock her up like I did all those years ago – just for very different reasons. Jane is glaring up at me, her chest heaving in furious breaths, her brilliant emerald eyes flashing with passion and anger. Almost as soon as the thought enters my head, it leaves again. I promised myself I'd never hurt her again, and I hate myself for even considering it. The mere idea of seeing my perfect mate in more pain than she's already in makes me feel sick to my stomach, so I brace my shoulders and pour all my alpha authority into my voice.

Whatever perfumes or disguises she wears, Jane is still an omega, she won't be able to resist submitting. "The answer is no, Jane. I've made my decision and it's final. You aren't coming."

Jane tries to fight the pull of my power for what feels like hours, but I know it was only a few seconds. She resists until every inch of her body is shaking with the effort of defying me, but when I growl she breaks, lowering her head and tucking her proverbial tail between her legs. I don't feel any triumph in this victory, not when Jane is cowering miserably in front of me, and especially not when she shoots me a look of pure betrayal, and runs from the room with tears streaming down her face.