

Chapter 63 - Eric Makes a Confession

3rd Person

"I really am sorry Jane." Eric professed, reaching for her hand across the dinner table.

"I know." Jane smiled softly, giving his palm a squeeze. After a week of chaos, Eric had convinced her to come out with him for an apology dinner, and she'd been only too happy to oblige, since every night she had plans was one more night she could tell Ethan she wasn't available for a date. At the same time, she also hadn't told the Alpha about their evening out, though she wasn't sure why. A woman had every right to go out with her fiance after all.

She supposed she was worried about creating more tension between the men when things were already so stressful, but she also felt a bit guilty lying about having a business dinner with Ethan's replacement on the perfume launch. He didn't seem to mind - so thrilled to spend time with the kids he'd agreed to take them to see a new movie that was bound to be a drag for any adult. Studying Eric in the low candlelight, she realized that it was for the best they could share this time together. They needed to talk before this situation could get any more



out of hand. "Listen Eric," She continued hesitantly. "You coming here was supposed to help uncomplicate things with Ethan, and now it seems like things are more complicated than ever."

"I hate to say it, but that was bound to happen when you moved in with him." Eric reasoned, hanging onto her fingers a few moments too long.

"That's fair, but I didn't have much choice, and I'm trying to do what's best for my pups." Jane countered.

Eric bit his tongue. He strongly disagreed about her lack of choice, but he didn't want to argue with her either. "I understand, so how do we move forward?"

"Well, I think we have to consider if this arrangement is still a good idea at all." Jane sighed. "I love you for going to bat for me the way you have been, I just... that fight really scared me, Eric. I don't want anything to happen to either of you and I definitely don't want that kind of energy around my pups."

"Are you saying you want me to go back home?" Eric asked. He felt like he was on a roller coaster. Hearing Jane say she loved him – no matter how innocently it was intended – followed so closely by her potential rejection had his heart beating a mile a minute.

"I'm saying I think the fake engagement can work without you being so present." Jane hedged. "I don't

want to give up the protection it provides me, but I can keep up the lie without you being physically there. All that aggressive alpha male energy between you two is making things worse. It's turning this into a competition when it's supposed to be a safeguard."

"Jane," Eric said evenly, feeling as if she was slipping out of his hold with every second that passed, "I talked to Ethan before we came to blows, I know how he thinks about your relationship and I am telling you that unless there is actually a physical wall between you, he is never going to give up." He pressed, "let me be that wall for you. If you truly can't get out of this launch early, this is the only way you're going to keep him at bay."

Jane gnawed her lower lip, unsure if he was right or wrong about Ethan's mindset. She knew he didn't give up easily, but she also knew another man challenging him constantly was only making him feel more possessive. "There's another thing, Eric." She admitted, watching her friend closely for his reaction. "I feel really guilty using you this way. It really isn't fair to you to ask you to fake a relationship and paternity... not to mention your life."

Eric bristled at the reminder of how close he'd come to losing to Ethan. If Jane hadn't interrupted when she did, the other man would probably have killed him. He couldn't even blame Ethan for it – he'd picked the fight,

and it was the way of their kind to take challenges seriously. Still, he'd invested so much time in breaking down enough of Jane's walls to even begin thinking about approaching her, he couldn't stop now."

"What if I want you to use me?" Eric blurted out.

Jane blinked. "What?"

"Not like that." He corrected, huffin out a laugh. "I just mean that I've wanted to be more than friends with you for a long time now. I was trying to give you time and space, but maybe this is the way it was supposed to happen. I don't feel used, or like I'm missing out on being with someone else by keeping up the charade – because I want to help you, I want to be with you."

Jane's eyes widened, and Eric felt her pulse speed up beneath his fingers. "I respect that you aren't ready to tell me about what happened between you two yet, but I can see how badly he hurt you. And I can see how much of an effect he still has on you. I know you don't want to be hurt again, so let me protect you. I would never do anything to harm you."

"Except bite my leg off." Jane joked, cracking a smile for the first time since he started talking.

"Except for that." Eric said with a laugh.

Jane still looked uncertain, as if too many gears were spinning in my head. "I don't know." She answered softly.

"I mean, I find you attractive and we get along so well... I just never picture myself getting into a relationship again. Can I think about it?"

"Of course you can." Eric agreed, feeling a spark of hope in his chest. She wasn't opposed, she just needed more time, like he'd always thought.

Of course, on the other side of the table all Jane could think about was that as many wonderful qualities as her friend had, she'd never felt a spark between them – certainly not like the explosions of fireworks she felt at Ethan's smallest touch. That might be a good thing. A little voice said in the back of her mind. Look at how those fireworks ended up. You might not feel passion with Eric, but that also means he can't ever hurt you the way Ethan did. You don't really want to be alone forever, you just don't feel safe – but Eric is safe.

Almost too safe. Jane thought back, ignoring her wolf's contribution to the internal debate, which was basically begging she leave Eric and go climb into bed with her ex this very moment.

"I'll think about it." Jane confirmed, "just promise me you'll tell me if this becomes too hard for you."

"I promise." Eric vowed, turning to their menus. "Now, what looks good?"

On the other side of town, Petra stood in her bedroom, triumphantly grinning at the test results in her hand. Right there in black and white, was her proof that Ethan was father to all four pups. She was going to show him as soon as he got home, and she couldn't wait to see the look on Jane's face when she realized she'd been beat.

A knock sounded at the door, and Petra carefully folded the document back into its envelope and placed it in her desk drawer before going to answer it. She couldn't be more surprised when she found Eve waiting on the other side, looking very somber indeed.

Petra and Eve had been close friends for years, ever since Eve came to her rescue when Jane abandoned her. However Eve had always been impossibly kind in front of the Alpha's mother, the elder woman had been shocked and appalled when she received the recording of Eve berating her granddaughter. It defied everything she knew about the woman, but her maternal instincts went into high alert when it came to her family.

"What are you doing here?" Petra demanded, not inviting the younger she-wolf inside.

"I hoped maybe we could talk." Eve claimed simply, "I owe you such a huge apology for what happened with Paisley."

"I can't imagine what you possibly think you could say to

me Eve," Petra informed her coldly, "That recording said everything."

"Please, just let me explain." Eve begged, "It's not what you think."

Petra doubted Eve could change her mind about the situation, as it was all fairly black and white. Still, she felt their years-long friendship warranted hearing the woman out – if nothing else. "All right." She sighed. "Come in."

Eve sidled in with a humble smile, trying to hide the rush of excitement she felt. It was the same rush she'd felt before injecting the poison into Paisley's IV. She'd found the constant act she had to put up around Ethan's mother exhausting – it was such a relief to know she'd finally get to make her true feelings about the woman known. It seemed right that their last conversation should be honest, given it would be the last conversation Petra ever had.

