

Chapter 71 - Outed

Jane

I've only just dropped the pups off at pre-school and am on my way to the office when my phone rings. Glancing at the touchscreen display in the car's center console, I see Linda's name appear, and promptly accept the call over bluetooth. "Hello?"

"Hey," She greets me, sounding a bit tense. "Have you seen the news?"

"No." I sigh, already fearing the worst, "What is it now?"

"You just got outed." She explains gently, "In a very public way."

"What do you mean?" I ask nervously, thinking that it's beyond depressing my life has reached a point where she could be talking about half a dozen secrets or lies.

"It's on the front page of the Gazette." She replied simply, "Elise Carrington exposed - NightFang's Luna returns from the grave." Linda pauses, "apparently someone let it slip that your identity is fake and exposed the truth - including the fact that you faked your death."

I curse under my breath. This is the last thing I needed.

"I was worried standing by Ethan's side at the funeral

might draw too much attention to me." I groan. "I should have known better."

"I don't think it was the funeral." Linda corrects me, "The way this is written, well, let's just say it's not a flattering article. There's a lot of details here that they couldn't have gotten from the last few days, or even just looking into your life in the Dark Moon pack."

"Great." I mutter grumpily, "As if this week wasn't going badly enough already."

"Sorry babe. Call me if you need anything." Linda offers. "Thanks."

A little while later I have the chronicle spread out in front of me. My photo is plastered across the front page, right alongside a snapshot from my funeral. As I begin to read, my heart sinks.

Five years ago Jane Blackwell divorced the Alpha, just over a year after a mysterious attack paralyzed family friend Eve Mechant. Seven months later she supposedly died birthing the Alpha's daughter Paisley, who's young life has been marked by a heart condition and multiple surgeries. However last month La Louve CEO Elise Carrington swept into town to settle the disturbing fraud allegations regarding her perfume's sale at Eve Mechant's exclusive boutique - and citizens couldn't help notice the striking resemblance the entrepreneur bore to our late

Luna. Today we can confirm that the two women are one in the same. Jane Blackwell is very much alive, and has been masquerading as the elusive fragrance magnate ever since – but faking her death and forging a new identity is the least of her secrets.

The article goes on to reveal all the details of the police reports Eve and Petra filed against me after the attack six years ago, blaming me for Eve's injuries and noting my sudden disappearance from public life. It then provides a laundry list of the probable crimes I committed to get away, and goes on to speculate about my involvement in Petra's murder. If Eve was still in the good graces of the media, I might think she was responsible for this, but given all the details of the current investigation included, I suspect the police leaked the story.

Part of me wants to call Ethan, but I know how he'll respond. He'll promise to take care of it and tell me not to worry, even though I can't do anything but worry. I'm already so confused about his motivations that I don't think I can handle adding another layer of complexity to our situation, so I resist the urge to reach out.

However, that determination only lasts as long as the morning, for when I step out of the atelier to go to lunch, I find a crazed horde of reporters waiting for me. At first I stop in the doorway looking like a deer in the

headlights as the cameras flash around me, my mind incapable of deciphering one question from another as the various microphone wielding correspondents shout in my direction.

When I finally regain my senses, I fight my way through the crowd, keeping my sunglasses lowered over my eyes, and muttering "No comment" until I'm blue in the face.

It's not until an unfamiliar woman steps up and blocks my path, that I finally stop. "Jane, what do you have to say to NightFang customers who are advocating boycotting your perfume in light of the allegations against you?"

This actually gives me pause. The NightFang pack is the most prosperous on the continent, which means it has the wealthiest citizens and comprises the largest income revenue for my business. If they boycott me, I could lose an inordinate amount of money and risk the future of the company.

Taking a deep breath, I turn towards her and carefully choose my words. "La Louve is my creation, but its products stand on their own. Our customers do not wear our fragrances because they support our politics or enterprises, they wear La louve because it is the height of elegance and prestige. Our competitors cannot come close to matching our exclusive scents, and any woman of

taste knows that her perfume choice is not merely a fashion statement, but a reflection of her identity.”

Staring straight into the camera, I continue. “I dare the woman of the NightFang pack to find a fragrance as enigmatic, luxurious and scintillating as our signature, or as nuanced as some of our other lines. Every woman is unique and complex, and we’ve created our perfumes to match those indefinable qualities upon which we all pride ourselves.”

“So you’re saying that CEOs like yourself should have no accountability if their products are good?” The reporter demands.

“I’m saying that corporations have the utmost responsibility to conduct their business ethically, and the accusations against me have nothing to do with my business. They are of a personal nature.” I amend, knowing that while the reporter might have a point and our customers would be well within their rights to boycott, high fashion has a long history of trumping morality. “Five years ago I ran away from a bad marriage, and I did what I felt was necessary to protect myself. But I never harmed Petra or Eve Mechant, and anyone who says otherwise is either misinformed or pursuing their own agenda.” I conclude.

Pushing past them, I decide to forgo lunch and head

straight for Ethan's office. I don't know if my pandering to our wealthy clients' egos or cravings for exclusivity was sufficient to undo the damage this article has done. I can't stand the thought of losing everything I've worked so hard for over the last few years, especially not due to another one of Eve's schemes.

Charging into the pack headquarters, I walk straight into Ethan's office, bypassing his assistant even as she races after me, insisting I can't go in. When I open the doors, I find Ethan seated behind his desk and his Beta, Matthew, sitting across from him. One of the pack elders is on Matthew's left, looking very grim indeed. Ethan rises immediately when he sees me, and the other two turn around in surprise.

"Jane." Ethan greets me, striding around his desk. "Are you okay?"

"No." I whisper shakily, glancing at Matthew and the elder.

"Can you give us a moment?" Ethan requests of the men. They nod and depart, leaving us alone. "I saw the Gazette." Ethan tells me, clearly not needing any explanation for my sudden appearance. "I've already contacted them about printing a restriction, but I'm afraid the damage has been done.

"People are talking about boycotting La Louve," I share,

pressing my palm to my temple, "there are reporters camped outside my office and yours, they're probably at the Penthouse too. I don't know what to do."

Ethan pulls me into a hug, and I for once I don't fight him. He rubs my back and purrs gently, making me relax even though I don't want to be soothed. "That isn't fair." I mutter into his chest, breathing in his rich, Alpha scent. "What isn't?" He croons, kissing my hair.

"This is very serious." I tell him, "NightFang she-wolves are my biggest customers, if I lose them I could lose my business. I can't afford to let my guard down."

"You can." He insists, "because I'm here to watch your back while you take a breath. That's what partners do."

"We're not partners." I answer with a pout.

"I meant in business, Janey." He teases, "I might not be your main contact anymore, but I'm still board president."

"Oh." I breathe, "right. So, what do you think I should do?"

"Let me deal with the press." Ethan suggests, "And the police. I don't care much for the investigator on my Mother's case, but I might be able to knock some sense into him yet."

My mind reels, and I feel so tempted to let him take care of everything for me, but I've taken that path before, and it didn't turn out well. As much as he comforts me, I

simply don't trust him when it comes to my freedom.

"No." I object, pulling away from him. I look up into his dark eyes, gathering my courage as his brow furrows with displeasure. "Thank you, Ethan, but I think I have to do this myself."



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