

Chapter 73 - Anniversary

3rd Person

"It didn't work." Riley announced sullenly, exchanging worried looks with her siblings.

Though their efforts to convince Jane and Ethan not to separate the family had certainly made an impact on their parents, it hadn't done anything to change their minds. Jane had run off crying, and Ethan had sent the pups to go have a lie down while he checked on Jane. A little while later Jane had emerged from her bedroom dry-eyed and grim-faced, and went about making dinner as if nothing had happened.

Afterwards Ethan talked with the pups and told them how sorry he was that they found out this way, and helped them work through their feelings, but ultimately nothing changed.

"What do we do now?" Parker questioned, feeling at a loss. The problems facing the pups were piling up so high they were becoming insurmountable. How were they supposed to help clear Jane's good name, while also convincing her to stay in the NightFang territory with Ethan?

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"I dunno." Ryder sighed, "but Mommy and Daddy must have loved each other once, we just have to make them fall 'n love again."

"How?" Paisley murmured, leaning against her sister for comfort.

"I think we need help." Riley decided, putting her arm around Paisley.

"From who?" Parker inquired, "the other grown ups agree with Mommy."

"Uncle Eric might, but I dunno 'bout Auntie Linda." Riley answered. "I think she has a crush on Eric."

"But how'd we talk to her without Mommy knowing?" Paisley wondered aloud.

"We'll find a way." Ryder declared, "Next time they're on the phone, we can try to catch Linda before she hangs up."

Hours later they hovered near while their mother talked with Linda, listening to every word the women spoke as they hid just out of sight.

"I don't know what I'm going to do, Linda." Jane fretted, briefly opening her bedroom door to make sure the pups weren't listening outside, then closing it again. Of course, what she didn't realize was that the children were on the second extension of the landline, holding their small paws over their mouths so the grown ups wouldn't hear them breathing.

"Janey, I know things are tough right now. But it will get better." Linda replied, "The talks of boycotts are already dying down."

"Yes, well a boycott only matters if I have a business to run." Jane replied cynically, dragging her hand through her long hair. "Even that won't matter if I'm in jail."

"You won't go to jail." Linda insisted. "And if you do, I'll break you out. I know all the laws, I can get away with it."

Jane chuckled, but her humor only lasted a moment. "So

"I can be a fugitive?" Jane scoffed. "That'll be great for the pups."

"Well you know no matter what you've got the best lawyer in the territory in your corner." Linda answered warmly. On anyone else, her confidence might seem overblown, but Jane knew her friend had a perfect record. She'd never lost a case, and she couldn't hope for a better lawyer.

"I know." She replied, "thank you."

There was a pregnant pause, and then Linda spoke in a deceptively neutral voice, "How's Eric handling all of this?"

"I still can't believe he told Paisley about the move." Jane complained. "He apologized repeatedly, but I can't remember ever being so angry with him."

"I'm sure he thought they already knew." Linda defended.

"I'm not so sure." Jane exhaled, "He's been so opposed to us staying here and so aggressive towards Ethan. I'm really starting to think it was a mistake asking him to come here." She paused, debating whether or not she wanted to share the topic which had been on her mind most. "And... when we went out the night Petra died, he told me he had feelings for me."

"Oh." Linda uttered, her voice breaking. "Wow... that's... wow."

"I didn't know how to respond either." Jane confessed,

not picking up on her friend's disappointment.

"So what did you say?" Linda asked, her voice a few octaves higher than usual.

"I said I'd think about it." Jane confessed. "I mean Eric is kind and good, I know he would take care of me and make a wonderful father figure for the pups."

"But?" Linda prompted.

"But it feels like Eric is someone who's meant to be in my future when I'm stuck here living in the past." She eyed her open day planner, running her finger over the page that had been taunting her all morning. "You know Saturday would have been my 10th wedding anniversary?" In truth, it wasn't the anniversary of the day Jane truly considered to be her wedding, when she and Ethan eloped, but it was the date of the formal ceremony they held a few months later.

"I remember." Linda told her simply. "Does Ethan?"

"He hasn't said anything, but I'm sure he does." Jane griped. "That man never forgets anything."

"Are you going to celebrate?" Linda asked slyly.

"Of course not." Jane scoffed. "And if Ethan asks for a date that night, I am not agreeing. I've already slipped up one time too many." She admitted, gnawing her lower lip.

"I really thought changing my scent would protect me, but at the end of the day he's still an Alpha, and we have

so much history. My body isn't my own when he's near me."

"Have you considered that's the Goddess's way of telling you that you're meant to be together?" Linda suggested.

"If the Goddess wanted us to be together, she would have fated us." Jane argued back, "Ethan and I were only ever together because we were both young and defiant – I should have known better. No Alpha marries an omega. If we'd listened to his parents, we could have avoided all this."

"If that's true then why does she keep bringing you back together?" Linda inquired, "why did she gift you with pups?"

"Maybe she's not as benevolent as we like to think." Jane theorized. "Maybe she's just pulling the strings, toying with me for fun."

"You don't really believe that." Linda scolded.

"No, but sometimes I do wonder." Jane whispered.

"Otherwise why would she make this so difficult?"

"I don't know." Her friend stated honestly. "But I do know that nothing worth having comes easily."

"Yeah." Jane murmured thoughtfully, "anyway, I'll let you go – thanks for listening Linda."

"Anytime girl." Linda assured her. "I'll talk to you later."

"Bye." Jane said, hanging up.

As soon as the line clicked, Riley hurriedly exclaimed, "Auntie Linda?"

Linda paused, "Riley? Is that you?"

"Yes." The pup answered happily, exchanging a smile with her siblings. "And we need your help."

On Saturday evening, Jane was standing in her office when her cell rang, trying to catch up on some of the work she missed during the week amidst all the media drama. Seeing Ethan's name scrolling across the screen, she considered ignoring the call, but eventually caved and raised it to her ear.

"Hey gorgeous." Ethan greeted her.

"Ethan, what's up?" Jane replied stiffly.

"Well first of all, happy anniversary." He proclaimed.

"We aren't married anymore, Ethan." Jane reminded him.

"I know." Ethan confirmed, "but it's still an anniversary. And I just got home to find quite the surprise."

"What are you talking about?" She asked warily.

"Well." He began, the smile evident in his voice, "It seems our pups have been scheming with their aunt. There is a rather beautiful dinner here waiting for us to celebrate: filet mignon, good red wine, a luscious

chocolate cake. So unless you want to disappoint them, you need to get back here."

"What?" Jane repeated. "Ethan I'm not celebrating our anniversary."

"Sweetheart, I had nothing to do with this." Ethan insists. "I'm as surprised as you are, and after the week the pups have had, I think we owe them this much."

His words hit Jane right in the heart, she'd been overwhelmed with guilt all week long over the pups meltdown and nothing she'd said or done had convinced them to forgive her. "Fine." Jane grumbled, caving even though she knew it was a terrible idea. "I'm on my way."

Jane had gotten so used to seeing a sea of reporters outside her door, that it was actually a surprise when she exited her office and found the investigator waiting for her instead. Of course, the media jackals were still there, they were just outside the doors while the police waited in the comfort of the building's lobby.

"What is this?" She asked, eyeing the detective and the uniformed officers flanking him on either side.

The man offered her a vicious smile. "Jane Blackwell, you are under arrest for the murder of Petra Balckwell." He announced, sending the officers towards her with a pair of handcuffs. As they spun her around and pulled her hands behind her back, he continued, "You have the

right to remain silent, anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney..."



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