

Chapter 83 Ethan's Confession

How did it come to this? I think morosely. How did everything go so wrong so quickly?

I'd like to think I've been shielding the pups from the truth about what happened between Jane and I all those years ago for their own safety and peace of mind, but if I'm honest, I think I've been protecting myself. I know how horribly I messed up with Jane, and as badly as it hurt to see my former mate looking at me with that expression of utter betrayal, seeing it on the faces of my innocent pups is worse. When I left the house this morning I was their hero, now I'm their villain.

"Why don't you come sit down." I suggest to the pups, hoping they'll agree. How am I ever going to explain this to them? They're too young to even understand a fraction of it.

Despite my tormented thoughts, they obey. One by one they toddle into the living room, settling on the sofa while I take a seat on the edge of the coffee table in front of them. I search their young faces for any hint of openness, but they all seem completely closed off.

"Listen." I begin, not even knowing where I'm going with this. "I made a lot of mistakes in the past, and I did a lot

of things I'm not proud of, but I love you and I love your Mommy more than anything."

The quadruplets exchange meaningful glances, "what does that mean?" Ryder questions.

"It means that it's true. Eve tricked me into believing something terrible about Mommy, and... I punished her." I confess, "I put her on house arrest."

"But how could you b'lieve Eve?" Riley demands, clearly affronted on her mother's behalf.

"Because I didn't know how evil she was then." I explain, "I don't have any other excuse. I was a fool – I let her make a fool of me, and believing her is the biggest regret of my life, second only to how I treated your Mommy afterwards."

"Wha's house arrest?" Parker inquired, clearly distracted by my previous choice of words.

"It's like what Paisley said, a permanent time out." I share.

"So you made Mommy a prisner," Riley summarizes, "for something she didn' do."

"Yes." I concede. "That's right. I made her my prisoner, and I'll never regret anything more."

I can see their affection for me evaporating, and I don't blame them. If someone did to my mother what I did to

Jane, I'd probably kill them. Still, I can't believe how quickly things have flipped upside down. A little while ago I was happier than I've been in a very long time, and now I'm awash with shame, guilt, and despair. I'm losing them. I think forlornly, I only just got them, and I'm already losing them.

Well, it's your own fault. A little voice says in the back of my head, after all, if you hadn't been so cruel to Jane they wouldn't be able to hold it against you.

I was young and stupid. I argue back, but children don't understand the blurry black and white shades of youthful indiscretions, or the complexities of growth and redemption. To them I'm the evil man that hurt their mother, full stop.

"How did you find out?" I ask them, wondering why this suddenly came up after Jane and I were both out all day.

"Eric told us." Parker admits, looking at me as if I've just kicked a puppy.

"What?" I growl. To my horror, Riley, Parker and Ryder actually flinch away from me, as if frightened I'll lash out at them. If I thought I felt ashamed before, it's nothing compared to how terrible I feel now.

"Easy now," I caution, softening my tone, "I'm sorry. I was just surprised."

"Eric said you were a monster." Paisley murmurs, looking

as though the sky is falling around her.

"It's not that simple." I sigh, feeling a rush of pure hatred for the other man. "People aren't angels or demons. Good people do bad things sometimes, and bad people do good things."

"So which are you?" Ryder asks grumpily, scowling over at me.

"I'd like to think I'm a good man who was tricked into doing something terrible, but I don't know if your Mommy would agree. What I can tell you is that I'm not the same man I was then." I proclaim, praying they understand.

They don't.

"How's that possible?" Riley demands, "you weren't you then?"

"No, I was still me." I state, dragging one large hand through my hair, "but people change as time passes. You'll see when you get older, sometimes you can change so much over the years that you don't even recognize the person you used to be, and having children is one of those things that can transform a person."

"I don't understand." Ryder admits.

"I think he's saying he has two personalities." Riley explains in a stage whisper.

"No." I chuckle humorlessly, "I don't have two personalities. I just... I would never treat anyone that way today, but I can't change the fact that I did it in the past."

"So... you were bad before, but you're not bad now?" Parker presses.

"I was bad before." I confirm, "And I'd like to think I'm not anymore, but that's not for me to decide. It's for you and your Mommy."

"I think if he did the bad thing once, he could do it 'gain." Ryder contributes, gazing at me with newfound suspicion. Riley nods, "Mommy's already in trouble 'gain. Was dis your fault too?" She asks me.

"No, I'm doing everything I can to help your mother." I insist.

"Paisley, what'd you think?" Parker asks.

"I dunno." She whimpers, "I love Daddy, an' I love Mommy."

"But Daddy hurt Mommy." Riley reminds her, "He locked her up."

Before I can say a word, Riley, Parker and Ryder put their heads together, murmuring to each other under their breath. Cocking my ears towards their low voices, I catch the tail end of their conversation. "I think we should

leave." Riley is saying.

"Eric is much nicer to Mommy." Ryder agrees.

"He was right, Mommy's scared." Parker adds. "I don't want her to be scared. I think we should leave."

"Agreed." The other two murmur, pulling away and looking curiously towards Paisley.

Jane enters then, her hair still wet from her shower and her clothes clinging to her damp skin in the most alluring way. Still, this isn't the time to appreciate her luscious little body. The ground is crumbling beneath my very feet, and here I am distracted by my mate. Of course, it takes Jane all of five seconds to zone in on the tension in the air, so attuned is she to her pups.

"What's going on?" She asks, studying their devastated expressions and turning to me for an explanation. "Is there news?"

Yes, I want to say, There is news. I know they're mine, but none of it fucking matters any more.

"Mommy, we wanna go home." Riley announces gravely, getting to her feet.

Jane frowns, moving deeper into the room. "We are home, angel."

"No, we wanna go back to the Dark Moon pack." Parker explains.

"You do?" Jane asks, completely shocked. "I thought –"

"We wanna go home!" Ryder interrupts her, sounding as if he's on the verge of tears.

"I... what's happened?" Jane questions, looking to me now.

"They know." I state bleakly, "they know what I did to you."

Jane's eyes widen in shock, and she turns to Paisley, the only one of our pups who hasn't said a word yet. "Paisley?"

My precious girl looks up at me, her lower lip quivering heavily. She seems as if she wants to speak, but can't seem to find the courage to actually share her thoughts.

"It's okay, little one." I tell her, feeling my heart break into a thousand pieces. "I want what's best for you. You don't have to be afraid to say how you feel."

"I don' wanna leave Daddy." She squeaks, staring hopefully at Jane. "But I don' wanna lose you neither."

"You can never lose me, sweetheart." Jane promises, coming forward to stroke Paisley's soft cheek. "And leaving your Daddy doesn't mean losing him either, it just means you live with me and he comes to visit."

Paisley's looking at me again, and as much as I want to roar my rage and sorrow into the abyss, I can't put those bad feelings on her, "I love you, Paisley. Whatever you choose."

Her head whips back and forth between Jane and I, her cheeks growing increasingly red until she finally bursts.

"I can't! I can't choose!"

"Hey," I croon, pulling her into my lap as tears begin streaming down her face, "It's okay, honey, I'm sorry. It's okay, you don't have to choose."

Paisley wails into my shirt, and I find myself looking to Jane for guidance, feeling almost as raw and vulnerable as my daughter does. "What are we going to do?"



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