

Chapter 93 Prince Eric

Eric stared down at Jane in abject shock, trying to process her words as he took in all the changes she'd manifested in a little under a week. She reeked of Ethan and his mark flared red around the curve of her neck. Her skin was glowing with health, and her cheeks were flushed with color. She was angrier than he had ever seen her, but he also immediately recognized that she hadn't gotten through her heat on her own. Jealous anger flooded him, rising up to meet her own flaring temper, even though he knew he was in the wrong.

Glancing down at the papers she was forcing against his hard chest, he pried them free of her clenching fingers and flipped through them, quickly putting together the pieces of the story. "So," He mused aloud, "Ethan stopped rutting you long enough to have me investigated?"

"Excuse me?" Jane snarled, "how dare you speak to me that way?"

"I asked you if you needed relief, Jane." He reminded her, "I offered to help you with anything you needed."

"Don't try to change the subject." Jane hissed. "This isn't about Ethan and I, or my heat, this is about you lying to me – for years!"

"And don't you go making this about you!" Eric replied tersely. "Nobody in the Dark Moon pack knows who I truly am, for precisely this reason." He explained. "I wanted a normal life, but the only way to achieve that when you're the son of the king is to disappear, to hide in plain sight in a place where no one knows you."

The investigators had gone above and beyond looking into his past. Somehow they managed to do what all the paparazzi in his home nation had not, and connected Dark Moon businessman Eric Danvers to Prince Henry of the Midnight Pack – a tiny island empire in the south seas. He was the youngest son, one of five children with no hopes of ever inheriting his father's title, but a prince nonetheless.

"But we've been friends for years." Jane insisted, "I opened up to you, I told you my deepest, darkest secrets and all the while I didn't even know the most basic information about you. I didn't even know your real name."

"But you understand trying to protect yourself at all costs." Eric – or Henry, argued. "You understand putting on a mask for the sake of leading the life you want."

"Not with my friends!" Jane argued. "I trusted you, Eric. Henry – whatever your name is!"

"My name is Eric – same as it's always been." He insisted.

"This is who I am, and this is the life I want. I'm the same person I've always been, just with a fancier title."

"Did you tell the pups what happened between Ethan and I?" Jane asked abruptly, catching him completely off guard.

His eyes widened, and then his expression closed off completely. "Jane, what you have to realize, is –"

"Oh my god!" Jane exclaimed. "You did it." She murmured. "You told my babies that Ethan made me his slave so that they would turn against him."

"How is that worse than him making you a slave in the first place?" Eric demanded in return. "Why is it you can forgive him enough to sleep with him over and over again, but I simply bring what he's done out into the open and I'm the villain."

"They're four!" Jane exploded, "and he's their father! Children shouldn't have people unloading their baggage about their parents onto them they're innocent!"

"I was trying to protect you!" Eric insisted fiercely. "All I've ever wanted is to protect you. Besides, I didn't tell them the details, I put it in terms they could understand."

"That wasn't your place!" Jane hissed, "and it didn't protect me. Don't you understand that if you hurt my children you hurt me?"

"Are you sure that's what you mean?" Eric pressed. "The

pups didn't seem all that hurt Jane. Are you sure you don't mean to say I can't hurt your mate without hurting you?"

"I thought you were better than this, Eric." Jane admitted grimly, shaking her head as tears burned in her eyes. "I thought you were on my side. But you've only ever been on your own side."

"Don't say that." Eric begged. "I've been on your side from the first moment we met."

"Yes, well," Jane began, swiping the tears from her cheeks, "I was playing a part then too. Maybe that was our mistake. We were both play acting instead of being honest, and we never saw the real people behind the facades."

"I see you, Jane." Eric professes, reaching for her. "You're beautiful and kind and generous, you're smart, ambitious and strong. I love you. I've been in love with you for as long as I can remember."

His words shocked Jane to her core. She'd known he was infatuated with her, but she'd never dreamed he imagined himself in love with her. If she'd had any idea he felt that strongly she might have tried to put a stop to this sooner, especially now that she knew how Linda felt.

"Eric," Jane began hesitantly, trying to find the right words to let him down easily.

"No," He interrupted, "don't say it like that. Don't end this before it's even begun. Just give me a chance, one chance to show you how good we could be together."

"I'm so sorry." Jane admitted, "I'm so honored that you feel that way about me. There's no greater compliment and the last thing I want is to hurt you. But Eric, we aren't meant to be. We aren't a good fit. You may think I'm beautiful and strong, but the truth is I'm barely holding it together. I feel lost every day of my life. It's like no matter what I do, I can't seem to escape my past. It keeps hanging over me like some terrible spectre and all the while I'm just fighting for the basic hope of making my family whole again. That's all I can focus on right now, it's all I've ever wanted – and all these romantic distractions are just confusing me."

"So let me help, let me make it clear." Eric suggested. "You need someone to take care of you."

"No." Jane argued, deciding to try another strategy. "I need my pups to be together. I need us to be safe, and sure, one day I'd like to be loved if I can, but right now it's all too much."

"Would you be saying this if I were Ethan?" Eric demanded, "When you go home tonight and he crawls into your bed, are you going to turn him away?"

"I don't know." Jane confessed. "He's confusing me more

than anyone else, but I can tell you this much: when it comes to mates, my wolf makes the decision, not me. And my wolf..."

Understanding dawns on Eric's face as I trail off, his face falling as my unspoken words land in his consciousness. "Doesn't want me." He guesses.

"That's right." Jane confirmed, wincing. "I'm sorry, that isn't how I wanted to tell you."

"No." He raised a hand to stop her. "It's okay. I wouldn't listen."

Jane nodded, peeking up at him nervously. "If we're going to be friends, there can't be any more lies between us, Eric." She directed, "I don't want to know about your life from a folder, I want to hear it from you."

"I'll be honest too, I don't think I can stand by and watch if you're going to go back to that monster." Eric replied. "I want to support you, but there has to come a point where you draw a line in the sand when the people you care about are hurting themselves."

"Goddess, Eric." Jane muttered. "You make me sound like some sort of addict."

"Is it really so different?" He asked, his voice a low grumble. "What would you say if it was Linda, or some other friend in your shoes? Would you just stand by while they went back to their abuser?"

"I think it's not that simple." Jane countered. "Ethan made mistakes, but I've done my fair share of damage too." She confessed. "Honestly, I've been justifying hiding the pups from him for so many years because of what he did, that it never occurred to me how I would react if he changed."

"You can't tell me that you're considering staying?" Eric interrogated, leaning forward to tower over her.

"No, I'm just saying that things are a lot more complicated than I was prepared for." Jane admitted.

"And it begs the question of how long people should be punished if they've truly repented for their wrongs."

Eric glared down at Jane. "You're assuming that he truly has changed, he truly has repented. Has it not occurred to you that this has all been an act for your benefit?"

For the first time, Jane was starting to realize just how calculating Eric truly was – and it didn't bode well. His instinct was clearly to distrust, rather than give anyone the benefit of the doubt. It wasn't a trait many honest people possessed. "You can't act with kids." Jane answered coolly, "they see through everything, and they're always listening."

Little did Jane know, but her pups were up to a lot more than mere eavesdropping. Across town, they were busy investigating Eve while their mother faced down Eric, and

luckily for them – it was about to pay off.