

Chapter 97 Ethan Makes a Vow

Ethan

Over the years I've been in more fights than I can count, some more noble than others – some decidedly dumb. Either way, I've taken more than my fair share of punches, but I've never felt such a powerful gut punch as the one Jane just landed. I feel as though all the air has been stolen from my lungs, like I've forgotten how to breathe and won't ever remember again.

I expected my mate to be relieved that she was no longer in any danger of being arrested, I wanted her to be happy and excited like this – but not because it meant she could leave. I'd known she was planning on moving up her departure date, but I thought that was because she was afraid. I hoped that with things more settled and everyone safe and sound again, she'd reconsider. It's not why I did it of course, but I can't deny how disappointed I am to see her so overjoyed to go back to the Dark Moon pack.

"What about the perfume launch?" I say blankly, taking a step back from her. "Things aren't finished here."

Jane quickly sobers, seeing my change in mood. "I'm sorry, Ethan." She professes, "I didn't mean for it to

sound like that. I've just... having all the kids together has been my dream since the day I gave Paisley up. It has haunted me and preoccupied my every free moment for more than four years."

"The kids can be together here." I tell her, "and it's safe now, you can stay here. We can start fresh."

Her face falls, "Ethan when I fell into heat I warned you it wasn't going to change things. I was honest with you from the beginning about what I wanted."

"That isn't true." I growl. "You couldn't be honest with me because you aren't even being honest with yourself."

"Excuse me?" Jane utters indignantly. "Who are you to decide if I'm honest with myself? To assume you know what's going on in my mind, or know my own feelings better than I do? Who are you, to think you know what's best for me?"

"I'm your mate." I rumble dangerously, "That's who."

"No you were my mate." She corrects me fiercely. "Once, a very long time ago. Not anymore."

"It's been a day, Jane." I remind her, pointedly staring at my fresh mark. "One day and one night since I last claimed you."

"Well I didn't ask to be claimed!" She bursts out, turning red as she remembers the way she begged me to make love to her. "I mean I did, but not that way - not

permanently.”

“Then why did you claim me too?” I question her, pulling open the front of my shirt to expose all her little bite marks, and especially the small circle her fangs carved into the dense muscle of my pec. “Or have you forgotten how desperate you were to leave your mark on me the other day.”

Even as I say it, visions of Jane – gloriously naked and lowering herself onto my hard cock, undulating her hips as she nibbled and scratched every inch of my skin she could reach – burst across my vision. I’ll never forget the way I rose up beneath her, catching her hips and guiding her movements, helping her ride me. She’d looped her slender arms around my neck and thrown her head back in ecstasy, but the closer she came to climax, the more desperate she became to feel our bond in its entirety. She lowered her swollen lips to my chest, to the faint scars she first gave me on our wedding night, and possessively sunk her teeth into my flesh, making me explode inside her as my wolf went completely wild.

Her cheeks, neck and chest blushing scarlet, present day Jane stammers weakly as she stares at her handy work. “That... I... It was just the heat.” She explains.

“Plenty of omegas go through heats without claiming their partner as a mate.” I tell her, “you know how rare

that is." In fact, because so many omegas were doomed to become pleasure slaves to alphas in want of a breeding bitch rather than a true lover, an omega claim was almost unheard of. It was only in love matches like Jane's and my own that it happened.

"Then it was nostalgia, or my damned wolf losing her head!" Jane deflects. "I want to go home, Ethan. I was never planning on staying here and I never pretended otherwise."

"I know that." I reply, frustrated to no end that she was still denying our connection. "But I thought..." I stop myself just in time, just before admitting that I'd arranged this entire scheme of living together to change her mind.

Unfortunately for me, Jane got my drift without hearing the words. Her hands ball into fists at her sides, "You just thought that if I lived here with you and saw the family we could be, I wouldn't actually leave, when the time came. Is that it? You never actually planned on letting me take Paisley? You thought you could manipulate me into doing what you wanted?"

"Jane," I exhale, raising my hands in supplication, "what other choice did I have? You backed me into a corner with this."

"What is with the men in my life?" Jane rages, not the

least bit soothed by my low voice and even tone. "Are any of you capable of being honest? Are you all just possessive, scheming cavemen playing tug of war with my life? With my children's lives?"

"Eric and I aren't the only ones who have been playing tug of war with the kids, Jane." I assert. "I understand why you left, I truly do. But you kept three of my pups from me and didn't even tell them I existed. You left Paisley with me, then expected to waltz in and take her away from the only parent she's ever known without ever asking her what she wants. You let the kids into my life, gave them a father for the first time, and now expect me to what? Abandon them?"

I'm working extremely hard to keep my voice down, but I'm failing with every new word. I didn't realize how angry I was with Jane about everything that's happened until now. I've been so focused on being near her, convincing her to stay, that I haven't let myself feel the rest of these things. "

Tears are shining in Jane's eyes now, and as guilty as I feel for making her cry, I can't back down now. "They're all a part of me, but especially Paisley." I forge on. "How would you feel if someone asked you to give up Ryder, Parker or Riley? You've been loving Paisley from afar all this time, but I'm the one who's been here day in and

day out. I'm not just going to walk away from her."

"What am I supposed to do, Ethan?" Jane hiccups, "I've been planning this from day one. I've been dreaming about this for years."

"So make a new plan! Find a new dream!" I suggest, "don't punish your pups for the sake of following through with a plan you don't even believe in anymore."

"I do believe in it." She argues, sounding more confused than I think she realizes.

"You believe in keeping the pups together, but there are a hundred different ways you can make that happen, Jane." I reason. "But you haven't considered anything else, have you? You haven't let yourself imagine any other solution because you're determined to have things the way you wanted them four years ago." I can see the gears turning in her head, and press on. "I'm not the same person I was four years ago, and I know you aren't either. So why are you letting someone who doesn't even exist anymore dictate your life?"

"Because!" Jane cries, raising her voice so loudly I know there's no hope of keeping this from the pups. "I don't know what I want anymore!"

"Yes you do." I reply, "your wolf has been trying to tell you all along, but you won't listen to her, because you're too afraid!" My own pitch is rising now, but I can feel my

control slipping too fast to stop now. "But she made it very clear the other night." I continue, gesturing to her bite. "So I'm not giving up, Jane. It's my fault you're scared, so the way I see it, it's also my responsibility to take that fear away. I won't stop you if you want to leave, but I won't let you go either. I will follow you, wherever you go I'll be on your tail."

"You can't leave the pack." Jane objects weakly.

"Did you think I was lying to Paisley?" I demand. "I will choose my family over the pack every time. I don't need to be Alpha, but I do need you. All of you."

"So that's it, those are my options?" She sniffles. "Stay or let you stalk me forever?"

"That's right." I answer ruthlessly.

Jane stares at me for a long moment, and then she turns on her heel, and stalks out the door, slamming it behind her and disappearing into the night.

"Where'd Mommy go?" Turning, I find all four pups huddled behind me, staring up at me in confusion. While we were fighting, they were waiting to announce their happy news. They expected joy and celebration, and instead they were getting a soap opera they couldn't even begin to wrap their young minds around.

"She'll be back before you know it." I tell them, hoping to the Goddess I'm right. "You'll see."