

## Chapter 105 Second Chance

Jane

I didn't intend to tell Ethan about my decision now, I hadn't even decided whether to tell him outright before all this happened. When I was walking home after meeting my mother's ghost in the park, I'd daydreamed about sharing the news with Ethan. I thought we could go out on another date, and I could figure out some romantic scheme to surprise him. Our current predicament is about as far from that fantasy as possible, but we have to focus on whatever slivers of hope we can find right now.

I can't bring myself to admit that part of me is terrified Ethan and I might only have each other from here on out. I'm terrified that we're too late to save the pups, that they aren't just missing... but gone. In my heart, I feel that they're still alive. But what if that's just a mother's stubborn hope, an innate refusal to accept the unimaginable?

Ethan is trying to be patient. I can tell he's eager for me to explain my meaning, and trying to restrain his impulse to drag the information out of me. Any other day I might take pleasure in teasing him, but right now I just want to be close to my mate. My mate. I repeat in my head, as if it's decided. I thought I'd only come to terms with sharing the kids with Ethan and possibly seeing if there might be a future for us romantically, but my heart seems to be on a different page than my head.

"I was going to tell you," I broach hesitantly. "I made a decision the other night, before I knew the pups had been taken."

"Yes?" Ethan prompts me, the curiosity plain in his deep voice.

"I'm not going to leave." I murmur softly. "I mean... if we get the pups back, I'm not going to take Paisley, I'm not going to take any of them from you. I'm sorry it took me so long to do the right thing – I was just so afraid. But I was wrong."

Ethan's arms were already enveloping me so snugly it was hard to remember we were two separate people, rather than one, but now they squeeze me so tightly I can scarcely breathe. "When we find them." He corrects me, burying his face in the curve of my neck. Emotion is thick in his voice when he continues, "Thank you so much Jane. You have no idea how much that means to me."

"Of course I do." I reply, my eyes already burning with tears. "It's why I've held onto them so tightly all these years."

He purrs, and my knees go weak. Of course, the wonderful thing about Ethan is that I never have to worry about weak knees, because I know he'll always be there to keep me upright – and this time is no different. He absorbs my weight as if it's nothing at all, increasing the rumbling vibrations in his chest and making me feel completely safe despite the fact that we're in the middle of a crisis. "Is that all you decided?" He asks, clearly sensing that I'm withholding more.

I shrug, "I don't want to think about anything but the pups right now."

"That sounds like a no to me." He croons, nuzzling my hair.

"How are you so calm?" I inquire, both jealous and infinitely appreciative of his steady strength.

"I'm not calm." Ethan admits, his rumbling voice infused with a steely edge. "I'm furious, and I'm terrified. But I'm also determined to do whatever it takes to get them back. That gives me purpose – it keeps me sane even though I want to tear the world to pieces."

I nod, understanding better than I can express in words, and clench my eyes shut. A few tears escape, but I refuse to let myself fall apart. "Come on, little wolf." Ethan encourages after a moment. "We need to get you into a shower and into bed."

"Will you stay with me?" I request quietly. "I don't want to be alone."

"That is a question you never have to ask." He replies, sweeping his arm under my legs and lifting me into the air.

Circling my arms around his neck, I let Ethan carry me into his bedroom. He strides straight into the master bathroom and sets me down on the counter, closing the door behind us and stepping into the shower stall to turn on the water.

"I meant I didn't want to sleep alone." I inform him dryly, "not that I needed a shower buddy."

For the first time since all this began, Ethan offers me a lopsided grin, one which so keenly resembles Parker and Ryder's frequent expressions that I almost burst into tears. However the sadness eases when he speaks. "What if I need a shower buddy?" he asks.

"Then I suppose I can make an exception," I decree as he approaches. "Just this once."

"I'll take it." Ethan comes to stand between my legs, resting his hands on my hips and lowering his lips to his mark. He doesn't kiss or fondle me, just rests his mouth against the scars which claim me as his mate. "We're going to find them, Janey." He promises. "It'll be okay. I'm going to make it okay."

"I believe you." I affirm, leaning into his warmth. Ethan and I have our fair share of problems, but I know he won't give up until the pups are home safe. At the same time, I don't want him to carry the weight of that responsibility alone. I realize he's distracting himself by taking care of me, doing the only thing he can to not feel completely helpless in a helpless situation – but I can see how the stress and pressure is weighing on him.

The tables have turned on us: half an hour ago Ethan was scolding me within an inch of my life for pushing myself too hard. I refused to stop looking for the kids and come home, but my mate forced me to see reason, insisting that we rest so we can fight again another day. Now it's my turn to do the same for him.

I kiss my way across his chest and shoulders, trailing my lips up his neck and over his scruff covered jaw. He turns his head towards me, capturing my mouth before I can reach his. One powerful hand circles my nape, cradling my head as he steals the breath from my lungs.

I'm clinging to him as if he's my one and only lifeline, my arms and legs wrapped around his muscular body as my hearts breaks into a gallop. I'm not sure when I started crying, but by the time Ethan lifts me from the counter and carries me into the shower, my cheeks are streaked with tears. The steaming water pours over me, but I barely notice. My entire world has reduced to Ethan, and the delicious sensation of his body against mine. He tries to set my feet on the ground, but I won't have it. I don't want to be parted from him, I don't think I could bear it when his touch is the only thing keeping me sane right now.

My wolf exalts as my back presses to the tiled wall and Ethan continues his lazy exploration of my body. His mouth is like a searing brand as it travels over my skin, moving down my throat to my bare breasts. "Goddess, you're dirty." He teases, making me laugh for the first time since our ordeal began. I know he's right. We spent so long racing through the city in our wolf forms that my body is caked in dust and dirt.

Before I know it, my soft chuckle gives way to a fresh stream of tears. This is how it's been all night long: terror gives way to numbness, and when the shock is broken by some other emotion – be it hope, anger or humor – it gives way to a grief more profound than anything I've known before. Then the cycle begins again.

"Don't make me laugh." I hiccup, shaking my head as guilt and pain churns in my belly. "I shouldn't be laughing, not when my babies are out there, scared and alone."

"I'm sorry." Ethan professes, petting me so lovingly it hurts. "But you're wrong about one thing." Ethan corrects me, "They're not alone. They have each other."

Nodding, I tilt my head back to offer up my lips again, and Ethan dips his head in reply, slanting his mouth over mine and making my body completely overheat. My need for him blazes like a raging fire too powerful to contain, and before long I'm writhing in his arms, desperate to feel him inside me. I'm so on edge with everything going on, and I can tell that Ethan is too. He's being so gentle with me, but there's an urgency fueling his desire which makes me feel as if I'm the only thing keeping him together.

The world around me disappears as Ethan slides his hands down my body, spreading the flames of his touch until I'm completely consumed. I let myself spiral into the haze of lust without restraint. As long as Ethan is touching me I can forget everything that's going wrong, I can forget my sadness, fear and pain. As long as Ethan is touching me, I know I haven't lost everything... yet.