

## Chapter 109 Eric's Story

Jane

"It's a long story." Eric broaches, sitting across from us in his living room. "Are you sure you want to do this now? Surely there are more important things to worry about. The pups—"

"We're asking because of the pups." Ethan interrupts. "Because we think there's a chance they were taken by traffickers, and there's very few people who would have the motive, or the nerve to buy them."

Eric blinked, "But Eve... I thought it was Eve."

"She did take them at first." I explain hoarsely. "But she doesn't have them anymore. The police caught her, and they aren't with him."

"Goddess, I'm so sorry." Eric gasped. "That's terrible news."

"Do you think your father would take them, if he had the chance?" I ask him.

"Yes." Eric sighs, letting his eyes fall shut for a long moment. "He would – in a heartbeat. Do you know for certain that they've been taken by traffickers?"

"No." Ethan replies. "But it's the likeliest explanation at this point. They were in a bad part of town late at night, and there's been an alert out for them so anyone who might have grabbed them would know they're ours."

Eric nods in understanding. "In that case I can reach out to some allies in my father's court. I don't have many friends left there, but there are still a few people I know I can count on."

"Eric, why did you leave in the first place?" Ethan inquires.

"I came because my father sent me." He admits. "I wanted to prove myself to him, I've always just been the spare son, I wanted to show him I could be more than that – that I'm every bit as good as my older brother."

"Sent you why?" Ethan pushes, absentmindedly rubbing my arm.

Eric is watching me now with such a guilty expression that I'm afraid to hear his answer. "I'm so sorry, Jane." He begins, making my heart sink. "He sent me to befriend you, to learn anything I could from you about Ethan, and potentially... to take you and the pups hostage."

Ethan growls deep in his chest, but he doesn't move. Both men are watching me for my reaction, and I wish they'd stop. It's hard enough to process all this without their constant scrutiny. "I... I don't understand." I confess. "No one knew about me, everyone thought I was dead."

Eric shakes his head. "My father is a very untrusting man. He has dozens of spies in every territory, every pack in the realm. They'd already been watching you when you faked your death. They followed you to the Dark Moon territory, they watched you throughout your pregnancy. My father thought Ethan must be hiding something terrible if you were so desperate to get away from him that you'd go to such lengths, so he sent me to find out what they were."

"So you knew who I was, before you ever approached me?" I ask, my voice sounding very small indeed.

"Yes," He admits, wincing. "My job was to get close to you, to find out what skeletons were hiding in Ethan's closet, but you have to believe, I never wanted to hurt you, Jane."

"Well you did!" I exclaim, surging to my feet. "I can't believe what a fool I've been. I trusted you over everyone, Eric!"

"That's because his spies told him exactly how to get close to you." Ethan rumbles ominously, scowling at the man I once considered my best friend, second only to Linda. "He practically had a Jane handbook. He knew your every vulnerability, and exactly what buttons to push."

"You knew about this." I accuse Ethan, turning to look at him with mild hurt. "You knew he was never really my friend."

"I suspected." Ethan corrects me gently. "After we found out who Eric really was. Aimon isn't the only one with spies, but unlike him, I never had my spies watching you, so they didn't know you were still out there. They did know that Aimon was watching us like a hawk though. That he'd go to any length to bring me down. Without me, there wouldn't be anything to stop him from expanding his empire over the continent."

"Jane, you have no idea how sorry I am." Eric tells me, "After I got to the Dark Moon pack and got to know you, I told my father I couldn't help him anymore, that I wasn't going to spy on you. However it started, I fell in love with you for real – and he exiled me as punishment. I haven't spoken to him in three years."

"Three years." I repeat. "Which means you were still reporting back to him for a full year before you got enough backbone to stand up to him!"

Ethan pulls me back down onto the couch before I can lunge towards Eric, but it's a close call. I'm still growling under my breath when he tucks me under his arm. "Easy, little wolf."

"You're right." Eric laments, a pained expression on his handsome face. "I was weak, I was a coward. It's the worst mistake I've made in my entire life, and I will always regret it."

"You should." I snap. "You could have at least warned us. You could have at least told me that I had people watching me, spying on my pups!"

"I was afraid that if I told you, you'd never forgive me." He shares.

"You were right to fear that." I hiss, "Because I won't. Especially not now."

Ethan cuddles me closer. "If you're really sorry, you can start by helping us track the pups down. If we're right and they're being taken to your father, we're going to need someone with insider knowledge to help us get them back."

"I can't go back." Eric pales. "I told you, I've been exiled. If I set foot in the Southern Isles, I'll be killed on sight."

"Sounds fair to me." I snipe.

Ethan shoots me a look, "Or, you can go to your father and tell him you've made a grave mistake. Tell him you'll do whatever he asks in order to regain his good favor."

"He'll know it's a lie, he'll know I'm trying to help you get the pups back." He objects.

"Not if you reach out to him before they arrive, before he knows they're up for grabs." Ethan suggests.

"What if we're wrong?" Eric asks, "What if the pups aren't headed there at all?"

"Then you can still pay your penance by becoming a double agent." Ethan informs him coolly. "Aimon's bound to tell his son things he wouldn't let slip to his spies."

"He'll never trust me after I betrayed him." Eric insists.

"Too bad." I bite, "You don't have a choice. My pups are missing. Goddess only knows what they're suffering right now and if you think I'm going to have any sympathy for your traitorous behind when their lives are on the line, you are sorely mistaken."

"If he does get hold of them, what will he do?" Ethan questions, "you said part of your original mission was potentially holding Jane and the pups hostage, to what end?"

"I can't be sure." Eric hedges, "my father is insanely paranoid. He didn't tell me then what his end game was, but if I had to guess he would use them to try and lure you out into the open so he could attempt an assassination. Or he could attempt to engage you in a war, assuming he has reason to believe he could defeat you in combat."

A steady stream of swears pour from my lips as I mutinously grumble under my breath, glaring daggers at Eric as I imagine all the different ways I'd like to punish him. The mere suggestion of Ethan's death has my wolf raring for a fight. I didn't realize how protective I felt of him until this very moment.

The man in question is smothering a smile and petting me in a manner I'm sure is intended to be soothing, but it's not working. Feeling my mate's hands on my body does nothing but heat my blood. Usually it would spark my lust, but right now – when I'm already feeling completely bloodthirsty – it just eggs me on. Before too long he's holding me back again, and Eric is looking even more miserable than before.

"I'll do whatever I can to help." He offers.

"Of course you will." I scoff, "not helping was never an option you little weasel."

"Janey." Ethan scolds, not sounding the least bit disapproving, "play nice. We're going to have to learn to get along if we want to get the pups back."

"Get along with him?" I gape, "a month ago you were fighting him to the death! And that was before we knew what a traitor he is!" I'm a mom. I can't control my anger to Eric when I see the fact that my pups being kidnapped is related to him.

"It's for the pups, baby." Ethan reminds me, "for then we can put up with everything – even the weasel."

"You're right." I begrudgingly agree, shooting another hateful glower at Eric. "For the pups."