

## Chapter 53 - The Pups Go Shopping

### 3rd Person

Jane couldn't believe what she was hearing. She never imagined that Ethan would concede defeat at all, let alone without a lengthy battle. Now he was offering to just give her Paisley, but the idea of living with Ethan again was too overwhelming to contemplate – if she could even trust that he would keep his word.

“Why should I believe you'd actually let her go?” Jane asked suspiciously.

“Because I want what's best for her.” He stated gently, “And I'm man enough to admit when I've made a mistake.”

Jane eyed him skeptically. Ethan had changed course so suddenly she felt as if she had emotional whiplash. This day had been a complete roller coaster from start to finish, and she didn't know how to deal with the alpha's sudden about-face. At the same time, she'd never dreamed he would apologize for what happened between them. He actually looked truly remorseful, as if he was finally realizing just how badly he hurt her.

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"Jane listen," Ethan sighed heavily, searching his ex-wife's face, "Did becoming a parent change you?"

"Of course it did." She agreed easily, becoming a parent had been like being reborn herself. Life started over completely the moment she first held her pups in her arms, and it would never be the same again.

"Well it changed me too." Ethan professed. "I would do

anything for Paisley... and if anyone did to her what I did to you..." He trailed off, looking pained, "I think maybe you're right. I shouldn't be the one to raise her."

"Alright," Jane murmured hesitantly. He looked so sincere that she actually felt tempted to trust him. This was so unlike the Ethan she knew, and it was completely throwing her off. She needed to get away from him and clear her head, she couldn't think straight with his damnable scent filling her head, or the feeling of his dark eyes piercing straight through her. "I'll think about it."

"You will?" Ethan repeated, squeezing her shoulders.

"If-" Jane qualified, shaking him off. "you put it in writing."

"Of course I will." Ethan vowed. As he led Jane to the door, he tried not to let his excitement show. He knew if he pushed too hard, she'd never agree - and she had to agree. If his plan worked, it wouldn't even matter whether their deal was on paper or not, Jane would be his long before the deadline arrived.

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When Jane got home she called Eric and Linda for an emergency debrief. The kinds were still sulking after their collective meltdown, and though she checked on them after sending Sadie home, they weren't ready to talk yet. It was for the best, as much as she adored her

pups, her current problems couldn't be solved with kisses and cuddles – she needed advice in a big way.

"Hello Gorgeous," Eric greeted her a little while later, kissing her on the cheek as he swept into the apartment. Linda had already arrived and was currently pouring a bottle of wine into three very large glasses.

"Hey!" Jane greeted the handsome alpha. "Thanks for coming."

"Sure thing," He replied, brushing off her needless gratitude. "What's up?"

"Well," Jane dragged the word out nervously, wringing her hands. "I sort of did something a little crazy, and I'm hoping you won't hate me."

"I could never hate you." Eric assured her.

"Yeah?" Jane confirmed with a small smile, "how do you feel about having four kids?"

Eric glanced curiously at Linda, who offered him a confused look. "I'm not following you." He admitted, looking back to Jane.

"I kind of told Ethan my pups are yours." Jane confessed, blushing scarlet. "I accidentally admitted that Paisley is my daughter and that I made up the Elise Carrington identity... so to make up for it I said the kids weren't his: that you and I met and had a one night stand before Ethan and I got divorced, and that it's taken us until now

to get engaged because I have trust issues.”

Eric couldn't help but grin, “So not all a lie then?”

“No, I guess not.” Jane grinned sheepishly.

“Well,” He said brightly, “We were already faking an engagement, so this isn't that much crazier.”

Jane groaned, “Oh Goddess, you're right. This is crazy isn't it?”

“That's not how I meant it, honey.” Eric promised, patting her back and letting his big hand linger on her shoulder.

“He's right.” Linda contributed, joining them in the living room and offering them each a glass of wine. “This entire situation has been wild from the beginning. Don't think of it as you being crazy - just think of it as making the best of a crazy situation.”

“Well, speaking of crazy,” Jane continued, “That's not all that happened. I told Ethan I wanted custody of Paisley, and he figured out that Eve tricked him about the attack and apparently felt so guilt about it that he actually offered to let me have her - if the pups and I move in with him to help her acclimate.”

“Holy crap.” Linda gasped, taking a big gulp of wine.

“That's out of the question.” Ethan's response was so sudden and visceral both women were taken aback. “He

wouldn't truly give her up that easily - no matter how guilty he feels. It's got to be a trick."

"I don't know." Jane thought aloud, "I had the same instinct, but he seemed really sincere."

"Maybe he was sincerely guilty, but that doesn't mean his offer was genuine." Eric cautioned, "trust me, I know how alpha males think and I saw the way he was looking at you the other day. This is probably just a ruse to win you back somehow."

"At the same time, it probably would be good for Paisley." Linda added, unable to look Eric in the eye. She hated to disagree with him, but she also couldn't help but think Ethan had a point. "You're talking about uprooting her from everything she's ever known and she absolutely worships Ethan. Living with you and getting to know her siblings before she loses him isn't a bad idea."

"That's not the question." Eric argues harshly, making Linda flinch. "The question is whether or not he actually intends to give you Paisley."

"He's right." Jane agrees, looking back and forth between her friends as if wishing one of them could simply make the decision for her. "What am I going to do?"

Little did she know that her pups were on the other side of their bedroom door, asking themselves the very same question.

"Did you hear that?" Riley whispered with excitement, "We might get to go live with Daddy 'n' Paisley!"

"Yeah but Mommy doesn' seem too sure." Parker frowned.

"We can sue her!" Ryder suggested, "we just have to think of a way to make her wanna move in."

"But how?" Parker pondered, listening at the keyhole for another long stretch of the grown up's conversation.

"Uncle Eric seems grumpy."

"He likes Mommy." Riley informed the boys confidently, "Course he's not gonna want her to go."

"What was that word Mommy used about Paisley?" Ryder asked, "Custardy?"

"Something like that." Parker confirmed. "But I don' know what it means."

"It doesn' sound good either way." Riley decided.

"Otherwise she wouldn' be talking 'bout taking Paisley."

"She can't take her, we're s'posed to all be together." Parker objected.

"I know, I know." Riley confirmed, "so how can we make it happen?"

"Maybe Mommy would wanna move if the new 'partment was really icky." Ryder brainstormed, "like so icky it couldn' be cleaned."

"That's an idea." Parker nodded, "you know Mommy

hates messes.”

“But what kind of mess is big enough to make her wanna leave completely?” Riley asked her brothers, “It’d have to be really bad.”

The three pups put their little heads together and thought hard, their young faces scrunching up in thought while the adults continued to talk in the living room. After a few minutes of thinking, Riley’s face lit up with excitement. “I know someting that would make Mommy wanna get out ‘a here real fast!”

“What?” Her brothers asked eagerly, bouncing up and down beside her.

“Parker,” the little girl prompted slyly, “Do you still know where Mommy keeps the ‘mergency credit card?”

“Uh-huh,” He confirmed, “but what are we gonna use it for?”

“Well, ya know that time we were in the twain station, and Mommy saw a rat?” The pup asked.

“She screamed really loud.” Ryder giggled, remember the scene very clearly.

“I bet we can order some pet ones online!” Parker exclaimed, “if Mommy saw a rat in the house she’d freak out.”

“Exactly!” Riley grinned deviously.

Ryder nodded firmly. “I’ll get the computer, you get the credit card.”

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