

## Chapter 64 - Shock

Ethan

How pathetic is it that I've only been away from Jane a few hours, but I already miss her? It didn't help that the entire way through the kids' movie, I had nothing but time to think about my lovely mate. Strange as it seems, I just didn't find a bunch of animated woodland animals frolicking through a silly adventure as compelling as Jane. Still the kids enjoyed it, and my heart swelled in my chest the moment that Ryder crawled into my lap for no other reason than that he wanted to be close to me while we watched.

Now, as we return to the penthouse, I can't wait to watch them act out the story for their mother. They're currently debating the best part of the film, but the fine hairs on the back of my neck stand on end the closer we draw to the apartment building. As we round the corner, I see a blinding array of flashing lights, and police cars flooding the street in front of the entrance.

My first thought is of Jane, and before I can think twice, I scoop two pups up in each arm and race up to the first officer I see. "What happened?"

The woman pales the moment she sees me, "Alpha, I'm

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so sorry..." She begins, clearly unsure of how to voice her next words.

"Just tell me." I demand, feeling the pups anxious energy increase as my own spirals out of control.

"It's your mother." The officer utters as gently as she can. She glances at the children nervously, "she's gone, sir."

Too many feelings bombard me at once. I'm both relieved it's not my mate, and incapable of processing the shock of hearing my mother is dead. "I..." staring at the woman helplessly, I look down at the children in my arms, whose little faces are turned up at me in confusion. "Is there someone who can take care of them for a little while?"

Five minutes later I'm getting off the elevator, and immediately set eyes on Jane talking to a detective in the hallway. Her head turns my way the moment I step off, and then she's rushing towards me. Her eyes are red-rimmed, and she looks a bit shell-shocked. "Ethan don't, you don't want to go in there."

"What happened?" I reply, stroking her cheek, "are you okay?"

"I just came home and found her." Jane murmured, her voice sounding distant. "Please, I'm telling you, you don't want to see her that way."

"I have to." I tell her, setting her aside carefully. "You

should go downstairs to the pups.”

“No.” Jane argues, taking hold of my hand. “If you’re going to do this, I’m going with you.”

Together we walk down the hallway, and though I’ve trekked this stretch of flooring a hundred times before, tonight it seems ten kilometers long. It takes forever for us to finally reach the doorway, and the scent of blood is so heavy in the air that it clogs all my other senses.

When we finally reach the door, I feel like I’m walking through a dream – a nightmare to be more exact. My mother is lying in the middle of the foyer, surrounded by evidence markers and a pool of crimson. Her eyes are wide and unseeing, and where her throat is supposed to be, there is only a gaping scarlet hole of torn muscle and tissue.

I lead Jane forward, standing over my mother’s prone body with blood rushing in my ears. None of this seems real. The only thing I can think is that I want to close her eyes. I start to bend down to do so, but Jane stops me. “We can’t touch her.” She cautions, and for the first time I notice that her shoes are bloody on the soles. She must have walked close enough to confirm Mom was gone before retreating and calling the authorities.

Rising back up, I nod and turn to the investigator behind us. “What do we know?”



"We don't have to talk about that right now." Jane interrupts before he can answer, her small hand rubbing my shoulders.

"Yes we do." I insist. I can't deal with feelings right now. "Someone killed her in my own home, that means we might all be at risk."

"Well there was no forced entry, and no signs of a major struggle, which suggests it was probably someone she knew." The investigator explains. "As you can see her throat was ripped out, but from the looks of it, it was a small paw – so probably a woman."

"Is there any evidence that Eve has been here?" I demand instantly.

"No sir, and frankly, we don't know what her motive would be for attacking your mother. They got on well didn't they?" The man inquires.

"They did, but I warned you less than a week ago that this would happen if she wasn't caught!" I remind him, feeling my temper begin to slip. Ⓜ

"Sir we have no reason –" Ⓜ

"Okay!" Jane interrupts. "Enough. This is not the time. This has all just happened, you haven't had time to investigate anything," she reminded the investigator pointedly. "And you," she says, turning to me, "are in shock."

"I am not." I object. "I simply want to find the person responsible, and every moment counts."

"I said enough." Jane repeats in her best Mom voice, before leading me away. "Look at me Ethan." Raising my eyes to her reluctantly, I see only an outpouring of compassion. "I'm so sorry. I know how much your mother meant to you, and I can only imagine how difficult it is to process all this. The next few days are going to be hard enough to get through without you getting in trouble for attacking that idiot investigator."

Nodding, I agree and drag a hand through my hair. "I guess... I guess we should pack some bags for us and the pups and find someplace to stay tonight. I presume you can go back to Linda's for a night or two?" I suggest, "and I'll get a hotel."

To my surprise Jane snorts. "If you think we're leaving you on your own tonight, you are out of your mind."

"Jane, I'm okay, honestly." I protest.

"We'll get a hotel together, and tomorrow I'll help you make arrangements." She corrects me, "Now go pack a bag."

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A few hours later I wake to hear Jane tossing and turning in her bed, moaning in her sleep and crying softly. Rising from my unfamiliar hotel bed, I cross the suite and push

open the door to her bedroom, instantly seeing her struggling in the tangles of her bedsheets – as if she's fighting them.

Moving to her side, I shake her awake as gently as I can. "Wake up Janey, it's only a dream."

She thrashes around for a few moments more before opening her stunning green eyes. Her wolf glows bright behind them, her panting breath and racing heart gradually slowing as she returns to the present. "It was only a dream." I repeat, sitting beside her.

Blinking tears out of her eyes, she scrubs a hand over her face. "I can't stop seeing her." She admits in a small voice.

I understand better than I can admit, my own dreams were filled with images of my mother's brutalized body, but when I think about it I still feel nothing but a bottomless void – a gaping black hole in my chest. The only feeling I can muster is sympathy for my mate, sympathy I should have felt earlier if I hadn't been so distracted by the shock of losing my mother.

"Poor baby, I didn't even think about how upsetting it must have been for you to find her that way." I purr, wrapping my arms around her.

"This isn't the way it's supposed to be." She snuffles. "I'm supposed to be comforting you, not the other way around."

Sliding under the covers beside her, I encourage her to lie down with me. "The only thing I can focus on right now is dealing with the threat against our family."

"Ethan she was your mother." Jane murmurs, "This time is your chance to say goodbye to her. You can't waste it on denial and anger."

"I can't help it." I confess, "Every time I think about it, it just doesn't seem real."

The soft pitter patter of tiny feet interrupts us, and before I know it four sets of bright eyes are glowing on either side of us. "Daddy, we went to your room but you weren't there." Paisley whispers loudly.

They're already climbing into bed with us, not bothering to wait for permission. "Why were you looking for me, angel?" I ask, even as their little bodies begin forcing their way between Jane and I, until I'm cushioned by puppies on all sides.

"Cuz Mommy always lets us sleep with her when we're sad." Parker answers, from somewhere around my elbow, "And you seem sad."

"Thank you my loves." Jane praises them, cuddling Riley to her chest, "This is exactly what he needs." I can hear the second part of her sentence clear as day in my head, though she didn't have to say it, even if he doesn't realize it.