

## Chapter 75 - Ethan Faces the Press

Ethan

The day after the arrest, I wake up before dawn, striding into the kitchen to make a pot of coffee and rouse my exhausted brain. It's still dark out, but when I exit my bedroom I can see the lights are already on down the hall. When I reach the living room I find Jane curled up in the window seat, wide awake and staring out at the waking city.

Frowning deeply, I move to her side, my concern growing when she doesn't seem to detect my presence. She's completely lost in her thoughts, and when I reach out to touch her shoulder, she jerks away from me as if she's been electrocuted.

"Easy, Jane." I shush her softly, "It's only me."

Her wide eyes relax slightly, a heavy sigh expelling from her lungs. However she doesn't relax completely, her muscles are still wound tight as a spring, and my heart aches just looking at her distraught face. "Sorry," She mutters weakly, "you startled me."

"Have you been up all night?" I question, studying the dark circles beneath her eyes.

She shrugs, averting her gaze. "I had a lot on my mind."

Thankfully it's Sunday, so she doesn't have to go into work, but I can't help worrying for my poor mate. "Sweetheart, that's no good." I scold gently, suddenly regretting letting her go to bed alone. I'd been sorely tempted to stay with her until she fell asleep, but she clearly wanted to be alone so I didn't force the issue. "The pups won't be up for a few hours, you ought to try to get in some rest before they wake."

"I can't." Jane admits, her rosy lips tugging downward. "I tried to sleep, but I couldn't get my brain to turn off." Normally I would suggest a glass of wine to help send her off, but five o'clock in the morning seems a bit early to start drinking. Instead I gather her into my arms, ignoring the way she jolts and squirms to escape. Taking a seat on the sofa, I cuddle her to my chest and begin to purr softly, knowing that no matter her omega instincts are buried, she'll never be immune to my comfort.

"Ethan, I don't want to sleep." She objects, still wriggling despite the fact that her nose is pressed to my chest and she's obviously smelling me. Silly little omega, I think, does she really think I don't know what she's doing?

Chuckling darkly, I snuggle her close and stroke her hair, "Now you're just being stubborn."

"I'm not stubborn." She mutters mutinously, her dark

lashes fluttering despite her words.

"Just go to sleep, baby." I encourage, kissing her hair and trying not to get distracted by her own delectable scent.

Little by little Jane submits, falling into a sleep so deep that she doesn't even stir when I carry her to bed. Depositing her between the silky sheets, I try to pull away, only to find her small fists clenched in my shirt. It isn't easy to disentangle her, but I finally succeed, hoping she'll stay asleep once I leave.

When I finally make it back out to the kitchen and collect the morning paper, I'm relieved Jane fell asleep, because the morning news is far from good. Once again her photo is splashed across the headlines, only this time mine is alongside her, and the story below details her arrest and my intervention at the police station.

The words "corruption" and "abuse of power" leap off the page, assaulting my tired mind as my coffee brews, and I know I have to do something. I don't know what is going on with the lead investigator. Perhaps he simply believes he's right and is too prideful to consider another explanation, taking every challenge as an assault on his authority. Or it may be the case that he's pursuing his own agenda and is deliberately trying to sabotage us.

Either way, Jane has been as skittish as a frightened rabbit ever since he spoke to her at the funeral, and

regardless of the impact on my family, he's following the wrong lead. Eve is still out there somewhere waiting to wreak more havoc, and neither Jane nor the pups are safe as long as she's free.

Calling my second in command, Matthew, I direct him to arrange a press conference for this afternoon, and set about preparing my statement.

A few hours later, I'm standing in front of a throng of reporters, camera flashes bursting in front of my eyes as I stare them down.

"Thank you all for being here today," I begin, trying to keep my temper in check, "I appreciate you taking the time to come out. I know there has been a great deal in the news about my family lately, specifically my former mate, Jane. I can confirm that Elise Carrington is, in fact, Jane Blackwell, but this is where the news's accuracy ceases. While our past has not always been smooth sailing, we have reconciled our differences and appreciate the pack respecting our privacy in this matter. We are only interested in moving forward, particularly after the tragic events surrounding my mother's murder."

It still feels strange to talk about my mother in the past tense, let alone to say the word 'murder' relating to someone so close to me, but I forge on without pausing.

"Despite what you may have been told, Jane had

absolutely nothing to do with this crime. The person responsible is Eve Mechant, who also engineered the attacks for which Jane was blamed in the police reports recently leaked by the investigative team, as well as my daughter's attempted murder. I am extremely disturbed by the police and the media's insistence on persecuting an innocent woman when Eve remains at large. I urge all members of the pack to be on the lookout for Ms. Mechant, as she is a grave threat to public safety."

"As for the accusations of corruption levied against me, I ask you the following: is the true abuse of power standing up for what is right and defending the innocent, or neglecting one's duty and allowing a dangerous criminal to roam free, because an easier target is available to take the fall?" A string of mutters moves through the crowds, and I can't keep the growl out of my voice as I conclude, "I am determined to hold the responsible parties in these terrible events accountable, and you have my word as Alpha that I will not rest until our city is safe and order restored. I will not be taking any questions, and thank you again for your time."

This prompts an explosion of flashes and shouts from the audience, but I ignore them and leave the dais, my temper still dangerously close to snapping. However, that only lasts for a moment because as I step off the podium,

I see Jane standing just inside the door, watching me with her fingers pressed to her lips. I had no idea she was going to be here, and the astonished look on her face sparks a pang in my chest. Ignoring the press, I go to her and wrap her in a hug, lifting her feet off the ground as I squeeze her tight. "It's going to be okay." I promise.

"You didn't have to do that." Jane murmurs into the curve of my neck.

"Yes I did." I insist, setting her down and cradling her cheek in my hand. "You don't deserve what they're saying about you, and Eve can't be allowed to get away with this."

"Thank you." Jane breathes, hugging me again.

My heart swells as she freely offers me affection, and I decide to use her good will to my advantage. "You know, we never got to celebrate our anniversary, and you owe me quite a few dates." I tell her. We never discussed what would happen with the dates we canceled after Mom's murder, but I have every intention of making up for lost time now.

"Oh yeah?" Jane smiles, her beautiful green eyes glittering.

"Yeah," I confirm, "So what do you say? Let's play hooky tomorrow and go do something fun."

"I shouldn't," Jane sighs, "I've already missed so much

work with everything that's been going on."

"Yeah, but you haven't done anything for yourself." I argue, "you've been taking care of me, taking care of the pups, fending off the police. You're so stressed out, Janey. You deserve a break."

Jane shifts restlessly, peeking up at me from beneath her lashes. "What would we even do?"

"I dunno," I muse, trying to think of some activities that don't involve Jane naked and in my bed, which is suddenly all I can think about. "We could go apple picking, or hiking - maybe bowling."

"Not without the pups." Jane shakes her head. "Those kinds of activities should be with the whole family."

"Hmm," I ponder, well then how about wine tasting?" I suggest.

Jane beams, "that's the best idea you've had all day."

Chuckling, I decide, "alright then. It's a date."

