

## Chapter 84 Blackmail

Ethan

It takes almost an hour to get Paisley down for a nap, she's so distraught by the idea of losing one of her parents. I feel like an absolute monster: as if it wasn't bad enough that the other pups now think I'm a villain, my daughter's obvious pain is ripping me to pieces.

When I finally get Paisley down, I join Jane in the kitchen. She's standing over the stove stirring vegetables in a pan, silent tears sliding down her cheeks. "Hey," I murmur, reaching for her arm, "what is it?"

Jane jumps three feet in the air, turning towards me in surprise and hastily swiping at her tears. "Hi," she hiccups, "I'm sorry, I'm fine."

"You don't have to apologize for crying." I tell her softly. "And you're clearly not fine."

"I am." She insists stubbornly, sliding out of my reach, "this is just harder than I thought it would be. That's all." She admits.

"I know." I sigh, scrubbing my hand over my face. "This really isn't how I thought this evening would go."

"I just want one day, one day that isn't filled with tears

or drama.” Jane laments, her voice thick with emotion. “I suppose that’s not a realistic expectation when you have kids.”

“I don’t think most people’s lives are this crazy, Janey.” I tell her wryly, “and I don’t think ours is going to be like this forever. We’ve been through a lot lately.”

“Well when does it stop?” Jane bursts out, stomping her little foot in indignation and looking at me with a sulky frown. “You’re an Alpha, can’t you just snap your fingers and fix everything?”

Chuckling softly, I have to resist the urge to pull her close. I wish I had that power more than she could ever know. I’d do absolutely anything for Jane and the pups, and nothing fills me with more guilt than being helpless to fix their worries and fears. “Earlier tonight I actually thought I might have a solution for us.” I share, “I spoke to the investigator today.”

“Really?” Jane perks up, “did he find something on Eve?” Suddenly I realize that I got so excited about the DNA results that I managed to overlook how Jane would take the news of the investigator finding more evidence against her. Internally hitting myself, I try to backtrack. “No, actually, he found something he believed would prove your motive, but I told him he was an idiot.”

“How is that a solution for us?” Jane demands, “What did

he find?"

"Well it seems my mother wasn't convinced that the kids belonged to Eric. She had a DNA test done – on all four pups." I share, wincing in anticipation of her reaction.

All the blood drains from her beautiful face, and her entire body winds up tight as a spring. "She did?"

"You never had an affair, did you?" I press, decided to push past her discomfort and get right to the point. "You knew they were mine all along."

She bristles, "How do you even know the test she got was legit? Maybe she forged it – it's not that hard if you know someone at the facility."

"You would know." I remark coolly, narrowing my eyes at her. "I'm sure you were planning to do exactly that if I ever had my own paternity test run. But she had it done out of the territory, I highly doubt she kept in contact with foreign lab techs."

"She could have still bribed them." Jane mutters, crossing her arms over her chest before squaring her shoulders and glaring at me. "And anyway, what does this have to do with her murder?"

"He thinks you killed her because she told you about the test and you wanted to stop her from revealing the results to me." I explain, scanning her features and waiting for her to say more, even if it is only to deny the

test's veracity. "Is that really all you have to say about this?"

"What do you want me to say, Ethan?" She asks, "your mind is made up, just like that investigator's mind is made up."

"Then what harm can it do to come clean?" I question, "I already know the truth, so just admit it."

"If you know that there's no reason for me to admit it." Jane snaps, turning back to the stove.

I nab her trim waist, turning her to face me and towering over her with my most intimidating glare. "Yes there is." I growl. "I want to hear you say it. I deserve that much, Janey."

Jane can't seem to look me in the eye. Her gaze keeps skirting around the kitchen as she tries to escape my scrutiny, but I'm certain she can feel the weight of my regard. She begins shifting from foot to foot, squirming uncomfortably, but I hold out. I keep pinning her with my piercing gaze, waiting for her to pluck up the courage to admit the truth, or simply to surrender to my dominance. "Look at me, little wolf." I order after a few moments, putting all my Alpha authority into my tone. When she finally inches her glittering green irises to mine, I command, "Say it."

The words are dragged from her lips without her

permission, her wolf caving to my demand even though Jane wants to keep fighting. "Fine, they're yours!" She cries, "but that doesn't mean you should get to keep them. You lost that right when you made me your slave, and they want to go home with me." She reminds me, making my stomach churn. "I am going to marry Eric, and if the pups want to be with their stepfather instead of you, you need to respect that."

"What about Paisley?" I snarl, "She doesn't want to choose, and the kids only just found out about what happened between us. They might not be mad at me forever."

"They might not be, but I will." She argues, wrenching at my grip. "You may have changed, Ethan, but some crimes are too terrible to forgive. No one capable of doing what you did to me belongs around children."

"No!" I thunder, "you can say whatever you like about our marriage, but you cannot claim I am a bad father. You never would have left Paisley with me if you thought she wouldn't be safe -"

"I didn't have a choice!" Jane interjects, raising her voice so loudly that I'm afraid she'll wake the sleeping children.

Glancing towards the pups bedroom, I shush her gently.

"I might not have been a good husband-"

She scoffs, interrupting me again and sorely tempting to

shut her saucy mouth with my own, but I forge on ahead.

"This is one thing you cannot take from me. I am a good father and you know it."

"Fine!" Jane hisses. "But the pups need to be together, and they need to be with me. You saw what being without me has done to Paisley."

"And I promised her I would never leave her like you did."

I bite back before I can stop myself. "She's the one who's going to be hurt in all of this. The other pups might be okay, but you're asking her to live without one of her parents again. Don't you care about her?"

Jane jerks in my arms, looking as if she's been slapped.

"Of course I care about her." She insists thickly, "I love her every bit as much as I love the others... and in some ways she's more precious to me, because she's had to fight for every day of her life, and I've gotten so little time with her. I want what's best for all of them, and that means being with me, and being with a male role model deserving of their affection."

Now it's my turn to reel back. Her words slice through me so sharply I want to double over in pain. A few hours ago I thought I was finally getting everything I wanted, and now I feel as though everything is slipping out of my reach all at once. My wolf is raging inside me, and I can feel my control slipping. My temper is blazing hotter and

hotter with every moment that passes, and I know I should walk away before I say something I regret. Yet at the same time, I'm afraid if I walk away now I won't get another chance to convince Jane: she'll consider the battle won, and begin making plans to leave.

"Is Eric still going to want to marry you if he finds out you cheated on him?" I demand.

"Excuse me?" Jane responds, clenching her fangs.

"How would your fiance react if he knew we slept together a few days ago?" I threaten, "if he knew how completely you surrendered yourself to me, how many times you came screaming my name?"

"How dare you!" She explodes, jerking free of me at last.

"Are you blackmailing me? You think if he doesn't want to marry me, I'll stay with you?"

I know this is a mistake, but I can't seem to stop myself. The damage has already been done, and all I can do as I spiral towards self destruction is hold on for dear life.

"You haven't answered my question."

"He already knows." Jane growls, "I told him after we got back from the vineyard. Luckily for me he is good man capable of forgiveness, unlike you. But thank you for confirming what I already knew, Ethan. Thank you for making it so clear that we don't have any future here."

I stare after her as she storms from the room, my heart

sinking into my stomach like a rock. Whatever Jane says, I know Eric is less honorable than she believes, and I know he's hiding things – why else is he fighting so hard to take her and the pups from me? I've held off on investigating him before now, but that ends today. I'm going to figure out his secrets and expose them to Jane – before it's too late.

I will make sure Jane will be back to me. Nothing Nobody could stop me.

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