

Chapter 85 Jane Sets a Date

Jane

"I swear he's losing it." The man in question is back home with our pups, while I try to wrap my head around what just happened with the help of Linda and Eric. I'm seated on my friend's plush sofa, with Eric beside me and Linda looking on from the kitchen while she brews a pot of tea. "He threatened to blackmail me tonight."

"I warned you he wasn't really going to let the pups go." Eric frowns, "what on earth did he try to blackmail you with?"

My face flushes with color as I stare at my lap, fidgeting nervously. "Well..." I begin, trying to find the courage to speak the words aloud.

"Oh I know that look!" Linda chimes in, a note of humor in her voice. "What did you do, you bad girl?"

"I sort of slept with him." I confess, burying my face in my hands rather than face their scrutiny. "So he threatened to tell Eric so he'd call off our wedding."

"I knew it!" Linda exclaims, "How did it happen, when did it happen - I want details!"

"You slept with him?!" Eric adds, sounding appalled.

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"It was the other day, when we went wine tasting." I share, peeking at Eric through my fingers and seeing his furious face. "We got a little tipsy and -"

"You were drunk?" Eric repeats, immediately rising to my defense. "He took advantage of you!"

"He didn't." I murmur. "I mean yes I lowered my inhibitions, but I wanted it. I've been resisting him for so long." Eric is fuming, and I suddenly feel very guilty for sharing this with him when I know he has feelings for me. "I'm sorry." I profess, resting my hand on his arm, "I shouldn't be sharing this kind of thing with you. I'm not trying to be insensitive, I just... I told him you already knew."

"No it's okay." He assures me, quickly covering my hand with his own, "I need to know these things if I'm going to help you. If he says anything about it, I'll pretend I knew

all along.”

“Are you sure?” I inquire hesitantly. “I feel like I’m asking way too much of you.”

“I’m sure.” Eric promises, “and if you ask me Ethan isn’t losing it, he’s just showing you his true colors. If you want to see the man behind the mask you should keep pushing him, otherwise you’ll simply be letting him fool you again.”

Linda, clearly reading my slightly affronted energy, interjects, “I don’t think she “let” him do anything.” She says with a frown, her eyes locked on Eric even as she speaks to me. “And I don’t know that pushing him is a good idea, Janey. He’s clearly feeling desperate and more conflict isn’t good for anyone. I don’t believe he’s trying to repeat history here, but if you force him into a corner he might lash out and do it anyway.”

“You underestimate the depth of his cruelty.” Eric tells her bleakly.

I can’t recall ever seeing Linda argue with Eric, they’ve always gotten along like gangbusters, but now she actually seems annoyed with him. “If I’m underestimating him then it’s all the more reason to be cautious. Why are you giving her such bad advice?”

“Please don’t argue, you guys.” I beg, “I’ve got enough discord at home. I just want to relax with my friends.”

Eric softens almost immediately, patting my leg in comfort, "I'm sorry, you're right."

Linda seems more reluctant to drop the matter at hand, still seeming preoccupied with Eric. If I didn't know any better I might think she was angry he's giving me so much attention, but surely if she liked him she would have told me. She's known Eric for years and never even hinted at being interested in him. "I don't understand." She muses, finally turning away from him. "How did the pups even find out about Ethan enslaving you?"

"I don't know." I answer simply, pursing my lips, "my best guess is that they were eavesdropping again. Eric you were with them today, did they mention anything to you?"

Eric blinks, looking off into the distance and racking his brain. "No, they seemed fine. But if they overheard something and asked Ethan about it, I doubt they waited very long – which means whatever they heard probably happened tonight. Is there any reason Ethan might have been talking to someone about it?"

This hadn't occurred to me, but I realize he's right. The pups would have certainly been impatient to find out the truth about whatever they heard, so it must have happened today. A niggling doubt enters the back of my mind. The only two people who were with them today

were Eric and Ethan. I know Eric would never do anything to hurt me... but Ethan just found out the pups belonged to him...

"What is it?" Linda presses, her brow furrowed in concern as she reads my expression.

"Nothing," I deflect, "I just..." Trailing off, I rise to my feet, beginning to pace. "Is that tea ready yet?"

"Let me check," Linda responds, jumping up.

"What's going on Jane, this clearly isn't nothing." Eric observes, standing as well.

"I think I'm becoming paranoid." I moan, wringing my hands. "I mean Ethan just made a very public statement blaming Eve for Petra's murder. He's defended me with the investigator at every turn and he truly seems to regret what happened between us..."

"But?" Eric prompts.

"Well, what if he was talking on the phone to his beta or something, about taking me prisoner again now that he has proof the pups are his?" I fret.

"I think that's entirely possible." Eric agrees gravely, moving closer as if he wants to comfort me, but isn't sure if I'll accept it. I can't help but think how different he and Ethan are - Ethan would comfort me regardless. If he thought I needed it he'd impose it even if I fought him tooth and nail... and he'd probably be right. How twisted

is it that he's the reason I'm afraid of letting people get too close to me, and yet he's the only one hard headed enough to force his way in and give me what I won't let myself have?

"And I think that's a total leap!" Linda calls from the kitchen, strolling back in a few moments later with a tea tray. "You have absolutely no reason to think that, Jane. And if he was talking to someone about it, it was probably his regrets about the past."

"And how is that not a leap?" Eric questions her stiffly.

"First of all because the pups found out about the past, if he'd been talking about doing something in the future they probably would have told Jane, especially because they clearly turned against him." Linda reasons, "And second, because I've been here the last four years watching him like a hawk. I've seen him raising Paisley and I'm telling you he's changed. He isn't faking it."

My friend's words are a welcome balm to my tormented nerves. I know Eric wants to help, but he seems so protective of me that he's become as paranoid as I am – as if he was vicariously traumatized watching me try to recover from Ethan, while Linda's heart softened watching Ethan cope with my death. I know they're both on my side, and I know Linda might be biased in the other direction, but she's sounding more logical than Eric

at the moment.

"Thank you." I breathe, accepting a cup of tea and letting the warm steam waft over me. "You're right, I'm being a little crazy."

"It's okay babes, we all get a bit crazy sometimes." Linda reminds me, glancing pointedly at Eric, who is mutinously grumbling under his breath.

I sip my tea and return to my seat. "I think this just shows that I was right about leaving. I can't wait for the perfume launch, I need to get the pups back home sooner rather than later."

"What about Paisley's physical therapy?" Linda asks.

"I'll have to find a therapist there." I suggest. "And I know it's going to be hard for her to leave Ethan, but it will be better for all of us to rip the bandaid off rather than drawing out the pain."

"You may be right." She agrees, "but what about the investigation, you're not supposed to leave the territory."

"They can only stop me if they catch me before I get out." I remind her. "The Dark Moon pack isn't going to extradite their top business woman when the Alpha of this territory doesn't even support the investigation."

"That's right." Eric agrees with a wide smile, looking much calmer now. "And if they try they'll have to go through me."

I grin at his cheesy line. I still don't feel sure about starting to date anyone, but I have to think that after everything he's done for me.

Could Eric at least deserve a chance? Will it be a fresh start for all of us? It seems so. But something about Eric just doesn't make me feel right.

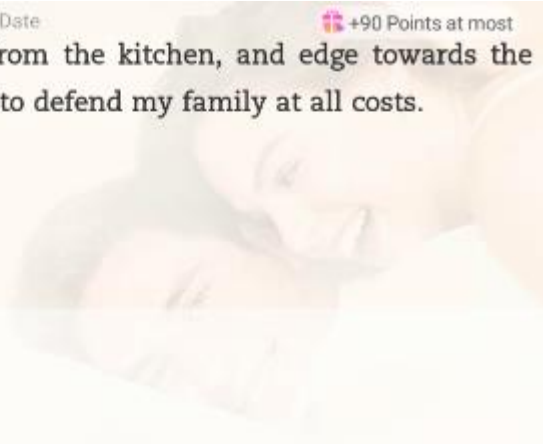
I so hope I would have my wolf to discuss about it and to clear my confusions.

Two nights later I'm lying awake in my bed, trying to list everything I need to do before we leave – including the not so little details of telling Ethan and Paisley, when I hear an odd scraping sound at the door. At first I assume it's Ethan coming home – he went out with his beta and I haven't heard him come in yet, even though it's nearly three am.

Still, the scraping doesn't end with a slight jingle of keys and the door clicking open and shut. Instead it drags on for two full minutes, soon followed by a few dull thumps. My heart rate increasing, I slide out of bed and edge toward the door. "Who's there?" I whisper anxiously. Has Eve escaped? Is someone else breaking in?

The scraping begins again as I draw closer, and my heart races in my chest. Someone is trying to get into the house, and that means my pups are in danger.

I grab a knife from the kitchen, and edge towards the door – prepared to defend my family at all costs.



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