

Chapter 86 Ethan Goes on a Bender

Jane

As I stare at the knife in my hands, I have to smother a shiver. I'm not sure I could actually go through with stabbing someone – and it occurs to me that any thief or burglar might just as easily take the weapon from my hands and use it against me.

Maybe I should just call the police? I think nervously. Or Ethan, he might be a pain in my ass but if he thought we were in danger he'd be here faster than any cop. Still my protective maternal instincts are in high gear, and I know I'm willing to risk my own life to defend my pups.

I'm almost to the peephole, still uncertain if investigating is the most sensible choice, when I hear a familiar growl. "Janey?" Ethan's muddled voice rises on the other side of the door, and I immediately relax. "I know you're there," he slurs in a sing song voice, "I can smell you!"

Oh goddess, he's drunk. I realize, lowering the knife. I set it down on the hall table, striding forward without hesitation. So drunk he can't open the damned door.

Wrenching the door open, I almost topple over when Ethan's big body falls into my legs. He must have been sitting with his back to the door, because now his head is

resting against my knee as I struggle to stay upright. Groaning, I bend down and hook my arms beneath his own, "Come on you, on your feet!" I encourage, trying to lift him and failing, "Oh for fuck's sake, you weight a ton!" Ethan chuckles, surging to his feet and reaching out to steady himself by latching onto the nearest object – which unfortunately happens to be me. The next thing I know we're tumbling to the ground together, and despite his clear inebriation, he does manage to roll so that my fall is cushioned by his body. Swearing, I try to scramble off of him, but he's faster, rising to his feet and carrying me with him. I don't untense until my feet are firmly back on the ground. As strong as he is, I don't trust him to stand on his own two feet right now, let alone support my weight.

"You better not be making a habit of this, Ethan." I scold. This is the second time since I've returned that he's gone on a bender like this, drowning his sorrows in booze.

"Why not?" He grumbles, "You're about to leave, and take the pups with you... what will it matter if I become a drunk?"

"Because that isn't you." I proclaim gently, leading him towards his room. "You don't give up and wallow, or lie around feeling sorry for yourself."

"Maybe I do. I've never been completely alone before,

maybe that's who I am without my family." He suggests, stumbling along behind me.

"It isn't," I insist, closing the door behind us. "This is just the booze talking. You scared me half to death by the way. I thought someone was breaking in." It's feeling much easier to be angry with him than to contemplate that he might be speaking the truth. "What were you even thinking, coming home in this state? What if the pups had found you instead of me?"

"I'm sorry, you're right." He answers hazily, turning around on the spot. "I'll go, I'll go sleep it off somewhere."

"No, no!" I object, catching him before he can escape the bedroom, "You're already here. Just get into bed." I instruct.

Ethan is swaying on his feet, but he seems to hone in on me now, looking down at me with tortured intensity. "I'm so sorry, Janey." He laments. "I didn't want to hurt you, I never wanted to hurt you."

"It's okay, Ethan." I lie, wanting to get this over with. "Just go to sleep, you'll feel better in the morning."

"No I wont. I'll never feel better." He groans, taking my face between his hands. "Please don't take them, please don't leave. I don't have anything without you and the pups."

"That isn't true, you still have the pack." I remind him,

"We were never meant to be together anyway. Alphas and omegas don't mix, everyone tried to warn us, it's our fault we didn't listen." My fingers close around his wrists, though I can't seem to detach his hands from my cheeks. "Besides, for all we know you have a fated mate out there waiting for you to find her." I say, speaking one of my deepest, longest hidden secrets aloud since I know he won't remember it.

It's a very strange thing, to fear something so much when it would solve all my problems. Still, the idea has haunted me from the first day Ethan and I got together. It stuck through our worst days, and even remained after I left him. Every time Linda checked in with me to report on Paisley's status, I kept waiting for her to tell me that he'd found his real mate

"No." He insists, shaking his head so vigorously it makes him dizzy. He finally releases me so he can hold onto his own temples, but he's undeterred. "I don't. It's you, it's only ever been you. I don't care if the Goddess sends me a hundred mates, I will only ever want you."

"Lots of people say that until they've met the one." I state, trying to sound like I don't care, or like I actually want this to happen. "Then their childhood sweethearts get tossed to the curb like yesterday's trash."

"Silly little wolf." Ethan scoffs, shaking his head as if I've

completely lost my mind. "Don't you realize I already met her."

"What?" I repeat, stunned and certain I've misheard him.

"I already met my fated mate – years ago, before everything went wrong." He announces, baffling me completely. "She didn't hold a candle to you."

"What?" I parrot, apparently incapable of coming up with any other words. "Ethan look at me, how much did you have to drink?"

"I'm not hallucinating, or dreaming." He mumbles, reaching for me again. I back away, leading him closer to the bed like a dog chasing a bone. "We'd been married for almost two years, and she was traveling through the territory with her family. My wolf recognized her immediately."

I freeze in place, stopping just a bit too long and getting myself nabbed by the handsy Alpha once more. "I... if that's true why didn't you ever tell me?"

"I didn't want you to be jealous, or doubt my love for you." He explains, nuzzling my neck. She was a perfectly lovely she wolf, but she wasn't you."

Oh no, there go my knees. All my insides are trying to melt, so I throw another wrench into his story. "And when you thought I'd died... you didn't try to find her?"

"Finding her wouldn't have brought you back – and that's

all I wanted.” His big, tree trunk arms are circling me now, surrounding me with warmth. “I had everything I needed with Paisley, except for you.”

I feel like I’ve got emotional whiplash, like every time I hit rock bottom I’m catapulted onto the top of a mountain, only to plunge down again. Which is why I don’t let myself fall for the warm fuzzy feeling in my chest, even though it’s threatening to take over me completely.

“And then I found out about Riley, Parker and Ryder...” Ethan continues thickly, beginning to ramble out every last one of his drunken thoughts. “the pups I never knew I needed until they were here... and now they hate me... now you’re going to take them away.”

Well that was even faster than I expected. Guilt and pain consume me so abruptly they steal the breath from my lungs... or is it the huge wolf squeezing me like a security blanket? Gasping for air, I struggle to pry Ethan’s arms off of me, “too tight!” I warn him hoarsely. “Ethan, I can’t breathe.”

“Sorry,” he apologizes, loosening his grip.

Of course, once he does I realize it hasn’t helped. Sure my lungs aren’t being physically crushed anymore, but the emotional pain remains. It’s hard to deny how badly Ethan is suffering at the moment, and there’s no doubt it’s my fault. I’d like to think that this will all go away in

the morning when sobriety returns, but I know better.

As I tuck Ethan into bed, I try to reconcile my guilt, with the strange joy of hearing that he truly chose me over his fated mate, and the knowledge that I can't let this change anything. Suddenly I see the appeal of trying to erase all my tumultuous emotions with the numbing power of alcohol, but Ethan is all the evidence I need to see that would only be a temporary fix, and one that would get me into more trouble. Instead I put him to bed, and return to my own, praying that he won't remember any of this in the cold light of day, and wishing I could forget too.

Can I?

