

Chapter 87 Eric Tells a Lie

Ethan

I don't remember leaving the bar last night, but somehow I managed to get home and into bed.

Of course, I don't need to remember to feel the horrible after effects of my foolish behavior. My beta, Matthew, tried to convince me to leave when I started feeling the effects of pouring half a bottle of scotch into an oversized tumbler and calling it a 'little drink', but I wasn't in the mood to listen. One little drink became three, and before long I succeeded in reaching blissful oblivion – though it doesn't feel even a little bit blissful now. Part of me feels ashamed of setting such a horrible example for my pups, but the other part simply reminds me that I'm not going to have pups for much longer.

Glancing at the clock, I can see it's already 9am, which means I'm officially late for work. Sitting up in bed, the room begins to spin violently, and all of a sudden working from home seems like the only way I'm going to get anything done today.

When I finally emerge from my bedroom, our babysitter Sadie is already playing with the pups in the living room. Only Paisley greets me good morning, and I try not to let

getting the cold shoulder from the other pups' affect me, but who am I kidding? Only a parent without a heart wouldn't be bothered by this.

Whether they're willing to talk to me or not, Sadie shouldn't have to stay here all day if I'm present, so I send her home and go about setting up a work station for myself in the kitchen. The morning is quiet and admittedly rather unproductive, since I can't focus on anything but the children silently despising me in the living room. However, by lunch I'm almost feeling human again.

By the time the pups' afternoon nap rolls around, I'm desperate for a shower, and immediately retreat to the warm steam as soon as they're down for the count. However when I emerge, the house seems oddly quiet. It takes me a moment to realize why. As distant and soft as the sounds of their slumbering breaths and beating hearts are, my keen senses have become completely attuned to the muted tunes of their bodies.

I burst into the pups' bedrooms, unsurprised but horrified to find it empty. Charging out into the main living area, I scan every inch of the room, but they're nowhere to be found. Next I search the hallways and stairwell, as well as the elevator, roof and building lobby. After all is said and done one thing is abundantly, terribly clear: they're

gone.

I'm seconds away from calling the police, when I decide to check with Jane just in case. Maybe she came home in the few minutes I was showering.

"Jane?" I greet her calmly, trying not to panic.

"Hi, is everything okay?" She asks hesitantly. We texted this morning when I decided to stay home, but I don't know why she sounds so on edge— unless of course she's feeding off my own energy. Still, I thought I was hiding my anxiety better than that.

"Do you have the pups?" I inquire bluntly.

"No." She replies hesitantly, "I thought —"

"I... I don't know how to say this but I'm afraid the pups might have run away." I admit, interrupting her in my urgency. "They were napping and I jumped in the shower, and when I came out they were gone. I've looked everywhere and they aren't here."

To my surprise Jane doesn't sound worried at all, "They haven't run away."

"But I've looked —"

"No," she interrupts in a soothing tone. "Eric has them. He took them to the science museum."

"Are you serious?" I demand, my fear quickly transforming to rage, "Jane you scare the hell out of me,

why didn't you tell me?"

"Well I never imagined he would pick them up without talking to you!" She defends herself, "or did you expect me to ask your permission?"

"That isn't fair." I counter, "First of all, they're my pups too and we agreed to stop sending them to pre school because of all the media, we should have discussed sending them out in full view of them without one of us being present. And second, you know that isn't what I meant. I came out and they were just gone, Jane. No note, no nothing."

"I'm sorry," Jane concedes, "You're right. We should have talked about it, and Eric shouldn't have done that. I'll speak to him."

"No, I will." I insist, "this is unacceptable."

"I'm not sure that's a good idea." Jane hedges, "or have you forgotten how well things went the last time you two talked?"

"This is different." I insist, "I won't let him get the best of me, and the pups will keep us both on good behavior."

"Are you sure, I think maybe I should come home." Jane worries aloud.

"No, you stay put." I instruct, "I'll handle this."

When Eric walks in a few hours later, I'm still fuming.

Paisley runs over to me immediately, climbing into my lap even as the other children collapse in a puppy pile in the living room. "Daddy! It was so cool! I put my hand on this thing, and it tingled and all my hairs stuck out like crazy!"

"That's amazing!" I praise, "so you had fun with uncle Eric?"

Part of me hopes she'll say no, but I also can't bring myself to be disappointed she had a good day. "It was fun." She confirms, leaning close and loudly whispering, "but I would rather have gone with you."

"Me too, angel." I agree, "why don't you go play with your brothers and sister while Eric and I talk?"

She eyes me warily, "You not going to fight 'gain are you?"

"No sweetheart," I chuckle, appreciating the reminder of how badly our last fight scared her. I'd been in more danger of breaking my promise to Jane than I'd like to admit. The moment I saw the other man walk in, my temper pulled taught, at serious risk of snapping like a twig.

Standing, I usher the other alpha out into the hallway, trying to mask my seething animosity for the pups' sake if not his own.

"What is this about, Blackwell?" He questions me snidely.

"Did you not think it might be a good idea to let me know

you were taking my children out of this house?" I counter coldly.

He shrugged, "I assumed you'd figure it out."

"I almost called the police!" I growl, "it was merely dumb luck that I called Jane first, I was convinced they'd run away or been kidnapped."

"But you did call Jane first, so no harm – no foul." Eric remarked, brushing off my concerns as if they were nothing.

"Really, that's all you have to say?" I snarl, "do you have any idea how badly you scared me."

"If I were you I'd start getting used to not having the pups around." He sneers, "Has Jane told you that she's set a date? In two weeks time, the apartment will be as empty as it was today, for good."

My wolf is doing it's very best to make me break my promise, but I keep repeating the same words in my head. The pups are here, the pups are here. His words are bringing my worst nightmares to life, but I also have enough sense this time to realize he's intentionally trying to bait me. He wants me to attack. It will make me the villain and he the victim in Jane's eyes once again, and any chance I have of keeping my family together will be gone.

"Get out of here." I hiss. "Before I finish the job I started.

You won't be able to win Jane if you don't have a head."

I remind him.

He smirks, "and you won't ever get her back if you kill me." Eric taunts, "of course, you won't win her back either way, but that would really put a pin in things."

"Just go, Eric." I repeat, I'm not interested in playing your games. With that, I turn on my heel and stalk back into the apartment, hovering near the door to make sure I hear him walk away before letting my guard down.

However, before I hear him depart, the sound of a dialing phone reaches my ears, and I realize he's making a call. Jane's familiar voice sounds in the distance, "Eric? Hey, how'd it go? Did you pick up the kids without telling Ethan?"

"I thought you'd already told him about the plan." He lies in an obviously false tone of sincerity,

"I'm so sorry, I never imagined. Jane he's saying he's going to call the police and have me arrested for kidnapping!"

