

## Chapter 96 Telling Jane

Ethan

The commander's words sink in slowly, but I keep my spirits high despite the bad news he's delivering. Unlike the detective, I had the intelligence to think ahead. "Then I suppose it's a good thing I made copies of every paper we found in Eve's safe." I muse aloud.

"You made copies?" The commander responds excitedly.

"Yes, I had a feeling about Detective Smithers, you see." I share. In fact, I made three sets of copies and promptly hid them. I'd been so paranoid about the conspiracy that I even made sure to put them in different locations. Unlocking my office safe, I pull out the copy I brought to work. "I'm looking at them right now. If you send someone quickly, they might catch me before I leave for the day."

Before he even responds to me, I can hear the commander barking orders to a uniformed officer in the background. "You, get to the pack headquarters this instant, go straight to the Alpha. No stops on the way." Once he finishes, his volume increases as he returns his mouth to the receiver, "Done. You know it's the strangest thing. We found out about all this because Smithers got

hacked this afternoon.”

“Is that so?” I inquire innocently. “Well, wasn’t that lucky for us?”

“Indeed.” He agrees, sounding more relaxed now that he knows the evidence wasn’t completely lost. “Of course we won’t be investigating that, since whoever is responsible exposed a traitor in our ranks. We really owe them.”

“If I hear anything about it I’ll be sure to pass on your appreciation.” I offer, deciding not to excoriate the man for missing that all of this was happening right under his nose. After all, I’ve been there. I know just how cunning Eve can be, and how skilled she is at hiding her schemes.

As if he can read my thoughts, the commander states, “And I’m sorry for everything he’s put your family through, Alpha. I feel horribly responsible for not seeing his corruption sooner.”

“Thank you.” I accept graciously, “I understand better than you think, but you should know this doesn’t end with me. The public isn’t going to be happy when this comes out.”

“Ah.” He replies, clearly understanding my warning about the hack reaching the papers. “Then I’ll begin writing my press statement now.”

“And I’ll go tell my mate the investigation into her is finally closed.” I answer, wanting to hear him confirm it,

just in case.

“Tell her congratulations from me, sir.” He answers, a bit more stiffly now. I imagine he’s not happy that this story is going to get out – it will be a public humiliation for the force. Still, I think he also realizes any other Alpha would have removed him from his position as punishment, and accepts that keeping his job comes with a price.

Hanging up the phone, I wait until the officer arrives and hand over the copied files, before heading home to Jane and the pups. When I walk in the door, four energetic munchkins rush my legs. “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!”

Kneeling down, I catch them all in a bear hug squeezing them tightly even though they clearly didn’t come to me for cuddles. They’re squirming excitedly, trying to wriggle free and jump up and down at once. “Can we tell her, can we tell her?” They whisper.

Looking over their heads, I can see Jane looking on in surprise and confusion. She’d been walking down the hall when I entered, and now she stood in the center, clearly nonplussed. “In a little while.” I promise them, “Mommy and I need to talk a little first.”

They groan in disappointment, but I release them and instruct, “go play, the sooner Mommy and I finish our conversation, the sooner we can tell her.”

Riley, Ryder and Parker instantly race off to their rooms,

but Paisley stays snug against my chest, his little arms wrapped around my neck. Chuckling softly, I loop an arm around her middle and lift her as I get to my feet. "How was your day, Princess?"

"I missed you." She tells me, "I like it better when you work from home."

"I do too." I admit. "But it's tough right now with everything going on. People need to see me out and about, it's important for leaders to be present when things seem uncertain."

"Daddy, I need you more than the people." Paisley tells me, slightly sulky.

"Is that so?" I ask, searching her earnest expression.

"Yes, you're my Daddy, not theirs'." She explains, as if I should know this without being told.

"Well being Alpha is a little bit like being the pack's Daddy." I explain. "I have to take care of, and protect everyone who lives here."

Paisley wrinkles her little nose. "Why?"

"Because someone has to." Jane answers for me, approaching us but staying out of my reach, as if she thinks that I'll sweep her up alongside Paisley if she gives me the chance. Such a clever little mate. "And you're Daddy's the strongest wolf in the pack, so the responsibility is his."

"You didn't have a choice?" Paisley asks me, blinking her bright eyes curiously.

"Not really," I shrug, "but that's okay. I love the pack, I want what's best for it."

"And you're what's best, right Daddy?" Paisley grins lopsidedly.

"That's right." I nod firmly.

"Okay." She answers, reluctantly accepting that she can't have me all to herself. "As long as you don't love the pack more than me." As the words leave her lips, she narrows her eyes at me, challenging me to confirm her statement.

Trying not to laugh, I reply, "Not possible. I love you pups and your Mommy a million gazillion times more than I love the pack."

"Good." Paisley nods, satisfied by my answer and now squirming to get down so she can run off and play with her brothers and sister.

Jane's cheeks are flushed with color when I turn to her, and to my surprise, she's scowling at me. "What?" I ask her, closing the distance between us. "I'm not allowed to say I love you?"

"No, it's not that." She tells me, refusing to meet my gaze and determinedly staring at the wall. "It's just really annoying when you're so cute with them."

"Oh, and why is that?" I tease, settling my hands on her waist before she can think to move away.

"Because it makes it a lot harder to hate you." She confesses begrudgingly, every bit as sullen as Paisley had been a few minutes ago when she told me she needed me more than the pack.

"Hmm," I muse, trailing my lips over her neck when she still won't turn her head to give me a real kiss hello.

"Harder, but not impossible?"

That seemed to get her attention. Untensing enough to lean into me a little, she switches her stare to my collar, restlessly fidgeting with the buttons of my shirt. "I didn't say that." She murmurs.

The more time we spend together, the more I'm able to read this new Jane. She's changed a lot over the years, somehow both softer and harder than she was before. More vulnerable, more anxious, but also infinitely more guarded. Like now, I can see she wants to tell me something, but she also can't bring herself to offer the words freely. "How did it go with Eric?"

Her emerald irises slowly climb to meet my penetrating stare, and I can see from her mournful expression that I guessed correctly. "You were right about him." She relates, leaning closer still. "He told the pups about us, and he's been lying to me for years. He tried to pass it off

like we'd been doing the same thing... but I came clean to him about my identity after we became friends, he had every opportunity to do the same – knowing I'd understand..."

"And he never did." I finish her thought, wrapping my arms around her small body and snuggling her to my chest. "I'm sorry sweetheart."

"He wouldn't even acknowledge the possibility that he was in the wrong." She says, her voice muffled by my shirt. "I feel so stupid."

"You are the farthest thing from stupid, Jane." I answer sternly. "He's the stupid one."

"He was pretty stupid yesterday" She agrees, sounding a little happier now. I can feel her ribs expand as she inhales a deep breath, then sighs contentedly and presses her nose to my chest, before doing it again.

Chuckle deeply, I ask. "Are you smelling me, little wolf?"

"No." She lies, her voice sounding small and petulant.

Stroking my hands up and down her spine, I offer, "well, would you like some good news?"

She perks up, suddenly awash with curiosity. "Really?"

I nod. "The pups want to tell you what they found themselves, but I wanted to make sure you know there's nothing to worry about first. The long and the short of it

is that they found some evidence against Eve, and after a few bumps in the road – the police are closing the investigation into you. You're not a suspect anymore."

Her mouth drops open in shock. "Are you serious?"

"Of course. I wouldn't joke about this." I relate solemnly.

"It's over?!" She exclaims, lighting up until she positively glows and jumping up and down in excitement. "That means we can finally go home!"



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