

Chapter 21 Ethan Gets a Bath

Jane

Ethan collapses to the ground, completely unconscious.

I take a deep breath and try to fight the emotions warring inside me.

I will not fall for this man's tricks again.

I've been telling myself for years now that I'd be immune to his charms if we ever met again, that I'd learned my lesson the hard way and wouldn't soon forget it. So much for that. ③

I'm still wallowing in my self-imposed misery when I hear a chair scrape across the floor on the other side of the door. Smashing the vase must have made too much noise and woken the pups. I know my sons, and I'm certain they're currently clambering onto the chair to spy on us.

I run off before they can see me crying, darting away down the stairs without a single thought for my ex-husband. It's only later, after my senses return and logic sinks in, that I realize they'll have seen Ethan and run for Linda. The knowledge keeps me away from the house for much longer than I would otherwise considered hiding. I can only pray that he's gone by the time I get home.

3rd Person

As soon as Jane ran away down the stairs, Ryder and Parker yanked the door open and rushed over to Ethan, looking down at him in confusion. The planter Jane smashed over his head lay in shards beneath him, the flowers it once held crumpled and crushed by his big body. His clothes were covered in dirt, still damp from being watered a few hours earlier.

"What happened?" Parker asked his brother, bending over the handsome alpha and studying him intently.

"Why'd Mommy do that?"

"I guess she didn't like the kiss." Ryder shrugged forlornly, "she seemed really sad."

"I heard her and Auntie Linda talking the other day." Parker frowned, "parently Linda thinks Mommy should give Daddy 'nother chance, so we can be one big family."

"I want that too." Ryder admitted, .

"Uh-huh," Parker nodded in agreement, "but Mommy was scared."

"Of Daddy?" Ryder exclaimed, "Why?"

"I dunno," Parker shared, "they moved 'way afore I could hear more."

"Poor Mommy." Ryder reflected softly, "we have ta help her, maybe we can show her she doesn' need ta be scared."

"Like she does for us when we have nightmares!" Parker reasoned, getting more excited by the moment.

"Let's get him 'nside." Ryder suggested, brushing some of the dirt from Ethan's shirt. "Then Mommy will have to take care of him."

"Good idea!" Parker approved, bending down and taking hold of Ethan's ankle.

Ryder moved to stand at his brother's side, taking the Alpha's other ankle in his small hands. "On three okay?" He instructed, "One, two, three!"

Both boys grunted and strained with all their might, trying to pull the huge alpha into the house. Unfortunately even their budding shifter strength couldn't budge the man, and they gave up with a pair of identical huffs.

"He's too big!" Parker assessed in disappointment.

"So what'd we do?" Ryder asked.

Parker rubbed his chin thoughtfully, trying to figure out how they could possibly make their plan succeed. After a moment the answer came to him like a lightbulb jolted with electricity, "our skateboards!"

Together they ran back to their temporary room and grabbed their favorite toys, suddenly feeling very thankful they convinced Mommy to let them bring them on the trip. Returning to the hall, they worked together to heft Ethan's limbs onto the three skateboards, then quietly rolled him into the house and shut the door behind them, completely oblivious to the tracks of mud they were leaving in their wake.

"What now?" Ryder questioned, looking a bit stumped. They hadn't thought this far ahead.

"He's really dirty." Parker observed, crinkling his nose.

"Yeah," Ryder concurred, "he needs a bath. Mommy hates messes, it'd probly be better if he's clean when she comes home.

"Good idea." Parker confirmed, directing Ethan's body towards the bathroom.

Unfortunately for the boys, Jane had already thought better of running away and leaving the Alpha knocked out for her spying pups to find. Tears banished, she was already on her way back upstairs as the boys rolled Ethan towards Linda's pristine guest bathroom.

When they heard her footsteps outside the door, Ryder and Parker exchanged a startled glance and dropped the Alpha's unconscious limbs like a pair of bricks, darting away to their bedroom before they could be caught.

(Jane)

When I reach the landing I immediately notice that Ethan is missing, as well as the muddy skateboard tracks leading into the house. "Oh boys." I sigh, shaking my head. I'm honestly not sure if I should be annoyed or proud. I would want any of my pups to help someone in a medical emergency, which they probably imagine this is, but they should also know better than to bring strange men into the house.

When I open the door I see Linda standing over Ethan's prone body with her arms crossed over her chest, looking perplexed. She looks up at me, "Do I want to know?"

"Probably not." I grumble, sidestepping the trail of mud my kids left behind. "But I owe you a new plant."

"Are those skateboards?" Linda asks, lifting one of Ethan's arms.

"Yes." I confirm with a low chuckle, "clearly my boys have been playing 'search and rescue'." I raise my voice towards the bedroom, sure they're listening to our conversation. "And they better be back in bed and sound asleep by now!"

We can hear the soft pitter patter of tiny feet as they run back to bed. Once it falls silent, I glance at Linda, "Sorry for the mess."

"Oh don't worry about it." Linda brushes aside my apology, "What are we going to do with him?"

"Let's get him cleaned up. The sooner we do, the sooner we can get rid of him."

We drag Ethan the rest of the way into the bathroom, though it's no easy feat to wrangle his body into the bathtub. When I begin unbuttoning his shirt, Linda backs away and says, "Alright, you clean the wolf, I'll clean the floors."

When I try to pull the shirt out from under him, I see blood on his collar. My heart sinking, I reach around the back of his head, feeling a swollen lump.

Damn, "Linda, I think we need to call the doctor."

Linda reappears in the doorway, taking in the sight of the Alpha's blood. "I'll call – if we're lucky they'll do a house visit."

I finish undressing Ethan when she retreats, using the detachable shower head to rinse off most of the mud before filling the tub with steaming water. Though I try to focus on my task and not get distracted, it isn't easy.

Ethan had always been too attractive for his own good, and he's only gotten more handsome with age. Somehow he seems even more muscular now than he had when we were married, and his bronze skin practically glows with health. My eyes keep trailing to the rippling contours of his abs, gradually drifting lower and making my insides turn to jelly.

Needing to protect myself from my own libido, I pour bubble bath into the water, breathing a sigh of relief when his limbs disappear beneath a thick layer of foam. Turning to his wounded head, I try to clean it as gently as I can, but it seems my best efforts aren't enough.

Ethan stirs with a groan, flinching away from my hands. "Shhh," I murmur gently, turning his head back into position.

All of a sudden, Ethan grabs my arm and latches onto me with unbreakable strength. I try to pull my arm away, but he only hold tighter.

"I love you, Jane. Don't do this. I...love you."

"Let go of me." I order him coolly, tugging at his hold more forcefully now.

To my surprise, he grips me tighter, actually pulling me toward him, "No. I won't. Not ever."

"Stop it!" I protest, beginning to panic and all but lashing my body away from him. "Let me go."

Ethan offers me a sultry growl and tugs back, his immense strength yanking me forward - and right into the bath.

Splash—