

Chapter 27 The Pups Find a New Playmate

Ethan

For all my bluster, my head truly was aching after settling the ordeal with Eve and the reporter. Jane was so thankful I'd stepped in that she didn't even complain when I said I was going to lie down for a bit, though I could still hear her speaking in a low voice with Linda after I closed the door.

"What happened?" Jane whispered.

"It's like he said," Linda answered, "The doctor said it would be best if he remained here to rest a few days. He said something about there being too much temptation to take care of pack business at the penthouse, he didn't trust Ethan to actually rest if he went home."

"That's nonsense." Jane hissed. "Ethan must have ordered the doctor to say that."

"Whether he did or didn't doesn't really matter." Linda argued in a hushed tone. "He's the Alpha. We can't refute his orders or the doctor's. We've just got to make our peace with it."

"I can't have him here with the kids." Jane murmured

nervously. "Maybe we should see if we can move into the new apartment sooner."

"Sweetheart, he's already seen the pups." Linda reasoned, "if anything, spending more time with them will give you time to convince him he's wrong about you. I guarantee, if you cut and run you'll only be confirming his suspicions." I wasn't sure if Linda believed what she was saying, or was secretly in my corner, but I appreciated her either way. "Stay here and pretend nothing is wrong. Show him he doesn't have any effect on you. Make sure that he'll let you go when the time comes."

Bloody unlikely. I think, even as Jane answers, "Maybe you're right."

That's right baby, listen to Linda.

"But I don't like it!" Jane adds stubbornly.

"It's only a couple of months." Linda assured her. "You can do this."

There was an odd pause, and then Jane remarked. "Maybe it won't be a few months after all. When that article comes out, Eve's Atelier will be ruined. The deal can fall through."

Unfortunately for Jane, I'd already thought of this and sent off an email to the board to begin the process of formally removing Eve from her position. Her decision to try and frame Jane for her own crimes was the last straw.

I no longer felt any duty to protect her under the circumstances. I might have been able to understand her holding a grudge against Jane, but I was also incapable of allowing her to harm my mate.

My last thought as I fell asleep was of the cute look I knew would be on Jane's face when I told her the news: that our deal would absolutely be going forward, and I would be taking over management of the boutique so that we would have to continue working together long after the perfume launch. She was going to be furious, and I was going to enjoy every moment.

When I wake, it's to the sound of young voices and three distinct scents, all like different shades of Paisley. I keep my eyes closed as the pups sneak into my room, my heart already swelling in my chest. Other than getting to spend time with Jane, I've been looking forward to truly meeting the pups the most.

Opening my eyes to tiny slits, I catch sight of the three pups hovering at the edge of the bed. Closing them again, I pretend to shift my legs, listening in amusement as the kids duck down with three little gasps. A moment later they rise again, muted footsteps carrying them closer.

"Why's he sleeping so much?" One of the boys whispers. "I dunno." Riley replies, a note of pure mischief in her

voice. "Maybe you should poke him."

Paisley's other half if I ever saw one. I think with delight.
Little imp.

"No!" The boys whisper in unison, "he'll wake up."

"What are you, chicken?" Riley replies, making a series of soft clucking sounds.

"Stop it, Riley." One of her brothers complains.

"Come on, I dare you!" Riley eggs them on.

There's a beat of silence, and with another tiny peak I catch the boy on my right reaching toward me hesitantly.

At the very last moment I leap up and catch the boy with a dramatic "Rawr!"

All three kids squeal in surprise, but I've captured the second boy in no time flat. "Well what have we here?" I ask, eyeing them suspiciously. "A pair of spies! And so small too." I tease, lifting a pup in each hand and adopting an intimidating expression. "Tell me now, who do you work for?"

Riley had begun to run for the door when I rose up, but now she turns back. Seeing me holding her brothers captive, her adorable features scrunch up in anger. Fighting to smother my smile, I say, "Oh-ho, so this is your leader."

Without another word the little girl charges my legs with

a vicious war cry, and I know I'm a goner. I've barely met them, and I'm already head over heels for this pack of rascals.

Jane is standing in the kitchen when I emerge with Riley hanging from one of my arms, and both boys on the other. Their little feet hang off the ground and they giggle uproariously as I carry them out into the main living area. Despite herself, I see the corners of Jane's mouth twitching upward, and I offer her a wide smile in return. "You're supposed to be resting." She tells me, trying to sound stern.

"I was!" I tell her defensively, "But then I caught these little devils spying on me."

Jane sighs, and shoots the pups a disapproving mom look. "I told you three to stay out of his room."

"But Mom!" All three cry in unison.

"It's okay." I announce, "I'm glad I finally got to meet your pups."

"Do you have kids?" One of the boys asks.

"I do, I have a little girl named Paisley." Jane's eyes are almost comically wide as she looks back and forth between me and the pups, as if she's trying to figure out some way to split us up before I can say more.

"Can we meet her?" The other boy asks.

"If you like." I agree happily, I would love nothing more.

"But not this week, she's in the hospital."

"I was just there!" Riley announces happily.

I raise my arm until she's hanging level with my eyes, suddenly overflowing with concern. "You were?" I question, scanning her for injuries. That must have been why Jane was there the day we ran into each other. "Why?" "Just a flu." She shrugs, completely unconcerned.

Her bright smile calms me immensely. "Well I'm glad you're better."

"Us too!" The kids have already moved back to playing, climbing my body like a tree and swinging from my arms like little monkeys.

"Mommy, come play with us!" Riley calls hopefully.

Jane, who is pretending to dry the same plate she was working on ten minutes ago, shakes her head. "Maybe in a little while honey, I'm just finishing the dishes."

Bending to the pups' level, I nod towards Jane and whisper, "you're not going to let her get away with that, are you?"

The children exchange mischievous glances, and I give them the extra prod they need. "Get her."