

Chapter 36 - Ethan Offers Jane a Deal

Ethan

Agitation consumes me so quickly it steals my breath. Where could they have gone? I think manically. Paisley's not allowed off the ward, and Jane wouldn't ever risk taking her out of her doctor's reach this soon after surgery - would she? Did somebody get to them? Have they been taken? Surely Jane wouldn't have run off with Paisley... the idea is almost too terrible to bear, though she had pushed awfully hard to convince me to go home. My wolf is in an uproar, clawing at the surface and begging to be let out so he can begin tracking my mate and pup. I'm on the verge of letting him, of tearing the hospital apart to find my she-wolves when the elevator dings and their scents hit me. Charging out of the room, I watch the silver doors open and see Jane wheeling Paisley out in a wheelchair, surprise coloring both of their faces when they realize I'm there. Of course the difference is that where Paisley's face lights up, Jane's falls.

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"Daddy!" Paisley cries, opening her arms to me. I scoop her up immediately, being as gentle as I can.

"Hello angel," I press half a dozen kisses to her soft cheek.

"Did you and Mommy go on an adventure?"

Jane pales when I call her Mommy, but Paisley simply nods and leans back to look me in the face, "we got ice cream!"

"So I see," I chuckle, wiping a bit of chocolate from the corner of her mouth. "You look like you're feeling better too."

"Uh-huh!" She nods happily, "where were you?"

"I went home to take a shower so I wouldn't smell like a big stinky foot when you woke up." I tell her, earning a peel of delighted giggles in return.

Paisley cuddles close and breathes in my scent, "you smell good Daddy." She confirms, then lowers her voice conspiratorially, "but Mommy smells better."

"What?!" I cry, pretending to be offended, "How can you say such a thing?"

"It's true!" Paisley insists.

"We'll just see about that," I grumble, reaching out and dragging Jane close.

My mate yelps and objects, trying and failing to push me away as I bury my face in her neck. Purring with satisfaction, I drop a sneaky kiss to her delectable throat before pulling away and giving Paisley a resigned sigh, "You're right, she does smell better."

Jane glares at me but grins at Paisley, "One would think

a wolf could figure that out without manhandling me.”

“Daddy’s silly.” Paisley agrees, beaming at us.

“And you, sweet girl, ought to be in bed.” I order, carrying her back into her room.

“Daddy do I have to?” She complains as I tuck her in.

“Yes, you do.” I answer, tender but stern. Despite her protests, the poor pup is sleeping again within minutes, and I take the opportunity to pull Jane into the hall, trying to keep my voice low so we won’t wake Paisley.

“What were you thinking?” I demand. “How could you take her off the ward?”

“She’s not made of glass Ethan.” Jane answers, “the doctor said she could eat whatever she wanted if she had an appetite, and I had no idea you’d be back so soon. I’m sorry if we scared you.”

“It’s not just about her health.” I growl, “I have security agents guarding the ward. They didn’t know you’d left. Someone might have tried to attack you.”

“Anyone who wanted to lay a hand on Paisley would have had to go through me first.” Jane announces, all fire and maternal instinct.

As much as I love seeing this side of her, I hate the idea of her being harmed just as much as I do Paisley. “What, and that’s somehow acceptable to you? That’s supposed to make me feel better?” I growl, pleased to see a shiver

run down her spine. "I don't want you hurt either, Jane."

She pulls away from me as if she's been burned. "You have to stop this, Ethan."

"You keep saying that." I counter, "but you're still here."

"Well I mean it this time." Jane states icily. "Now that the perfume launch has basically been tanked, we can finally go our separate ways."

Arching my brow, I prowl forward, making Jane back up to avoid letting me come too close. "Who said anything about it being tanked?"

She blinks, "Eve just publicly accused my company of fraud, Ethan." Jane declares, as if I could have forgotten.

"In my book, that's a dealbreaker."

"Well it's not in mine." I reply smoothly. "Your contract didn't have an out, Jane. The launch will be moving forward as planned. Eve has been removed as CEO to avoid any further conflicts."

Jane visibly pales, "What?"

"You hear me," She's so close I could easily reach out and touch her, but I reign in the impulse before it can take hold. "Our deal is moving forward exactly as planned."

"My lawyers will find a way out." Jane asserts, looking unsure of herself.

"No they won't," I smirk, "because mine already made

the deal unbreakable. If you walk away now I'll sue you for breach of contract, and Goddess knows how long a trial could drag out. You'd be stuck here in arbitration for years."

Jane's eyes flash, and I suspect she wants to lash out at me. Instead she holds herself back, and I watch the gears working in her sharp mind, almost as if she's mentally rereading the document even as she glowers up at me. After a moment she begins gnawing on her lower lip, eventually conceding - though not without a condition of her own. "If it's going to move forward, I want someone else assigned to the account. Who's the new CEO?"

"They haven't been hired yet." I sigh, pretending to sound as though I regret the fact. "But I assured the board I would be handling things personally to avoid any further upsets."

"Listen to me, Ethan." Jane orders, stomping her little foot just like Paisley does when she doesn't get her way. "I demand another board member take over as my main contact. I might not be able to break the deal, but I draw the line at working with you for a single moment longer." Considering my mate, I wonder just how badly she wants to end our working relationship. Once Paisley is released from the hospital, Jane is facing the prospect of working with me all day every day, and though she might have



thought she could handle it originally, she's clearly having second thoughts now. Though I relish the opportunity to spend so much time with her, I also know that professional boundaries will make winning her over more difficult. It would be easier if we could simply date - but at present she'd never agree to go out with me. Not without an incentive that is.

"I'll tell you what." I offer, backing her into the wall. "I'll make you a deal, little wolf."

"What deal?" She questions suspiciously, shifting warily to avoid our bodies coming into contact with one another.

Framing my hands against the plaster on either side of her head, I dip my head and speak low in her ear. "I'll assign another board member to take over your account, if you go out with me."

Jane's head whips up, "You're not serious?"

"But I am." I assure her. "If you go out with me, I'll agree to your terms."

"One date?" She asks, still eyeing me like I'm a poisonous snake about to strike.

A deep chuckle vibrates in my chest, "Oh no Janey. I mean you have to go out with me until the launch, three dates a week - minimum."

"You're out of your mind." She hisses, pushing at my chest.

"Alright, then we'll stay business partners. All day, every day." I taunt, "for the next three months."

"At least if we're colleagues you can't get away with talking to me this way." She mutters mutinously, ducking under my arm and starting to return to Paisley's room.

"And who's going to stop me?" I call after her. "I'm the Alpha, sweetheart, there isn't a higher law in the territory." Of course I'm bluffing, I would never speak to her like this in a work setting, but she doesn't need to know that. Besides, when it comes to mates, all bets are off.

"You bastard." She snaps, whirling around to face me. "You're not playing fair."

"I never said I would." I reply, "Come on, what's the worst that could happen? You've insisted you aren't interested in me that way. A strong, independent alpha she-wolf like you is surely immune to my charms... right?" I goad her further, knowing full well that she's not an alpha at all. My little omega is turned on just being near me - her scent betrays it even if she won't. "So what's the harm?"

I can see she wants to take the bait, it's dangling over her so tantalizingly, but she's even stronger than I realized. When she still doesn't agree, I give her one last push. "Come on, Elise. What are you afraid of?"