

Chapter 39 - Eric Makes Waves

3rd Person

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"Mmm why do you think I'm holding you so tightly?" He teased, rubbing his hand up and down her back for good measure. The truth is that he also wanted to hold her this way as much as possible and was beyond grateful for the excuse to do so. Eric had been falling in love with Jane little by little for months now, though he hadn't realized it at first. In fact, it wasn't until she departed for the Nightfang pack and he felt as if his heart had disappeared with her, that he understood what was happening.

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Right on cue, three little voices cried, "Uncle Eric!" and the Dark Moon wolf looked away from Jane for the first time.

The pups were now running straight for their favorite "uncle", but the wolf they left standing in the sandbox was one of the most intimidating men Eric had ever seen

in real life. He was a few inches taller and every bit as broad as Eric himself, and Eric towered over most wolves.

Ethan Blackwell was also handsome as a film star and moved with the lethal grace of an apex predator, but none of these things were what made him so intimidating. More than anything else, the raw power the NightFang Alpha exuded with every breath he took was staggering. It was easy to see why Jane felt she needed to call in reinforcements.

Over the course of their friendship, Eric had gathered that something went very wrong in Jane's marriage to the pups' father, something that made her completely skittish of men and especially alphas. It was obvious whatever Ethan had done had traumatized her, and knowing Jane is truly an Omega, it wasn't hard to guess how. The thought made Eric absolutely furious. As far as he was concerned, anyone who could mistreat a she-wolf and brilliant and beautiful as Jane deserved to be torn limb from limb.

So when Ethan crossed to Jane and threw a possessive arm around her shoulders, practically scent-marking her in front of the other man, Eric imagined doing just that.

"Who's this then?" Ethan asked gruffly, eyes Eric up and down.

"Ethan, this is my partner, Eric." Jane explains, gesturing

back and forth between the two shifters. "Eric, this is Ethan. He's the NightFang Alpha, and my contact on the Atelier project."

"Partner?" Ethan repeated, the word more of a snarl than anything else. "Like...?" He trailed off, clearly to livid to finish his sentence.

"That's right." Jane confirmed defiantly, slipping out of Ethan's grasp and moving to stand beside Eric.

Ethan looked about ready to explode, but Eric was still greeting the pups and had just noticed a fourth child hiding behind Ethan's legs. She was Riley's perfect twin, another miniature of Jane, but clearly lacking her sister's fearlessness. "Well hello there," He greeted her softly. "You must be Paisley."

Her big green eyes widened when she realized he knew her name, but she didn't emerge from behind her father. To his credit, Ethan reached down and cupped her round head in comfort. "She's feeling a little shy today."

Eric could see the traces of tears on her cheeks, and he knew from speaking with Jane that the poor pup had been through a lot lately. "That's perfectly fine, Paisley. I get shy too sometimes."

Her head peeked out just enough for Eric to see her offer him a sheepish smile, and he beamed back. There was a lot of Jane in Riley, Parker, and Ryder, but Eric suspected

her three eldest had inherited more of Ethan's personality than hers. However looking at Paisley, it was clear the youngest child was more Jane than anything else - or as he called her, more Elise than anything else.

With introductions finished, Eric was free to continue tormenting Ethan. Unable to resist, He straightened and looped his arm around Jane's waist and pressed a kiss to her neck. "I missed you, baby."

Ethan looked as though he might burst into flames then and there, his gaze locking onto Jane with laser focus. "Can I have a word, Elise?" He phrased it like a question, but it clearly wasn't.

Jane was already moving to obey, but Eric held her tight. "Sweetheart, do you want to speak to the Alpha alone."

Rolling her eyes to show him how little the other man's posturing bothered her, Jane promised Eric she was fine. "Will you watch the kids for a second?"

"Gladly." Eric agreed, kneeling back down to their level but keeping one eye on Jane as Ethan led her away. "Alright now, who can guess how many chocolates I have in my pocket?"

Jane

The pups are already shouting in excitement as Ethan pulls me away, and when I glance over my shoulder I see

Eric collapsing beneath all four of them as they eagerly search him for sweets. I'd laugh out loud if I didn't think it would completely set Ethan off. In hindsight, I should have arranged for this confrontation to occur when we weren't with the pups - then again, their presence might have kept things from escalating to violence.

"What the hell is this?" Ethan snaps when we're out of hearing range.

"What do you mean?" I ask innocently.

"Since when do you have a boyfriend?" He grouses, pacing back and forth across the grass while I look on warily.

"If you recall, you never asked if I was seeing anyone." I recount icily, "you assumed I was free game, even though I refused you multiple times. You don't get to act affronted when your own hardheadedness backfires, Ethan."

"I'm not acting." He hisses, glowering at me. "Why didn't you say something?"

"Why? Because you would have respected his claim on me more than you respected my own wishes?" I snipe. "Typical Alpha, it doesn't matter whether or not I want you, only whether some other man rubbed himself all over me first."

Ethan's head jerks up, and I realize I spoke too freely. "If

you're together why hasn't he marked you?"

"When you and I met, I'd already been in town for quite some time. He hasn't claimed me officially because we are not mated, he has scent marked me - it just faded." I lie, a strike of inspiration lighting up my eyes, "But have no fear, now that we're together again I'll make sure he doesn't waste any time doing it again."

"Over my dead body." The words are ripped from Ethan's chest as he surges forward, taking me by the shoulders. "He can't have you, Jane."

"That's not your decision." I remind him harshly, "It's mine."

Ethan glares down at me, his strong fingers digging into my shoulders with unrestrained force. I'm not sure if he wants to kiss me or hit Eric... though in truth it's probably both. For the first time in a long time, I'm actually afraid of Ethan. Not haunted by our past, heartbroken from losing him, wary of his charm or wary of his tricks, but actually afraid. I'm starting to think I miscalculated very badly by bringing Eric here, because Ethan looks ready to kill.

"You need to calm down." I breathe, talking to myself as much as to him. "The pups are watching."

To my surprise Ethan actually listens, gulping in a few deep breaths of air and counting to ten under his breath.

When he's finished he releases me, still breathing as if he's just finished running a marathon, but at least looking less murderous now.

"You haven't mentioned having a man in your life even once since you got here - nor has Linda or the pups." His eyes narrow, "nor was there anything in your background to indicate a romantic relationship."

"You looked into my background?!" I snarl in outrage.

"Of course I did." He answers slyly, turning the matter right back onto me. "Just as I'm sure you did when we went into business together. Unless of course, you already knew everything there was to know about me?"

"I don't search into people's pasts without their permission." I declare righteously, "That's not how I choose to do business."

"Give me one good reason." He forges ahead as if I hadn't spoken. "One, why I should believe this is real?"

"Because I'm telling you it is." I answer firmly. Sidling closer and lowering my voice to the barest of whispers I reply, "I chose Eric, not you, and you need to accept that."

"Why should I?" Ethan demands fiercely.

"Because Alpha." Eric's voice suddenly sounds on our right, "We're not just dating. We're engaged to be married."