

Chapter 40 - Engaged

Jane

I'm almost as stunned as Ethan is that Eric just announced we're engaged. We never discussed telling such a lie, but I have to admit it was certainly effective. Ethan looks downright furious. Beyond furious, he looks apoplectic with rage.

"Excuse me?" He snarls.

"You heard me." Eric answers smoothly. "We're engaged." Ethan's dark eyes leap to my ring finger, "I don't see a ring." He remarks shrewdly.

"I have terrible taste in jewelry." Eric explains, "I thought Jane would prefer to pick out her own ring rather than wear whatever hideous design I chose. We were going to go shopping as soon as she got home, but I missed her too much to stay away."

"That's so sweet." I pretend to swoon, "maybe we can go shopping here."

"That's a great idea!" Eric exclaims, "Do you have any suggestions for jewelers, Alpha?" He asks, his icy blue eyes sharp as daggers, "you used to be married right? Who did you use?"

"No one you could afford." Ethan scowls.

"Actually Eric is very successful." I chime in, "he's probably as wealthy as you are, in fact."

"Oh really?" Ethan seethes.

In any other circumstance I would be annoyed beyond belief to have these two wolves fighting over me like I'm some kind of toy, but at the moment I know it's necessary.

"Well I don't like to brag." Eric shrugs modestly, "but I've done quite well for myself."

"How nice for you." Ethan grumbles.

Eric chooses that moment to lean over and kiss me, and the tight leash Ethan has on his temper snaps. The next thing I know he's storming away with Paisley in his arms, the little girl waving at me in confusion as she's carted away. My own pups are still gathered around Eric, but I catch them exchanging worried looks.

"Sorry kids, I guess the Alpha had business to take care of." I apologize for their father, hating the way he let his jealousy blind him to the pups' needs. Doesn't he realize how confused they'll be? I didn't get a chance to say goodbye to Paisley, nor did my other kids.

"Mommy he seemed gwumpy." Riley informs me needlessly.

"Yes he did, didn't he?" I agree.

"I can't say I blame him." Eric rumbles in my ear. "I'd be jealous too, in his shoes."

Swatting at my friend's arm, I fret, "Eric are you sure that was a good idea?"

"It's not like we actually have to get married." Eric reasons, "Engagements end all the time."

"It's not that." I share nervously. "It's Ethan. He doesn't give up easily, and he already suspects my true identity."

"Elise, please don't worry about a thing." Eric encourages.

"You called me because you needed help, so let me help."

Still agitated but truly appreciating his support, I nod and lean into his warm embrace. I truly don't know what I would do without him and Linda, but I'm also very worried about how messy that confrontation was. I never intended it to happen in front of my pups, and even though they've gone back to playing on the jungle gym, I can't help but worry about how much they understood.

3rd Person

Jane was right to be worried about her perceptive pups. Riley, Ryder and Parker had listened to every single word the grown ups exchanged, and while they didn't understand all of them, they knew enough to recognize



their plans for reuniting their parents were in trouble.

The pups loved their uncle Eric, but they knew perfectly well that their Mommy wasn't planning on marrying him. Before Ethan came along they'd actually dreamed of her doing just that, but now that they knew they had a father and a sister, all they wanted was for their family to be whole once more.

What's more, Ethan taking off with Paisley so suddenly had prevented them from talking to Paisley about their plans. They hadn't gotten a chance to warn her that Eve tried to kill her in the hospital, or to inform her they were already working on a plan to get her out of danger.

Across town Eve was huddled under her car, choking on the heavy mechanical smells and squealing in squeamish disgust as she tried to identify her break line. She held a pair of wire cutters in one hand, and had covered herself in a protective tarp in anticipation of fluid spraying when she cut the rubber pipe.

She had been planning all day every day for the better part of a week. After so many failed attempts to rid herself of her brat problem, she was determined not to let anything else get in the way of her plans. She couldn't help feeling like her luck was running short, so there was no room for errors this time.

She decided to return to a strategy she knew and trusted

- one that had worked all too well when she needed to turn Ethan against Jane: Play the martyr. No one ever gets angry at the selfless hero who's injured in the pursuit of doing good. She cackled, thoroughly pleased with herself when she finally identified the break line and raised the sheers to the cord. Cutting through it quickly, she pushed out from under the car and rushed inside to shower.

Everything was already in place, now all that was left was getting Paisley into the car with her - and how hard could that be?

As it turned out, harder than she would have guessed. Paisley was in the kitchen baking with her grandmother when Eve entered, earning a warm welcome from Petra and a sullen glare from the pup. The little brat had never liked Eve. She was always getting in the way of Eve's plans for Ethan and he always seemed to take the tiny mongrel's side.

Not for much longer. Eve thought reassuringly to herself as she strode into the cozy room.

"Hi honey, how are you feeling?" She asked in a sickly sweet voice.

Paisley merely blinked, "why'd you care?"

"Paisley!" Petra scolded, sounded aghast. "Don't be that way. Eve loves you."

"That's right." Eve lied through a huge, fake smile. "I wanted to see if you'd like to go have some ice cream? That way your Grandma can run some of her errands."

"No, I'll stay with Grandma." Paisley refused her simply.

"Sweetheart, you don't want to run errands with me. They're boring." Petra said gently.

"But Grandma!" The little girl objected.

"Come on, Paisley, you love ice cream." Petra reminded her warmly.

"Pwease don't make me go with her." Paisley pouted, making Eve want to throw the brat out the window behind her. Honestly, you'd think she knew what Eve was planning.

"Stop being silly." Petra scolded, "Go have fun with Eve and when you get home this afternoon I'll make you a sandwich with all this lovely bread we've just made."

"Fine." Paisley grumbled, letting the kind old woman lower her to the ground and stomping toward Eve.

"There now." This time Eve's grin was completely genuine, within ten minutes time the little monster would be out of her hair for good.

Eve took Paisley down to the car, guiding her towards the blue sedan and waving off Paisley's security guard, "Take a break Frank, I've got her."

When Paisley pulled open the back door, but stopped when she realized there wasn't a carseat in the vehicle. Eve spoke up before she could question its absence. "Hey, I have an idea. You're such a big girl, why don't you sit up front with me?"

"But I hasta sit in the car seat." The child argued.

"Those are for babies!" Eve exclaimed, "You're not a baby are you?"

"No." Paisley frowned, "But Daddy says..."

"I don't care what your Daddy says!" Eve snapped, losing her patience, "Now get in the damned car."

Paisley climbed into the passenger seat, confused and unhappy. She began pulling on the seatbelt, but the nylon strap wouldn't come free. As Eve climbed into the driver's side and buckled her own seatbelt, Paisley tried to ask her for help. "My seatbelt is broke." 🗨️

"Oh my." Eve said worriedly, considering the implement for a long moment before giving up and shrugging, "Oh well."

Her foot slammed onto the accelerator, sending the car veering out of the driveway so quickly Paisley was thrown against the door. "Oww." She whined, rubbing her elbow.

"Oh stop fussing." Even ordered scathingly, tearing down the street.

The next thing Paisley knew the car was speeding through an intersection at high speed, careening through a red light without so much as slowing down. "What are you doing?" She cried in fright.

"I'm taking you to get ice cream." Eve forced the words out through clenched teeth, secretly furious that they hadn't managed to hit anyone in the first intersection. Where was all the traffic? "Now shut up and let me concentrate on driving."

The second intersection offered Eve the reprieve she'd been seeking, and a truck came barreling towards their out of control vehicle. At the last moment Eve spun the steering wheel to the left, turning the car so that the truck would collide with the passenger side where Paisley sat. Happiness swelled inside her as the big vehicle's grill drew closer and closer - this was it. Ethan would be child free in 3...2...1

