

Chapter 43 - News Wars

Ethan

In my time as Alpha, I've witnessed plenty of wild news stories, and even been at the center of a few. However nothing is as alarming as seeing Eve touted as my future Luna on every channel for 24 hours straight. Now that I know who she truly is and what she's done to my daughter, the idea of even being in the same room with her makes me sick to my stomach. After Paisley was discharged from the hospital I took her to our country cabin to recuperate, not wanting her in the penthouse with reporters camped outside the front door waiting for a glimpse of us.

At first I thought I'd let the story run its course and die down on its own, but then the calls started coming in. Everyone wanted my comment on whether I truly was planning to marry Eve, and when I began to do some investigating of my own, I discovered that all these stories had been paid for by a mysterious benefactor. Someone had bribed the news stations to cover the car accident and promote Eve this way, and I have a fairly strong idea that I know the person who's responsible.

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Eve's deception has thrown a lot of things into question as of late, not the least of which is Jane. The more time that passes, the more I think back on the attack she, Eve and my mother faced all those years ago. It's the only time in her entire life I've known Jane to possess even an ounce of cruelty, and the only time Eve has shown an ounce of selflessness. ①

Is it possible it was all another one of the conniving she-wolf's schemes?

I'm not proud of the way I treated Jane afterwards, but she didn't give me any other choice. If she'd tried even once to explain why she'd done what she did, I could have shown her some leniency, but to do so when she made no effort would have made me appear weak in the eyes of the pack – and no pack can flourish if the people don't have a leader they can believe in.

Pushing aside my brooding thoughts of the past, I call a press conference with every news station in the territory. Eve can scheme all she wants, but not even she can

override the word of the Alpha. I'm going to make sure every shifter in the NightFang pack knows that Eve will never be their Luna, before this entire situation gets further out of hand.

A few hours later, when I'm standing in front of the entire NightFang press corps, I cut right to the chase, not allowing any questions before I begin. "Many rumors have been circulating since the accident that so nearly cost my daughter's precious life earlier this week." I announce, working hard to keep the emotion from my voice.

"I'm pleased to say that Paisley's quick thinking saved her life and she's recovering well, and I'm touched by all the concerned citizens who have reached out to check on her. As many of you know, this incident came at the tailend of Paisley's successful fight against heart disease, and I am beyond thrilled to report that she is no longer in need of continued medical care." I can't stop the smile from spreading across my features, every day since Paisley was born has been marred by fear for her health, and it doesn't feel real that we can finally put all that behind us.

"My daughter may have been born with a weak heart, but she was also blessed with a warrior's spirit, and I look forward to watching her grow into a woman every

bit as special as her mother." I continue, "This brings me to the recent reports indicating I may be looking for a new Luna." The entire room seems to be holding its breath now, but they're going to be disappointed. "However there will only ever be one Luna for me: Jane Blackwell was and always will be the love of my life. She is the only she-wolf who I will ever call mate, and I have no intention of taking anyone else for a wife now or in the future."

A series of low mutters move through the crowd, and I can see a number of curious faces gearing up to ask me a bunch of invasive questions. "I will not be taking any questions on this matter, as it is not up for debate and requires no further explanation. If anyone has said otherwise, I would caution you to examine their motives before accepting their word. Trust me when I say this is the best thing for me and my family. Now I thank you for your time and attention, but I must be getting back to my daughter."

The room is heavy with silence as I depart, dozens of curious eyes following me as I stalk from the room with my head held high. I have always enjoyed killing two birds with one stone, and if I'm right, that little conference will have both put Eve in her place, and put Jane on notice. She can lie, hide and pretend all she

wants, but the hunt is just beginning. She will be my Luna again, and now the pack might even help me win her back.

Jane

"Jane, is there a reason you're glaring at the TV like you want to murder it?" Eric's familiar voice sounds behind me, and I feel him approach at my shoulder.

The TV screen is dark now, but moments ago it was filled with Ethan's rugged face as he announced to the world that I was the only Luna he would ever take. Of course, on one hand I'm glad to see he refuted Eve's shameless self-promotion. I don't know why it hurt so much to see all the news outlets singing her praises, but there was no denying the jealousy I felt when they suggested he might take her as his mate. I suppose it dug up all the pain of the past – I can tell myself I'm over Ethan until I'm blue in the face, but the betrayal of their affair still stings, even after all this time.

"Jane?" Eric prods, giving me a little nudge.

Coming back to the present, I slam my finger onto the remote's power button again, bring the screen back to life. Ethan's press conference seems to be over now, but the reporters sitting at the news desk are still discussing the event in absurd detail. "Honestly, you'd think he

announced we were going to war, not that he intended to stay single." I gripe.

"Uh-huh." Eric says simply, "And that's why you're upset? Because he isn't going to take a child murderer as a mate?"

"No." I grumble sulkily, "It was the part about me. He's sending me a message."

"I can see that." My friend replies. "So how are you going to answer him?"

Blinking up at the tall Alpha in confusion, I inquire.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he sent you a message. The polite thing to do would be to send him one in return." Eric reasons.

"I've already given him my message about a dozen times."

I remind him, "but he doesn't seem to understand the meaning of: 'go to hell.'"

Eric laughs warmly, squeezing my shoulders and beginning to massage the knots from my aching muscles. Oh Goddess, I didn't even realize how stressed I was about all this until he started doing that. "That feels incredible."

"Poor thing." Eric croons, "You've been through a lot these past few weeks."

"You have no idea." I moan, letting my head loll back to give him more access.

"Well, I think it might be time for a different kind of message." Eric suggests, moving his thumbs in concentric circles around my shoulder blades. I feel instantly relaxed, safe even, but I can't help thinking that if Ethan were the one touching me like this, I'd be a puddle in his arms.

"And what kind of message is that?" I prompt him, slipping out of his reach and turning to face him. I'm not sure if I'm imagining it or not, but I think I see a flash of disappointment cross his features. However if it was there, it's gone as quickly as it appeared.

"One he can't ignore." Eric answers simply. "After all, you did just get engaged, and a big famous perfume designer like you getting married? That sounds like front page news to me."

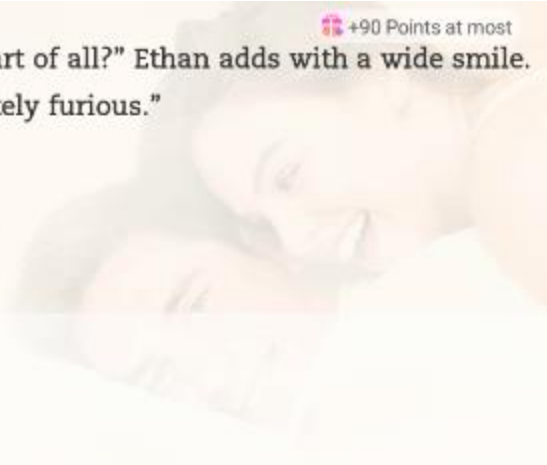
I think it over for a few moments, rolling the idea around in my mind. He has a point. Ethan is the one who made this fight public, it would be very fitting if I were to respond to his challenge in kind. What's more, Eric is right, if we want our lie to be believable, we have to act like we're actually engaged – and it would be major news. Every fashion magazine on the continent would want an invite to cover the ceremony, that's just the nature of my job.

"Well that would certainly cut him off at the ankles." I acknowledge with admiration.

"And the best part of all?" Ethan adds with a wide smile.

"He'll be absolutely furious."

"Let's do it."



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