

Chapter 110 Running Again

3rd Person

“We have to get ‘way from her before she can split us up.” Riley fretted, exchanging worried glances with her siblings.

“How can we ‘scape though?” Paisley countered. “The doors are locked!”

They were locked in the back of yet another windowless van and speeding down the King’s road, which connected the tropical port to the Southern Isles’ capital city. They knew from eavesdropping on Anita and her goons that they would reach the royal palace within a few hours, and by then it would be too late.

“We should tell her we have to go potty,” Parker suggested, “then she’ll stop and we can run away.”

“I dunno if she’d stop for that.” Ryder added skeptically, “I think she’d just say to hold it.”

“Say you’re gonna be sick then!” Riley mused, “I bets she’ll believe you after how sick you got on the boat.”

“Yeah, say you’re gonna make a huge mess she’ll have to clean up.” Paisley contributes.

“And be reaaally whiny!” Riley instructed.

At once, the boys raised their young voices to shrill howls. “Stop the car! I’m gonna puke!” Parker shouted.

“Me too!” Ryder added, “It’s going too fast!”

“Shut up you brats!” Anita bit back, glaring into the back of the vehicle.

The boys clutched their bellies and began rolling around on the floor, moaning and wailing. In the end, it probably wasn’t the imminent danger of their sickness which broke the traffickers will, but the sounds of their faux misery. Anita lost her patience almost instantly, slamming her hands against the dashboard and telling the driver to pull over. “Stop now, before I lose my fucking mind.”

The car veered off to the side of the road and the driver slammed on the brakes, sending the pups rolling across the floor mats. “Owie!” Paisley complained, rubbing her arm. A bruise was quickly forming on her delicate skin from colliding with some heavy equipment. Looking towards the offending items, she noticed a toolbox fitted with various drawers.

“Are you okay?” Riley asked in concern, surveying her sister for signs of injury.

“I’m fine, look at this.” Paisley pointed towards the drawers, and curiously pulled them open. Inside she found a plethora of nails, screws and metal washers. Anita and company had stolen the van from the port, and based on all the tools and four by fours in the cargo bay, the rightful owners were probably construction workers. “We can put these in the door!” She whispered excitedly.

It took Riley a moment to realize what she meant, but as Anita slid the side door open and the unmistakable rumbling of steel on steel filled the air, she understood. The tracks beneath the sliding door had to be clear in order for it to close, and even one tiny screw could prevent that from happening. “Tha’s brilliant!” She exclaimed in an undertone.

“The only question is whether we makes it obvious and just run, or hope she’s impatient enough not to realize the door’s closed.” Paisley murmured in the other pup’s ear while the boys tumbled out of the van and pretended to run off into the brush to vomit.

“I says we go big.” Riley confided. “The boys are ‘lready out, and they’ll notice the sound of the doors opening even if we’re moving.”

“You’re right, ‘sides, maybe we don’ need to block the door at all. Is open now, maybe we can just use these to keep them from following.” Paisley pulled open the nail tray, eagerly eyeing the pointy implements.

“Ready?” Riley asked, “you go first and tell the boys to run, I’ll set the trap.”

Paisley nodded and leapt out of the truck, thoroughly distracting Anita, “Hey, get back here! I didn’t give you permission to get out!”

Paisley ignored her, and before Anita could move a muscle, Riley slipped from the van and darted past her, turning back and dumping the nails over the ground. As soon as she heard the boys and Paisley take off, she began running too, sprinkling the nails over the earth behind her like vicious bread crumbs.

They heard a series of outraged shouts from their kidnappers, soon followed by the crash of footfalls through the undergrowth and the agonized screech of a she wolf treading on an upturned spike. Her howls of pain were quickly joined by those of her companions, as the city dweller’s thin shoes did little to protect them from the sharp objects.

The pups wanted to stop and look back, or simply to pause long enough to laugh, but they knew they had to keep going. They had to put some distance between themselves and their pursuers.

“That was genius!” Parker praised his sister. “They won’t walk for a week!”

“Tha’s the idea!” Paisley preened under his approval, tossing a nervous glance over her shoulder to make sure he was right. All four wolves were hopping on one foot, holding the afflicted limb in their hands and crying out in torment. As she watched, the tallest man managed to land his intact foot on another upturned nail, which sent him flying. Too afraid to put pressure on his already impaled toes and heels, he landed on his tailbone – hard. A new level of anguished crying burst from his lips as his backside was also punctured by the many nails, and Paisley had to turn forward again, lest she get so distracted watching them get their just desserts that she ran into a tree.

The pups ran deeper and deeper into the forest, only stopping until they were completely out of breath. Bent double and gasping for air, they formed a small circle and helped brace each other’s weight. “What do we do now?” Ryder questioned. “they’re down now, but as soon as they’re better, they’ll track us.”

“We have to find a way to get far away without leaving a trail.” Parker answered, holding his stomach as a stitch gripped his side.

“We need a river.” Riley declared.

“But...” Paisley’s objection left her lips before she could think it through, and now her siblings were looking at her expectantly, waiting for her to finish her thought. Sighing when she realized they weren’t just going to forget, she added, “I can’t swim.” Her heart had never been strong enough to handle any type of cardio activity, so she’d missed out on a lot of fun things other pups took for granted.

“Tha’s okay.” Parker assured her. “We’ll help you.”

“Yeah,” Ryder agreed. “We can teach you, or find something for you to float on.”

“Tha’s assuming we can even find a river.” Riley pointed out, looking around the dense forest. They were so deep in the wood that the canopy was blocking out the sun completely, and no matter which direction she turned, there was simply a sea of trees as far as the eye could see. She cocked her ears, listening for any signs or sounds of flowing water, and eventually caught the babbling of a distant brook.

“That way!” She directed, “Is little, but it might lead to more water.”

“Try not to disturb the ground.” Parker advised as they set off. Luckily there wasn’t much mud under foot, but there was an overabundance of leaf litter and fallen branches. It would be nearly impossible not to make an impact. Still, they did their best, and before too long, they reached the stream Riley had scouted.

“We should walk straight down the middle.” Paisley reasoned, nervously studying the water to make sure it wasn’t too deep.

“Good idea.” Ryder concurred, “but which direction?”

“Go ‘gainst the current.” Riley advised, jumping into the middle of the rocky streambed. “If we’re lucky is coming from a river, and if not, at least we won’t make tracks.”

One by one the pups joined her, the boys sandwiching Paisley between them so she’d be protected. Riley led the way fearlessly, and before long, the sounds of rushing water drew nearer and nearer. The stream grew deeper and deeper, until Paisley was waist high in water and beginning to panic.

“We need to stop and find a float.” Ryder called to Riley, sensing his little sister’s unease.

Together they found a huge fallen branch, which when thrown into the water, floated perfectly. It was big enough for all four of them to hold on, and they were definitely going to need it. While the others searched Riley dashed on ahead to try and decipher the landscape awaiting them. The stream was an offshoot of a river which looked a mile wide, and its raging waters moved so quickly that it would be a struggle for any of them to fight the current, whether they could swim or not.

“I dunno ‘bout this.” Paisley worried aloud when the others joined Riley.

“It does look scary.” Ryder agreed.

“We don’ have a choice,” Parkey announced grimly. “If we wanna get back to Mommy and Daddy, we have to make it so Anita can’t find us.”

It took a lot of encouragement and prodding to get Paisley into the water, with many assurances about crocodiles and carnivorous fish along the way. The other children were bluffing of course, but they knew this was the only way. In the end, it wasn’t any monsters of the deep which threatened them most, but the unforgiving rapids and huge boulders covering the riverbed. They only made it five minutes – which felt like a thousand – before Paisley was pulled under with a terrified yelp, and the other pups were swept away by the current.

Paisley’s foot was caught between two rocks, and the water was lashing her body on all sides, covering her head and choking the air from her lungs as she fought to free herself. The last thing she saw before the world went black, was a huge, dark shape moving towards her through the depths – one she felt certain was about to eat her alive.