

Chapter 113 The Pups Are Rescued From The River

3rd Person

The closer Paisley drew to her siblings, still carried on the back of her mysterious rescuer, the clearer their confused expressions became. “What is that?” Riley asked curiously, cocking her head as she studied the creature supporting her sister.

“I dunno, I was drowning an’ I thought it was gonna eat me, but then it saved me instead.” Paisley explained weakly.

“We’re so sorry, Paisley.” Parker frowned. “We never should have made you swim. Are you okay?”

“I’m really tired.” Paisley admitted, “drowning is hard.”

The other pups murmured sympathetically, then reached out their hands to help their sister onto the rocks. However when Paisley extended her own arms to them, the creature transporting her swam back out of reach. It was managing to fight the current somehow, keeping them in place while Paisley conferred with her siblings. “I think it wants you to climb on too.” She guessed, unsure of what else its strange behavior could mean.

“How can you tell?” Ryder wondered aloud.

“I dunno, but I think it wants to help.” Paisley shrugged. “Is a nice monster.”

The other pups exchanged wary glances, but intrepid Riley was the first to take the leap. Setting her jaw, she slid off the rocks and into the water, paddling over to Paisley and her rescuer, then climbing onto its back beside her. Parker was next, bracing himself for the return to the icy waters before diving in, and latching onto the unknown animal when he realized how warm it was. Ryder reluctantly fell into line, and the next thing they knew, they were gliding along the swift river, moving faster than even the current.

They couldn’t be sure how long they traveled, how far they went or even where they were headed, but eventually their living raft veered towards the shoreline, and swam far enough into the shallows for the pups to disembark from its back. Wading along the rocky shore, the quadruplets were finally able to get a good look at their savior. It raised its head above the surface, staring up at them with such a benevolent expression, they couldn’t help but reach out and pet its head. It had huge, expressive eyes, and a very round snout – almost like a cow’s. “What is it?” Parker whispered.

“I dunno, but is definitely a friend.” Paisley answered.

“Thank you for helping us.” Riley told the animal.

“Should we give it a name?” Ryder asked, “just in cases we see it again?”

“How about fluffy?” Riley suggested with a giggle.

The others glanced at her skeptically. “But is not fluffy.” Parker reasoned.

“Yeah, tha’s why it’s funny.” Riley rolled her eyes.

“Okay.” Paisley smiled, “Fluffy it is!”

After they waved goodbye to Fluffy, the pups staggered to shore, relieved that the strange forest before them was warm, if not familiar. In fact, it was unlike any forest they’d ever seen. Back in the Nightfang territory there were tons of mountains and trees, but this looked more like the rainforests they saw on nature shows. There was moss and vines as far as the eye could see, and huge ancient trees with roots as tall as they were. All manner of strange critters rustled through the dense canopy and undergrowth, and their sharp shifter ears caught every last sound.

“You guys, we’re really, really lost.” Ryder announced, to no one’s surprise.

“What do we do?” Parker inquired, not having the first clue how to find their way home, let alone make it through the night in a dark jungle.

“I want Mommy and Daddy.” Riley admitted in a small voice.

“I know.” Parker agreed with a sniffle. “I want them too.”

Just then it began to rain, thunder and lightning crashing violently overhead, sending a downpour more powerful than anything the pups had experienced back home. Seeking shelter in a hollow tree, they snuggled close and tried to get warm, but no one seemed able to speak. No one seemed to know what to say.

Paisley had never had the opportunity to take care of anyone other than herself, and she didn’t really know how to do it, but she remembered how much better she felt after Jane sang to her in the hospital. She had to guess that her mother had sung the same song to her siblings in their times of need as well. So as their shivers of cold and fear gradually lessened, she opened her mouth and began to sing, unknowingly repeating the same lullaby Jane had serenaded her babies with from the day they were born. One by one the other pups burst into tears, and before long Paisley gave in too, her song fading away as she wept her sorrows into her siblings’ loving arms.

“What are you thinking about?”

Jane was sitting on the edge of Ethan’s bed, her face locked in a miserable grimace. She hadn’t spoken to him since they left the police headquarters, but they also hadn’t slept apart since the pups were taken, even if the Alpha spent most of his nights tossing and turning rather than actually resting. It was some relief to Ethan that Jane still came to his room when she turned in for the night – he’d fully expected her to give him the cold shoulder until he departed for the Southern Isles.

“The boys have really bad motion sickness.” She whispered, “Parker once got sick just sitting in a rowboat.”

Nodding gently, Ethan took a seat next to her. He wrapped an arm around her shoulders, relieved when she accepted the comfort rather than pushing him away. “They get that from you, if I recall.” He murmured, remembering the one and only time he’d taken her sailing. It was just one more reason not to take her on an ocean journey, but he also understood why she was worried about the boys.

When Jane turned to look at him, her eyes were so wide and pitiable that they would give the pups a run for their money any day. “They need me, Ethan. I’ve always been there to take care of them when they’re sick...” She trailed off, clenching her eyes shut and shaking her head. “And Paisley, poor sweet Paisley, I’ve never been there for her in the past, and I’m not there for her now.”

“Paisley doesn’t get seasick.” Ethan assured her, willfully missing the point.

“You know what I mean, Ethan.” Jane complained. “Would you really rather them be scared and alone, than scared with me?”

“I don’t want any of you to be scared.” Ethan remarked simply. “And this might make me sound beyond selfish, but I can’t help thinking that if we don’t succeed... if we can’t get them back, you’re all I have left. I can’t risk you too, Jane.”

“This isn’t about us, Ethan.” Jane insisted. “It’s about them. They come first, always.”

“I made the mistake of not putting you first once before, Jane. Ethan reminded her. “I’m not going to do it again.”

“But this is different!” Jane exclaimed, “I want you to put me second this time!”

“I can’t!” Ethan exploded. “I can’t lose you all, if it comes to it, I’ll sacrifice myself to Aimon, but not you! Not the pups!”

“You’ll do no such thing!” Jane countered, with surprising force. She wasn’t sure where it had come from, but she suspected her wolf was responsible for her forceful reaction.

Ethan arched one dark brow. “Oh I see.” He rumbled. “So it’s okay for you to sacrifice yourself, but not me?”

“That isn’t... I...” Jane threw her arms up into the air, at a loss. “I don’t know! Okay? All I do know is that I’ll go crazy if you leave me behind. It will kill me to have to simply stand by and do nothing while you fight all our demons alone.”

“I’m not asking you to do nothing.” Ethan clarified, “the pack will need someone to lead while I’m away. I have Matthew, but a Luna would be more comforting for the people.”

“But I’m not your Luna anymore.” Jane reminded him softly. “They know Matthew, they trust him. I’m just a murder suspect in their eyes.”

“That isn’t true.” Ethan promised, “but it’s not just about public perception. You’re brilliant Jane, I can’t think of anyone better to fill in for me.”

“Now you’re just flattering me.” Jane sniped, “which – for the record, isn’t working.”

“I’m begging you, Janey.” Ethan professed, taking her lovely face in his hands. “I know how badly you want to come, and honestly I don’t want to let you out of my sight, but I’m begging you to trust me. Trust that I’m doing what’s best for our family.”

Jane gnawed on her plump lip for a long moment, thinking over his words with begrudging consideration. Eventually she nodded in agreement, letting Ethan pull her into his arms for a lingering kiss of relief. Of course, he was too busy ravishing her to notice the way she held one arm behind her back, or the way her pointer and middle fingers crossed as she promised to stay behind.

Ethan was right about one thing, Jane was no fool, and she knew he wasn’t going to agree to let her come along to the Southern Isles. And that’s precisely why she didn’t intend on giving him the choice.
