

Chapter 106 The Pups Take A Journey

3rd Person

“Are we there yet?” Riley whined, her small body rocking back and forth with the ship’s movement. They’d been out on the open ocean for days now, and though the pups would probably have enjoyed standing on the deck looking for dolphins and whales in the vast sea’s swirling waters, they hadn’t been allowed to go above deck. Instead they remained safely in the vast vehicle’s hull, and bided their time by badgering their kidnappers until they all but screamed.

“No, for the millionth time, we Are. Not. There. Yet.” The woman who’d forced them on this unwanted adventure grouched. They’d learned her name was Anita, and had figured out that she was definitely the leader of this trafficking gang, but otherwise their time with the crooks hadn’t offered much information.

“How much longer?” Paisley asked innocently, exchanging a grin with Riley when Anita threw her head back in exasperation. She didn’t respond, she’d already told them it would be two more days three times that morning, and she knew they were just asking to torment her. Luckily for the pups, she was too afraid of harming the Alpha’s pups to retaliate, though she clearly wanted to. That realization had helped Paisley come out of her shell, taking up the slack from Parker and Ryder, who were too seasick to help much.

The boys had spent the first few days of their journey curled up on the floor of the ship, trying to sleep in between bouts of vomiting. They were exhausted and dehydrated, and their sisters were doing everything they could to take care of them despite their bare resources.

Right on cue, Parker moaned and rolled over, resting his head in Riley’s lap. She patted his head the way their Mommy sometimes did, recalling just how much her affection helped even the worst aches and pains. Just thinking about Jane made her heart ache. She knew the others missed their parents as well, but she also understood if they talked about it the traffickers would just make fun of them.

She’d hated very few people in her young life, but Anita and her goons were quickly rising to the top of her list, even on par with Eve and the inspector. “Hey Paisley, she asked in a stage whisper. “What do you think Daddy’s going to do to them when he finds us.”

“I bet he’ll rip their arms off and beat them with them. I saw him do it once.” She lied, keeping her face and voice entirely serious.

“Really?” Riley exclaimed, smothering her desire to laugh. When she and Paisley first met, she loved her simply for being her sister, but the more time that passed the more she fell in love with her personality. It took Paisley a while to feel safe enough with new people to let her mischievous side out to play, but once she did it was unstoppable.

“Uh huh.” Paisley confirmed, nodding earnestly. “He told me never to tell anyone bout it. It was really scary.”

“Anita,” one of the thugs murmured, nudging the woman in question, “are you sure about this? The girl said—”

“The girl is winding you up, you fool.” Anita answered with a glare. “You’re being outsmarted by a four year old. Does that make you proud?”

“How do you know she’s making it up?” He asked, “The Alpha is ruthless, you said it yourself.”

“Because even if he had a reason to do such a thing, he wouldn’t do it in front of his pup.” She snarled.

“I’m not lying.” Paisley declared boldly, glowering at the pair.

“Shut up.” Anita snapped back, “I don’t want to hear another peep out of you until we make port.”

“What are you going to do ‘bout it?” She challenged, confident that the cunning feline was bluffing.

Anita rose to her feet and stomped over to the pups. She scooped up Paisley, who kicked and screamed like a wild thing, thrashing against her captor with righteous fury. “I might not be able to hurt you – no matter how much you deserve it,” She muttered as an aside, “but I can separate you.”

With that she marched over to a storage closet, and shoved the wailing pup inside, closing and locking the door behind her. “Hey, you give my sister back!” Riley cried, joined by weak echoes of outrage from the boys.

“No.” Anita bit. “This ought to teach you not to test my patience, brat. Keep up the nagging and the games and I’ll separate the rest of you too!”

“Then do it!” Riley growled, sounding every bit as intimidating as an angry kitten. The last thing she wanted was to be parted from her brothers, but they were in this together. If Paisley had to be alone, she wouldn’t suffer while the other three got to comfort each other. That was the way it had been from the day she was born, and Riley wasn’t going to let it happen again. If one of them suffered, they all suffered – together.

“Fine.” Anita shrugged, lunging for Riley. “Have it your way!”

The early morning sun filtered into the penthouse’s master bedroom, rousing the slumbering Alpha from his fitful rest. Ethan groaned and glanced at the clock. It felt like he’d only just fallen asleep. When he saw the timestamp blinking on the digital screen, he realized that wasn’t far from the truth. It was just past six AM, and they’d returned to the apartment only an hour earlier, after yet another long night of searching for the pups.

Next he looked to Jane, tsking when he saw the rivulets of tears sliding down her cheeks as she slept. He couldn’t help but wipe them from her face with the pads of his thumbs, unintentionally causing Jane to stir. She whined and cuddled into his chest. “Tell me it was just a dream.” She begged groggily. “Tell me it isn’t real.”

“You were crying in your sleep again.” He answered forlornly, wishing he could tell her what she needed to hear.

Jane whimpered and hiccuped a sob, but her would be breakdown ended as soon as it began. Instead of giving into the instinct to cry her pain away, she pushed away from Ethan and sat up in bed, giving herself a vicious shake. “Goddess, stop it!” She shouted at herself. “Stop, stop, stop!”

Ethan, confused but realizing that this wasn’t directed at him, sat up behind her and stroked her rigid spine. “What’s going on?”

“I’ve got to stop crying!” Jane burst out, slamming her fists into the mattress on either side of her. “It’s not helping a Goddess damn thing. I can’t afford to waste time feeling sorry for myself and I refuse to be the sort of woman who just weeps about her problems instead of fixing them.

“Hey,” Ethan responded, reaching around her to cover her clenched fists with his hands. “That’s not what you’re doing. In fact, maybe if you let yourself cry more it wouldn’t keep happening when you’re trying to rest.”

“I’ve cried plenty.” Jane huffed, “and I won’t be able to rest easy until the pups are home safe. I notice you’re not exactly sleeping either,” She added, glancing at him over her shoulder. “Why were you even up – we only just went to bed.”

“I blame the sun.” He quipped, urging Jane to lie back down with him. He tugged gently on her shoulders, not giving in until she surrendered and lowered her back to the mattress.

“Sure.” Jane muttered sulkily, “you’ve slept maybe three hours since this ordeal began, Ethan Blackwell, don’t think I haven’t noticed.”

“Oh, so you’ve been watching me, have you?” He inquired with a small smile. “Careful, or I might think you’re worried about me – or worse, that you have a crush.”

“I don’t have a crush on you.” Jane replied tartly, “I just don’t want you to fall over in the middle of the search because you’re too exhausted to keep going.”

“Uh huh,” He teased, “And all the sex, is that also because you don’t have a crush?”

Jane giggled, then abruptly snapped her mouth shut, a look of pure guilt crossing over her beautiful features.

“It’s okay to laugh, baby.” Ethan told her softly, petting her hair. “We have to find the light anywhere we can right now.”

“It doesn’t feel right.” Jane frowned. “I shouldn’t be able to find any happiness when the pups are missing. It makes me feel like an even worse mother than before.”

“What do you mean?” Ethan’s brow furrowed. “Worse than what?”

“It’s not news that I wasn’t exactly mother of the year.” Jane stated hollowly. “I split them up, I kept them from you, I imposed all my neuroses onto them.”

“Jane, you were doing what you thought was best, you were just trying to protect them.” Ethan argued.

“Was I?” She challenged. “Or was I just trying to protect myself?”

Ethan sighed, “You love them with all your heart, and they feel it every day, Jane. We all make mistakes, we’re all just trying to figure it out as we go along.” He reasoned, though his own doubts soon rose to the surface. “It’s not as if I’ve done a standout job myself. Look at what happened with Eve – look at what I unwittingly subjected Paisley too.”

“Do you think we’re being punished?” Jane whispered, looking up at Ethan with wide eyes. “Do you think the Goddess took them to teach us a lesson?”

Before he could answer, his phone began to ring and the police commander’s name flashed across the screen. Ethan snatched up the device, “Yes?”

“Alpha?” The commander’s voice sounded, “We’ve caught Eve Mechant.”

“You did?” Ethan exclaimed, putting the phone on speaker. “Were the pups with her.”

“No sir.” The commander sighed. “I think you need to get down here though.”

“We’re on our way.”
