

Chapter 108 Port

3rd Person

When Jane and Ethan arrived at Eric’s rental condo, it appeared to be empty. Jane tried to call him but his phone went directly to voicemail, so they sat down on the front steps and waited.

“Why didn’t you tell me about King Aimon?” Jane asked, tired of simply watching the minutes pass by. “When you found out who Eric was, why didn’t you say that his father had it out for you?”

Ethan grimaced, eyeing Jane warily.

“What?” She pressed, realizing he clearly didn’t want to answer her question.

“It’s nothing.” He said, attempting to brush the matter aside. “I just found it a bit… suspicious, that’s all.”

“Suspicious?” Jane repeated with a deep frown, “That he hid it?”

Ethan shook his head and winced as he explained. “That he just happened to come into your life the way he did.”

Jane blinked. “You think it was some sort of scheme?” She guessed, feeling her stomach lurch uncomfortably.

“How did you two meet in the first place?” Ethan asked, resisting the urge to touch Jane. It was a very difficult impulse to control, when they’d been happily married he rarely let her out of arms reach – keeping his hands on her at every opportunity. His wolf wanted the same now, but he didn’t think this was the time.

“It was random.” Jane shared, flushing as she related the details to him. “The pups were babies, and I was walking their stroller in the park.”

If circumstances had been different, Ethan might have given her a hard time for all the lies she’d told him about the other man – particularly that they’d had an affair – but he refrained, focusing on the matter at hand. “And what, he just walked up to you and said hello?”

“Sort of.” She shrugged. “I was really overwhelmed. You know, new Mom, three babies. I’d been up for three days straight and I couldn’t get them to go to sleep, so I was sitting on this bench crying and he came up and asked me if I was okay.”

“Did he ever tell you what he was doing in the Dark Moon territory?” He questioned, giving in and wrapping an arm around Jane.

She shook her head. “Those early days were such a blur, I was simply trying to put one foot in front of the other. I don’t think I cared why he was there, I was just glad to have a shoulder to lean on.”

Ethan nodded, remembering how difficult it had been for him with Paisley. Still, he’d only had one baby and his mother had been there to help him every step of the way, Jane had three times the stress and was all alone. He hated the idea of her struggling all that time, and part of him wanted to feel glad she’d found a friend to help her get through it. However the circumstances were simply too suspect for him to believe it was all a coincidence.

“You really think he might have targeted me?” Jane murmured softly, “that he knew who I was before he ever asked my name?”

“I don’t know.” Ethan pondered, not wanting to admit just how likely this was. He knew King Aimon’s reputation well, and he wouldn’t put it past the ruthless man to do something like this.

“Yes you do.” Jane responded, narrowing her eyes. “I know that look, Ethan. What aren’t you telling me?”

“Jane?” Eric’s voice interrupted them before Ethan could answer. “What are you doing here?”

Jane jumped slightly, she’d been so preoccupied with their conversation that she’d blocked out everything around them. She hadn’t even seen Eric approach. Ethan tightened his arm around her, though she wasn’t sure if it was in response to her surprise, or Eric’s presence.

Eric, on the other hand, openly glared at their close contact. “Is there any word on the pups?”

“No.” Jane replied grimly, “well, not any good word anyway.”

“We need to ask you some questions.” Ethan interjected, anger simmering just beneath the surface of his words.

“What kind of questions?” Eric inquired warily.

“About your father.” Jane replied. “And about how we became friends.”

Eric sighed, shaking his head as if he didn’t believe this was happening, but was resigning himself to accept it. “You’d better come inside.”

Ryder, Riley, Parker and Paisley stared at the bustling port with wide eyes.

Their journey had been miserable ever since Anita separated them. Locked away in small, cramped rooms without any way to communicate, they bided their time by counting the hours and trying to come up with an escape plan, but escape was very difficult when one was trapped on a boat. It was also nearly impossible to try to figure out anything in advance when they didn’t know where they were going or what it would be like when they got there.

Anita finally released them when land came into view, and they scurried up above deck, gratefully breathing in the first fresh air they’d had in weeks. They gazed out at the bustling seaport, taking in every sight and sound with avid interest. This would be a very easy place to disappear, if only they could get away from their kidnappers.

“Where are we?” Riley asked, watching a local fishmonger cart his catch off a much smaller boat than the one they stood upon.

“I dunno.” Parker replied. “It doesn’t look like any place I’ve seen before.”

“We should run.” Ryder suggested, his face still green from being sick for so many days in a row. “The boat’s stopped, this is our chance.”

“Where would we go?” Paisley reasoned. “We don’t know anyone here. There isn’t a safe place for us to go.”

“We have to try.” Ryder argued back, “We have to do something, we can’t just stay with them. Who knows what they’ll do.”

“You’re right.” Riley told him in a soft voice, “But so is Paisley. I wanna get away too, but we have to have a plan.”

“The plan is to run until we lose them.” Her brother insisted.

“The plan is for you to shut up and behave yourselves.” A cold voice declared over their shoulders. They turned to face Anita with identical sulky glares, and she leered back cruelly. “You four are going on sale – and not a moment too soon. If I’d known how much of a hassle you were going to give me, I would have dumped you out back in the Nightfang territory.”

The children exchanged sly smiles. They’d been miserable from the first moment they were taken, but it pleased them to know they’d made the cat shifter’s life more difficult in the process. “You can’t sell us.” Paisley told her grumpily. “We’re people.”

Anita snorted. “You brats really don’t know anything about the real world, do you?”

“Course we do.” Ryder countered. “Is how we know you’re the worst.”

Anita glowered at the pup. “Shut up and get ready. You’re going to meet the King today, and trust me when I say he won’t be as forgiving as I am if you talk back.”

“You’re not forgiving.” Riley objected, “you’re just scared.”

Anita bent down to the child’s eye level, adopting her most intimidating scowl. “You don’t know the meaning of that word, little girl. But trust me, you will by the time this is all over.” She threatened, taking hold of Riley’s chin. “Your life is about to get very difficult, and I’m going to enjoy watching you suffer.”

She stayed crouched down that way for a moment, watching as her words sank in. However instead of cowering or shrinking back, Riley just rolled her eyes, leaned forward, and sank her little fangs right into the woman’s arm.

Anita reeled back with a howl of pain, and the pups laughed and closed ranks, protecting Riley even though they knew she wasn’t in any true danger. “You’ll pay for that, you brat.” Anita hissed, examining the bloody bite mark on her skin.

“Who’s gonna make me?” Riley challenged fiercely. “Cuz I know it’s not you.”

“Yeah, you’re too chicken.” Parker added, making clucking noises.

Anita pressed her palm to the wound, applying pressure to the punctures. Her dark eyes flashed as her inner panther came to the surface. “We’re a long way from your Daddy now, you know.” She observed. “So far that I might be able to find more than one buyer for you mongrels. “How would you like that, hmm? To be sold to different owners, separated from your litter mates?”

The pups glanced at each other warily, unsure whether or not she was bluffing, but terrified of the suggestion.

“That’s what I thought.” Anita chuckled maliciously. “In fact I’d probably be doing them a service, saving them from the nightmare of all four of you together.”

The pups wanted to object, but they knew that doing so would only drive Anita to latch onto this idea even tighter. Instead they leaned closer to one another and snapped their mouths shut. Anita grinned widely. “Yes, that’s precisely what I think I’ll do. I’m going to sell every one of you to someone different. And then you’ll never see each other again.”