

I placed my shaky cloven hand against the glass, watching the tiny streams of water trickle down the other side of the window like rolling teardrops. They reminded me of her; just like how everything else in this world had a strange way of resembling Becky in one way or another. Her smile, her laugh, or even the way her eyes sparkled when she woke up next to me in the morning.

But the rain... there was something so different about it. Those tiny droplets of cascading water were the only noise that still managed to haunt me, with her muffled cries for help. And I knew why.

It was because the water carried the sound of *his* voice too. The sound of the beast that swallowed her up and devoured her soul; and he did it on a night just like this one. That's why it wasn't going to stop raining. Not tonight anyway. Not with him out there.

I could hear his claws dancing on the rooftop, filling the lobby with a low, rumbling growl that made the hairs stand up on my nape. Then a wicked burst of light filled the horizon, flashing momentarily before the beast let out an echoing roar that snaked its way to my drooping ears. He was hungry tonight, searching for another victim.

That's when I knew I'd have to go out there. Somewhere, in that vast, dark ocean of streets and roads, I was going to have to confront the monster, whether I wanted to or not.

"Shane?"

God, I hated that name. It felt so unnatural, so... *painfully* human. It reminded me just how different I was every time I heard it.

I could smell Allison long before I heard her soft, feminine voice call for me. Her body actually had a pleasant scent, like a crisp blend of faint spices and a hint of vanilla that seemed to fill the entire room, even from the other end of the hall. I closed my eyes for a second, listening to the sharp clicks of her heels against the tile floor as I breathed heavily out of my snout and turned to meet her. She was gazing at me with that glowing smile, and those perfectly innocent little blue eyes of hers. No matter how much I hated to admit it, Allison sure was pretty--for a human.

"Are you okay?" she asked, taking a moment to look up at the clock on the wall before she shifted her attention back to me. "It's nearly twenty after. Is Stephenson making you work late again?"

I didn't respond. As usual, I couldn't find the words, and Allison took the opportunity to let her eyes wander. It wasn't her fault, I suppose. They all did it.

She carefully inspected my porcine body, looking it up and down like she was searching the shelves of a grocery store. It made me feel naked; and I couldn't help glancing down just to make sure I was still fully clothed. This must have been the way my ancestors felt during the auction at the county fair, like a damn slab of meat.

My spine tingled as her examination continued to draw out, and I couldn't help but wonder, "*What is she really looking at? Are you sizing up my lungs? My kidneys?*"

I realized that's what we were engineered for to begin with, but Christ--the notion still made me cringe. But I guess I should've been thankful that human beings, in all their superior glory, were kind enough to allow ethics to come into play somewhere during the process. My knuckles popped as I tightened my fists, digging my hooved fingers back into my palms.

I wasn't sure how successful I was at hiding the grimace, because what I really wanted to say was, "*You treated our sentience like some sort of goddamned afterthought!*"

How... human of you.

But not Allison though, she was different than the others. When she looked at me, her face never showed that fake looking human concern I'd grown so accustomed to. She was one of the good ones; and even if I had a hard time admitting it to myself, she didn't deserve my bitterness. I just wish I knew how to control it better.

"Shane? Earth to Shane, can you hear me?" Allison questioned jokingly as she waved her hand in front of my face. I glanced over her tiny frame, tracing those long strands of blonde hair and that light Caucasian skin till it disappeared into the elegant, navy blue suit she was wearing. Eventually my eyes traveled back up to hers, and I shook my head slightly, attempting to bring my mind back up to speed. I had to force myself not to grunt. That seemed to bother them. Well, most of them anyway.

"No, I--I'm fine," I muttered before glancing back at the wet windows. "It's just... you know..."

"Waiting for the storm to pass?"

I nodded. She sounded concerned, and it made me want to respond, but the words just died in my mouth. I was never good with pleasantries.

"You want a ride?"

"No. I'll be okay."

"You sure?"

Again, I nodded. "I'll see you tomorrow, Allison."

She smiled. "Just don't stick around too late. They might think you like it here."

With that, she walked over to the door and opened it. The wind howled and screamed, echoing within the structure like the bellows of a wild animal trying to rip his way inside as Allison stood in the doorway with her umbrella in hand. It made me shudder, and the dark red hairs all over my body burned as they stood on end once more. The glass windows seemed to match my trepidation as I painstakingly watched Allison open her protective shield, preparing to rush over to her car.

Then I heard the rain let out another wicked, thundering snarl that rumbled through the tenebrous sky toward us. It was as if the beast were trying to tell me he could smell the petite human getting closer, and it made me feel like my hooves were about to fold up and curl back inside of me. I knew something wasn't right. I could feel it, like ice water flowing through my veins as I began to look at Allison a bit differently. Only it wasn't Allison anymore--it was Becky.

I nearly gasped when I saw her porcine body standing there in the doorway, gazing back at me with those soft eyes and that pure, white Yorkshire skin. I almost called out her name, but Becky's ethereal form soon faded from my mind, leaving Allison to solely take her place at the entrance of the building. I felt like I was starting to lose it, and I had to blink my eyes several times, hoping that it would get my head back on track.

There wasn't much time to think though. The beast had already made his intentions perfectly clear, and I knew something was going to happen tonight. But did that mean it was going to involve somebody else now; like this tiny, blonde female who was standing in front of me? There was only one way to find out.

"Allison--wait."

She looked at me from the open door, her umbrella already outside and in harms way. The fabric was being assaulted by the relentless drumming of water as I stepped closer. It gave me a nervous twinge I couldn't hide. I wanted her to come back inside where it was safe, but I knew she wouldn't understand. Nobody would.

"You... you sure you don't mind," I said coyly as my throat started to tighten. The words felt like razor blades coming out, nearly causing me to choke; but Allison smiled like only she could do as she grabbed my cloven hand with those thin human digits of hers. They felt so tender, yet strangely inviting against my rough skin and coarse hair. No matter how hard I tried, the faintest hint of a smile managed to grace the edges of my mouth. It felt weird. I hadn't smiled in a long time.

"You ready?" Allison asked with a wink as her eyes met mine.

It took a while, but I eventually nodded, and we headed out the door.

I didn't even try to get under the safety of her umbrella. I just ran to the car as fast as I could, and Allison didn't have a problem keeping up with me. My hoofed feet cracked against the pavement, but every few steps, the snap of my hooves were silenced with a

splash. It was almost as if the rain had decided to come down harder just for me, pounding on my stocky frame like a prisoner being beaten by his captors. I didn't give it the satisfaction. I fought my way through the bombardment and entered the safety of her vehicle, slamming the door shut. Allison quickly closed her umbrella and did the same, dulling the noise outside as she sealed herself inside the car.

I could have sworn I heard the beast roar as I glanced at the roof of her vehicle. The water continued to pelt the car, and it sounded like somebody was vigorously tapping their claws across the metal. I breathed another sigh of relief and leaned back in the seat, trying to give myself a moment's peace from the cacophony outside. That's when I heard Allison began to chuckle. I shifted to the driver's side, where she was trying not to stare at me. I was probably burning holes through her with my eyes, because she forced herself to stop giggling as she settled into her seat.

"Sorry, it's just that..." Allison started to say as she tossed her umbrella in the back.

I didn't have to ask, "What?" I did it with a simple twitch of my floppy ears, and surprisingly, Allison seemed to understand. She reached across the car and flipped the visor down on my side, exposing the mirror behind it. I hesitated, but lifted my head ever so slightly to see my reflection. She started laughing again.

I looked soggy. The hair all over my face and snout was dripping wet, and I felt like a soaker hose that was running full blast and perspiring all over the floorboard. I twitched my nose and wiped the water away from my snout as I let out a disgusted grunt. I didn't say another word as I relaxed my body against the now slightly damp seat. It was time to get this over with, and Allison seemed to figure it out on her own. She put the key into the ignition, fired the car's engine, and started driving deeper into the storm.

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This was a mistake. I shouldn't have got in the car with Allison, and it seemed like everything around us was trying to tell me that.

The wipers sounded exhausted, straining to keep up with the thin layer of water that was blurring the window. I could barely see, and Allison didn't seem to be faring much better as she leaned forward, her head hovering just over the steering wheel. The vehicles that sailed by us in the opposite lane looked like nothing more than vague shadows with glowing eyes as they streaked through the night, only to be consumed by the looming darkness that trailed behind us. I tried to ignore it all by narrowing my eyes and shifting my focus toward the dark, uninviting road. Yet all it did was help me avoid the blinding sheen of the oncoming headlights.

"Ain't this somethin'?" Allison chimed in as she made a quick glance at me. "I haven't seen it rain like this in a long, long time."

I saw her look at me out of the corner of my eye, and I nearly answered with, “*I have,*” but I remained stoic, glaring out the car’s front window.

“You don’t like to talk much... do you?”

The ensuing pause seemed to draw out for hours, and I’m still not sure why, but I eventually gave in with a heavy, almost painful sounding, “No.” I thought it would discourage her, but it didn’t work.

“Shane... is something wrong? Because you look really, really tense.”

The exasperated grunt just seemed to be the natural response. I couldn’t hold it back.

“Does it have something to do with the weather?”

That made me stir, and my body finally started working in unison as I shifted to look at Allison. She was persistent; I’ll give her that much. “I just don’t like the rain, that’s all. It bothers me.”

I could tell she was trying to pull together an appropriate response. Something sincere that wouldn’t sound offensive. She didn’t give herself enough time. “Is it an animal thing?”

I nearly laughed, but it came out like a quiet, uncomfortable sounding squeal. “No... actually--it’s more of a human thing.”

I noticed her grip the steering wheel a little tighter as an abrupt flood of rain started rattling against the roof of the car like a child wailing on a demonic bongo drum. It made my heart stumble. I sucked in a breath as my curly tail began to twitch inside my jeans, forcing me to shift in the seat. I needed something to concentrate on, something to take my mind away, and I couldn’t help looking back at the cars that were speeding toward us from the opposite direction.

Then I saw it. A blurred message was glaring at us from the side of the road. I squinted, struggling to see the flashing mobile billboard that read, “Road Closed Ahead. Use Detour.”

“It looks like we’re gonna have to take the long way around,” Allison said, attempting to sound upbeat with her positive tone of voice. I wasn’t nearly as calm.

*Don’t make me do this. Please God... don’t make us go down two-forty.*

I heard a rattling inside the car, and it took me a moment to realize it was my hoof clacking against the floorboard as if the carpet wasn’t even there. The nervous twinge slithered up my body, and the door handle let out a strained creak as I tightened my hand around it. I thought it was going to snap off as we came to the stop sign.

The large, yellow arrow stared at me from the middle of the intersection, telling me exactly what I feared. It was pointing me back to her accident; to the place where the rain had sprung to life and swallowed my Becky's soul. My ears flicked at the hammering clatter of the water, which was echoing inside the car and matching my quivering heartbeat.

The beast knew I was close, and he called to me with another crack of thunder that blasted the sky. It made me jump in the seat, which startled Allison and momentarily paralyzed her. My lungs began to heave and I inhaled deeply, hoarding what air I could as if I were taking my last breath before plunging into the ocean. Thankfully, no one was behind us, because it seemed to take forever for Allison to finally step on the gas pedal so the car could creep onto route two-forty. For a moment, I thought my shakes would never subside.

"Shane..." Allison muttered nervously, glancing at me from the sides of her eyes. Her voice was strained now. Fearful. And the last thing I needed was to have her frightened while she was driving the car.

"I'm sorry about that," I quickly answered as I took in a deep, soothing breath. "I didn't mean to scare you."

I could tell she wasn't pleased with my response, so she dug deeper. "Di... did something happen to you, Shane? Something you're not telling me?"

Her tone was still apprehensive, and even though I didn't want to speak, I knew I was going to have to. "Yeah. Something did happen. Something I've never told anyone."

"Well... yo--you can tell me. If you want to."

I managed a nod. Even with all the water pelting the outside of the vehicle, my mouth suddenly felt as dry as a desert; and it seemed as if the words were raking across my tongue on the way out. Everything started to hurt, but I still wanted to answer her. I needed to. "It actually happened here--on this road. And it was raining just like it is now... when I lost her."

"Her?"

I closed my eyes and nodded. "Her name was Becky. And she was my..."

I couldn't finish the thought, but it didn't matter. I had already opened the door. The events of that night flashed in my mind like a ubiquitous burst of light, making my eyes sting. I tried to hide behind my eyelids, but it only made the images seem clearer. I saw myself standing there again as they pulled her vehicle out of the water and removed her lifeless husk from the car. And then there was the rain. Oh God, that rain. It just wouldn't stop. He wouldn't let it stop.

I inhaled a ragged, painful snuffle in an attempt to stifle the pending sob. I hated it when that happened. Our instincts didn't understand the need for tears, and when anthros started to cry, the brain naturally tried to fight off the confused animal instincts like an infection, causing a jagged ache to pierce through our brains. It made my snout twitch. I had to blink back the sadness, wiping away the stray tears with my shaky hand before I was finally able to continue talking.

I was surprised how easy it came after that. I swallowed the lump in my throat, and the words just started pouring out. "She drowned. She lost control of her vehicle and it went into the canal. The one that runs along the road just up ahead. They're not exactly sure what happened but they... they think maybe she was trying to avoid something. Like an animal or... I--I don't know what. But the police said that if... if it weren't for the wet conditions that night, they think she might've..." I paused, my eyes dropping into my lap.

"My God, I... I'm so sorry."

I straightened myself up in the seat, rolling my shoulders in a failed attempt to hide the pain. It never worked. "It's fine, Allison. That happened nearly two years ago now... and I guess I... I need to learn to get over it."

"Shane--you don't get over something like that. It's no wonder you're so tense. I'd be too."

"Yeah, well--it's still no excuse to be scared of the rain. Not like it's coming after me or anything."

After less than a mile, the pitch of the tires changed. We were crossing the bridge, and the beast knew it as he greeted me with a low, cackling grumble. My heart sank into my gut, and when the vehicle came in contact with solid pavement once again, I couldn't help but glance to my right.

Our headlights caught the reflectors on the newly installed guard rail, making it stand out like a makeshift grave stone. I could see the water running parallel with the road behind it, like a long, scaly dragon chasing after the car. I shivered in my seat and turned back to the thumping wipers, which still couldn't keep up with the pouring rain. I wanted us to go faster. I wanted to get away from the beast while he was lying dormant, but a single red light glared at us in the distance, growing bigger as we approached.

The wet brakes squealed as Allison stopped the vehicle at the T-shaped intersection. My teeth were chattering. The red hairs on my neck stood on end, and the spasm in my shoulders ripped at my muscles so violently, I couldn't hold back the aching grunt. It felt as if Becky were attempting to reach out and claw me with her hooved fingers, trying to escape from her watery prison which was no less than twenty feet away from the car. I

couldn't even bear to look at the water; for fear that it might lunge forward and grab me just like it did her.

I peered through the wet front window, staring at the car that was waiting in the opposite lane across the intersection. It was difficult to tell in the heavy rain, but the driver looked like a young anthro feline, which made me relax just a little bit. I hadn't seen many of them around.

They were a newer creation, engineered toward the end of the organ harvesting fiasco, and mostly for cosmetic purposes. Swine weren't exactly considered *aesthetically* appealing, and humans seemed much more inclined to buy a heart or a kidney from a more glamorous looking cat or canine anthro. I cringed at the thought, but at least it took my mind off the rain for a moment.

I blinked my eyes several times, trying to see through the layer of water that blurred everything as if I had just woken up from a deep sleep. I knew it was just in my head, but God, that cat reminded me of Becky. Then again, everyone seemed to look like her on days like this. But why did it feel so different this time? And why did it feel like Becky was trying to tell me something?

That's when the light turned green.

The feline across from us didn't hesitate, but we did. I made sure of it. I reached over with my trembling hand and grabbed Allison's arm. My legs were stiff; and my hoofed feet cramped up as I pressed them into the floorboard, like I was trying to reach for an invisible brake pedal on my side of the car. It delayed us for only a second, but that was all we needed.

From our left, a blazing pair of headlights pierced through the darkness, illuminating the gold fur of the young feline as if she were caught in the rays of a giant spotlight. She was in the middle of the intersection, looking at the oncoming truck and watching its glaring beams grow brighter and bigger in her vision. It looked like she opened her mouth to scream, but it was already too late. There was nothing any of us could do to stop it.

The massive vehicle sped through its red light and careened into the side of the cat's vehicle, as if God were playing billiards with the two automobiles. They erupted upon impact, spraying wet shrapnel in all directions that pelted the window of Allison's car even harder than the huge droplets of rain. The heavy truck barely even jumped as it drove the feline's much smaller car through the intersection.

Metal popped and crunched like agonizing screams as the two vehicles went sliding in front of ours, heading towards the canal. The truck finally came to rest, but the tires on the other vehicle squealed as it continued across the wet pavement and banged into the low guard rail. The momentum flipped the car onto its side, causing the barricade to buckle like a flimsy piece of caution tape as the vehicle rolled over the top of the metal



guard rail. Then I watched as the cat's vehicle flipped once down the embankment, partially crinkling like a soda can before it plunged into the water upside down.

I quietly let out the word, "No," but the events had already been set in motion. She was in his grasp now, and the beast could smell blood as he started coming to life. His wet fangs slapped and splashed against the vehicle, pulling it under as he attempted to swallow the car whole like a snake trying to ingest an egg. I was frozen in my seat, watching the carnage unfold until Allison finally grabbed my shoulder and jarred me from my fixed trance. By then, the car was almost completely submerged.

I expected to wake up at any second. I figured this was all in my head and the beast would eventually just go away and everything would be fine. It had to be a bad dream; but as the rain continued to pour down from the clouds and time kept rolling by, I knew it wasn't a nightmare. That feline was going to die, just like my Becky did.

"Call 9-1-1," I said to Allison before stepping out of the car.

She hesitated for a moment, unsure of how to respond. I could smell the fear radiating off her body, just like mine was. "Shane--wait."

"Do it! Now!"

She muttered something back to me, but the downpour silenced her with a deafening rumble as I started running toward the sunken car. I watched the canal bounce in my vision, growing more and more imposing with each step that drew me closer to the water. I think the rain could sense what I was doing, because it started pounding on my body as I bounded over Becky's broken metal tombstone and ran within ten feet of the monster's mouth. I breathed in deep, filling my lungs with life while I sucked in some of the water that was dripping off my snout. I told myself I would never go near the beast after the accident, but now I was actually going inside--and I was doing so willingly.

I plunged into the water, hearing the distant, howling echo of movement and air bubbles as I settled into the beast's world. It was dark and murky, and it wasn't long before the headlights of the feline's car blinked at me and disappeared. I made a note to myself. She had about three minutes to live.

I swam toward the vehicle, kicking my hoofs wildly before nearly banging my snout into the car. Any available light from the surface was fading fast, wrapping everything in a shadowy, cold blanket as the vehicle continued to plunge. It was sinking like a bowling ball, the engine pulling the car deeper into the canal. Some of the windows had to be broken, but as I quickly felt my way around the side of the vehicle and rooted with my snout, everything still seemed solid.

Bubbles flooded my vision as the car jolted to a sudden halt. I was blinded for a moment and I lost track of everything. I had to fumble around for the door, eventually clasping my cloven hand over the handle; but when I pulled on it, nothing moved. I tried

again, and still--nothing. I wasn't sure if the car was too heavily damaged or if the pressure just hadn't equalized, but either way, the beast had his jaws firmly clasped around the vehicle and he wasn't going to let me inside.

She had just over two minutes left.

I moved deeper toward the cracked side window, and I could barely see the feline frantically trying to get free of her safety restraint. The animal part of her had completely taken over, and she was thrashing about in an attempt to get free of her shackles. She started biting at her seat belt and clawing at the door even as I pounded on the side of the vehicle, screaming for her to stop in a burst of air bubbles.

*"Fight your instincts, dammit!"* I bellowed inside my head as I tried to punch out the glass. *"Stop struggling or you're gonna die!"*

Somehow, I wanted her to hear me, but the cat just continued to panic. That's when I saw one of her claws snap off against the window. Than another; and the inside of the car began to darken a little more, clouding up with a faint red hue like someone had mixed food coloring into the canal water. I had to fight my own instincts at that moment, so I started to pray, hoping that our specially engineered lungs could buy us some more time.

I didn't want to battle the scared cat, so I moved to the rear side window. It was partial busted in, so I cranked my legs back, aiming the point of my hooves at what remained of the broken glass. Unable to brace myself, I kicked out, and nothing happened. I couldn't build up any power. I pulled myself closer and coiled up once more, pushing through the water as I gritted my teeth. It gave, but not enough. I felt like I was moving in slow motion, and I wondered how much time had passed. Ten seconds? Thirty? My screaming lungs and itchy snout told me it was closer to the latter.

*Come on, Shane, before we all drown.*

I kicked out one more time, and the window finally gave. It buckled inward, taking my leg with it as some glass dug into my calf. I whipped around and scrambled inside, pulling my porcine body through the small opening which looked like a mouth full of jagged teeth. I tried to ignore the steadily growing red hue that was tinting the water all around me, but my leg was beginning to burn and it wouldn't let me. The pressure was also starting to make my ears throb, and my lungs felt as if they were being filled with hot gravel. I thought my body was going to explode as I pushed myself inside the metal prison, and that's when I saw the infant cat strapped into her car seat. If it were possible, I would've sucked in a gasp.

The kitten was petrified. She was rigid in her upside down car seat, but her eyes seemed to be pleading with me, begging to be set free. Her cheeks were puffy and she was tensely bobbing her head. How the infant managed to hold her breath, I don't know, but her small lungs needed air fast.

My mind battled over what to do for only a second before I acted and moved for the kitten. I undid her straps and got the infant cat free, twisting her tiny frame upright before pulling the feline into my chest. I bit my bottom lip and tensed up as she sucked into me, as if my body had become a vacuum. Whatever air I had left in my lungs managed to escape as her claws dug through my clothes and pierced my hide. At least she wasn't going anywhere.

With one arm around the kitten, I pushed us out the broken window and frantically kicked for the surface. I don't know how many times I swallowed; trying to fight my body's screaming need to get oxygen that wasn't there. It burned and ripped at my insides. I felt like I was dying; and the fact that I was swimming toward the rippling lights didn't help matters. I wasn't ready to go just yet.

The gasp came out as a horrified squeal when I shot to the surface and sucked in life deep and hard. The rain tried to push me back under. It wanted to drown me, and I had to fight to keep us both afloat. The downpour was thundering in my ears like someone was pelting the water with giant rocks, but it was soon silenced by the terrified cries of the kitten when she realized she could breathe again. She wouldn't let go, digging in deeper with her claws and shocking my body as the adrenaline began to fade. I could feel the cold canal water mixing in with the warm blood and open wounds. It slowed me down just a little.

"It's okay, baby," I said, somehow managing to choke out the tired words while spitting up water. "I got ya."

I blinked my eyes to get rid of the liquid haze, trying to get my bearings so I could swim for the edge. I saw more lights, but no flashing red and blue ones like I had hoped. Blurry figures scrambled to the concrete bank as I kicked closer, but it was hard to see. I was nearly on my back just so I could keep the kitten out of the water.

A man came down to the edge and reached for us, his grubby human hands pawing for the cat that seemed to be physically attached to me. I couldn't help holding her close and secure as I stared into his eyes, searching for his reasoning. I had read all the horror stories. I knew the things humans were doing to anthro children, even now. But when the human's panicked gaze met mine and I got a whiff of his sincere scent, we understood each other; and even if it was only for that brief moment, it was enough.

"The mother's still inside," I shouted before prying the kitten away from my tender body and handing her over to the human. "Watch her claws."

The beast laughed at that, letting out a cackling rumble in the distance. The pain disappeared for a moment as I gritted my teeth and swam back toward the submerged car. I heard Allison's voice behind me, but it was too faint to make out and I couldn't turn around. It had to have been close to three minutes already. She was running out of time.

I sucked in as much air as the rain would allow before I plunged back inside the murky liquid and headed for the car.

It took me longer to find it the second time, but I eventually bumped into the dark shape and climbed through the same window. The mother wasn't struggling now. Her body was just floating there, dangling in the water. I unhooked her seat belt and she fell lifelessly into my arms, her knees banging against the steering wheel but she didn't respond. I was losing her. The beast was eating her soul right in front of me, so I swam out of the vehicle and kicked my hooved feet as hard as I could. I erupted to the surface once more, gasping for air, but she didn't do anything. She made no sound. She was dying.

Her body was heavy and motionless as I paddled for the edge. Another human jumped in to help but I didn't pay any attention to him. I needed to get out of the water if I was going to try and save her.

Allison aided another human in pulling the feline from the canal and I climbed out after them, helping them carry her toward the road even though my body was pleading for me to stop. Everything ached, but nothing more than my heart as they laid her on the ground.

The kitten started to yowl, screaming for her mommy over the panicked voices of the humans that surrounded me. I ignored them, and at least Allison realized the child needed someone to hold her. I pushed a burly human aside and fell to my knees, splashing in front of the mother while the rain pounded on my already wet shirt. I wasn't going to let him kill her without a fight.

Her muzzle was short, making it easier for me to cover the cat's mouth and nose with my own as I tried breathing life into the feline. Her chest heaved, not of her own doing, so I did it again. Nothing. I checked for a pulse. If it was there, it was too faint to feel, so I clasped my fingers together and found what I believed was the proper place to start the compressions. Her ribs popped as I attempted to start her heart, thrusting to get the muscle pumping again, but she just lay there motionless, like Becky did.

"Please--don't you do this to me again. Not again--please!" I begged to God, or whoever would listen before breathing into her muzzle once more.

A sudden pain shot through my head. I was crying again, but the rain cascaded down my face and erased my tears like they meant nothing. It soaked into my pores, as if the water were trying to peel off my skin and erode me away just so he could get to her. I tried to shield the feline mother from the shower of water, but the beast's saliva continued to drip all over her face. He wouldn't let her go. He was drowning her, even out here.

I sat back up and started pushing on the mother's chest again while her kitten was screaming at the top of her already strained lungs. They were horrific, deadening screams that canceled out the thundering rain in short bursts. I continued to thrust more

life back into the cat, but still, she didn't move on her own. I hoped that maybe, just maybe the bellows of her child would trigger a response in the mother. Something--anything--just please don't die on me.

*Please, God... if you're out there, don't you let her die like my Becky did. Please.*

Then she coughed. A painful, gargling cough, but it was life. I tipped the feline on her side, letting the water pour out from the deepest regions of her lungs as she hacked the beast out of her body. My ears started to twitch when I heard the soothing lullaby of the sirens in the distance, and they seemed to somehow calm the kitten's frantic wailing. Then the mother grabbed hold of my wet shirt, ripping at it with her claws as she continued to choke and cough. I didn't care though, because they were going to live. Thank God--they were going to be alright. And that's all I needed to know as I held onto the feline and waited for the ambulance to arrive.

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I was glad to see one of the paramedics was a swine, probably a distant relative from the odor. It was rich and earthy, like freshly rooted dirt, and strong enough that even the crisp smell of rainwater couldn't mask his familiar scent. I watched as he began tending to the feline, and after only a few seconds, his snout started to twitch. He looked up in my direction, briefly making eye contact with me before the police snaked into the crowd and pulled me aside for questioning. It didn't matter though. I got what I needed. Just seeing into the pig's eyes, no matter how short lived, made me feel a whole lot better about leaving the mother in his care. I knew she'd be in good hands.

When the police were done with me, I staggered my way back to Allison's car. I flopped down on the wet pavement, leaning against the passenger side door with my legs tucked in close and my arms draped lifelessly over my knees. It felt comforting to rest my body against something solid, even if everything around me was still completely soaked. At least the rain had started to subside. It was down to a mere trickle of what it once was, barely grazing my snout as I looked up at the dark, cloud filled sky overhead. As strange as it might have sounded, I was actually beginning to feel safe again.

"Shane? Are you okay?" Allison asked, treading cautiously as if she were trying not to startle me. I nearly laughed, because again, I could smell her long before she ever decided to speak up.

"I'm fine," I answered with a tired grumble as I waited for Allison to make herself visible.

She kept quiet, eventually coming into my view from the front side of the car. That's when I realized she was vigorously rubbing her arms. I thought it was nerves at first, but I got worried when I saw the series of red claw marks standing out against Allison's light skin. They weren't bad, but I felt like they needed to be addressed, more for the kitten's sake than anything else. The infant only did what came natural.

“Did you have the paramedics take a look at those?”

“I’ll clean ‘em when I get home. They just itch a little,” Allison replied softly, almost where a human wouldn’t have been able to hear her.

“She only did it because she was scared. You know that, right?” I couldn’t help defending the kitten. It just seemed to come out as naturally as breathing.

“Yeah. I know.” She looked down at her arms before finally shifting to look at me. “That was an incredibly brave thing you just did. You saved two people.”

I exhaled heavily out of my snout, and I didn’t even try to stifle the grunt that followed. I didn’t care anymore. “I saved more than just their lives tonight.”

I paused for a moment, watching my fellow swine take control of the scene as he carefully loaded the mother and daughter into the ambulance. She was walking under her own power now, with her daughter close in hand, both of them wrapped in heavy towels as the paramedics tried to keep the chill off their thick, drenched fur.

“I also took something back. Something that was stolen from me a long time ago.”

The beast knew I was talking about him. I could hear him grumbling in the distance, but the echo of his voice seemed more like a harmless yelp than the deafening roar of thunder it had been earlier that evening. The rain had also grown much quieter, and I was just now beginning to notice the strange, new sound it was making. I could no longer hear Becky’s voice resonating in those tiny droplets of water. Her cries for help were gone, and for the first time since the accident, it didn’t feel like she was trapped in there anymore.

“Well, whatever happened out there,” Allison started to say as she watched the ambulance chirp its siren before driving off into the night. “I’m sure Becky would be proud of you.”

“I hope so. I really do.”

When Allison spoke again, her voice seemed a little lighter. She was probably smiling. “Are you sure you don’t want to get checked out?”

“No. I just wanna go home. I’m tired.”

“Then let’s get in the car. You’ve had a long night.”

It took me awhile to process that, and when I finally stood up and opened the passenger side door, Allison was already in the car with the engine running. But I wasn’t quite ready to leave yet. I looked back at the dark sky once more, hearing the beast let

out a frustrated mewl as he began receding into the thick clouds. It made my ears flick, spraying a fine mist of water as if I were brushing the dust off my shoulders after a long, hard fought battle.

“Go to sleep,” I told the beast confidently before I stepped inside of Allison’s car and slammed the door. I knew he wouldn’t be hunting anyone else tonight. And for the first time in a long, long while, I wasn’t scared of the water. It didn’t even bother me to hear the rain gently pelting the windshield as we drove away from the accident scene and disappeared into the calm, cold rainy night.