

Chapter Seventeen



The group of us were sitting at the dock with beers in our hands. The only thing breaking the silence was Kiara quietly playing something on my ukulele, but I was too deep in thought about everything I heard on that tape to listen to it.

John B sat away from the rest of us, and I tried to do the same thing, but JJ had wrapped his arm around my shoulder and forced me to sit next to him. I leaned into him and closed my eyes, using his presence to ground me in the moment with my friends instead of all of the horrible scenarios involving my dad going through my head.

"How much was it again?"

"Four hundred mil," Pope answered from across from me, and I just kept my eyes closed.

I felt JJ sigh.

"Alright, let's talk the split. Now, before we say 'evenly,' may I remind you that I am the only one that can properly defend us from those groupers who were a er us."

"I swear to God, JJ. If you have the gun out right now, I' gonna throw it into the ocean," I muttered without opening my eyes.

"Protection," JJ continued, obviously ignoring me. "Not cheap, okay?"

"You haven't trained," Pope pointed out, causing me to chuckle. "You've done zero training."

"YouTube, bro! That's at least a five percent bump right there."

I opened my eyes and sat up straight, looking him dead in the eye as he turned to look at me.

"How exactly have you been getting onto YouTube with now power and no WiFi?"

"Any objections? Didn't think so," he once again ignored me.

Kiara and I held up our hands, and I waved mine right in his face.

"I don't hear any, so—"

"What are you gonna do with your eighty mil, Pope?" Kiara asked, causing me to chuckle at JJ's expense.

Pope paused to think about it, and JJ pulled me closer to him, and I leaned my head on his shoulder.

"Pay for college in advance."

I smiled. Typical Pope.

"And also, textbooks. Those are expensive."

"What about you, Kie?" JJ asked, and I switched my gaze to her.

"Yeah, what does a socialist do when she's rich?"

I chuckled and kicked Pope in the side.

"I just wanna make a double album," she answered with a shrug.

"About OBX, the Pogues. You know, the way Catch a Firés about Kingston. Record it at Marley Studio, Peter Tosh producing."

"Peter Tosh is—"

"Is dead," Kie interrupted Pope. "I know, but the spirit of Peter Tosh will never die."

I raised my beer in agreement with Kiara, and she raised hers in response.

"Actually, I know what I'm gonna do."

I took my head o of JJ's shoulder and scooted away to be able to look at him fully, putting on the greatest look of anticipation, causing him to chuckle before continuing.

"I'm gonna get a big ass house on Figure Eight and go full Kook."

"You're gonna go full Kook?" Pope asked in disbelief and a little admiration.

"Yup. I'm gonna get a marble statue of myself, and them I'm gonna get a koi pond, put a bunch of those fish—"

"I'm never visiting," Kie laughed.

For some reason, JJ's words made my heart sink.

"What are you gonna do, JB?"

There was a pause as everyone turned to John B.

"To going full Kook."

JJ, Pope, and Kiara laughed and stood up, cheersing their beers with John B's, but I stayed on the rail. I slammed back the rest of my beer before walking o the dock without another word. I felt everyone's eyes on me as I made my way to the hammock, sitting down on it and crossing my legs. My shoulders hunched over as I fiddled with my fingers in my lap.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

I knew they'd send JJ a er me.

He stood in front of me with his hands tucked into his pockets. I just shook my head, not really in the mood.

He hummed to himself before not so gracefully getting into the hammock next to me, almost tipping me out of it multiple times. We ended up sitting with our legs crossed and facing each other. Very Nani and Lelo.

I stared down into my lap and continued playing with my fingers. JJ took a deep breath.

"Joey—"

"Please don't call me that right now," I whispered.

"I've always called—"

He stopped himself mid sentence.

"Oh. Roo, now I get it."

When we were little, John B and JJ would call me Joey. My dad picked up on it, but he wanted a nickname that only he called me. So, Roo it was. He explained that it was short for Kangaroo because a joey is a baby kangaroo. I found that so cool as a kid, but now the nicknames only make me miss him more.

"So, you never shared what you want to do with your eighty million dollars," JJ stated, changing the subject.

I shrugged.

"Oh, come on, you know that I know that you know what you want to do with it."

I let out a laugh through my nose.

"You gonna go full Kook?"

"Absolutely not."

I surprised myself at how harsh the words sounded once they le my mouth.

"Why?"

JJ sounded confused and slightly concerned at the veracity I answered the question with.

"Because, Kooks are assholes, and I don't wanna be anywhere near them. Besides, the better surf spots are on the Cut anyway."

"Fair enough," JJ said, and I kept looking down at my lap.

"The first thing I'm gonna do is pay o the Chateau."

JJ didn't say anything, so I took that as my silent invitation to keep going.

"Then, I'm gonna fix it up, stop the roof from leaking during storms, get us our own generator, maybe add on to the porch, and get a better pull out bed."

JJ laughed.

"Then, I'm gonna go to college. I'm not sure for what yet, but I have a few years to figure it out. A er graduating, I'm gonna get a sail boat, pack up my surfboard, my ukulele, and a cooler full of beer and just go. I'll sail to the Bahamas and to Hawaii and through the Caribbean, catching my own food and teaching people to surf or something for money, but I'll come back here every summer because this will always be home."

JJ was quiet for a moment.

"You plan on going by yourself?"

I looked up from my lap to see JJ staring at a spot on my knee. I smiled.

"Well, I'm sure I'd have room for my best friend on my boat," I said, and JJ smiled without looking up. "But, I'm not sure how long it will take Pope to graduate from dead body school, so I might have to do a few trips without him," I joked, causing JJ's eyes to shoot up to meet mine.

He noticed the smirk on my face and rolled his eyes.

"You cut me deep, dude."

I laughed before placing a gentle hand on his knee.

"In all seriousness, I'd love to take you with me JJ."

He smiled, placing his hand over mine.

"And, when we get too old to sail, I'll buy us a big house on Figure Eight, away from all of the Kooks where we can just surf until we drop."

My heart fluttered in my chest. He said he'd buy 'us' a house. Thank God it was dark out, or he might've seen my cheeks burning.

JJ cleared his throat and removed his hand from mine, and I took my hand o of his knee.

"We should probably get some sleep, the rest of us are going to take you and John B fishing in the morning to cheer you guys up before heading to the hotel to steal the Internet and look up your dad's coordinates."

I nodded.

"Sounds good."

I laid back in the hammock and rolled onto my side.

"What are you doing?"

I raised my head slightly to give JJ a confused look.

"I'm going to sleep."

"Oh, well, uh. Goodnight."

With that, he got o the hammock and made his way into the house. Part of me was hoping he would stay. I weirdly tend to sleep better when JJ was with me, but I felt too embarrassed to ask him. So, I just sighed, curled up into a ball, and closed my eyes, feeling the exhaustion take over and pull me right to sleep.