## **Chapter Nineteen**

A er coming up with a plan on how to get the dive drone, I drove us

"Pope, we're not stealing the drone, we're borrowing it." John B said

to the salvage yard. I dropped Kie o at her car where her families

boat and trailer were hooked to it.

from the seat next to me.

"'Humans are the only animal that can't tell fantasy from reality.'" "Nerd," I fake coughed. "Wait, did you come up with that?" John B asked, causing me to

shake my head. "Albert Bernstein came up with it, but it applies to this whole treasure-hunting thing."

I rolled my eyes and look in the mirror to see JJ rolling a joint. He looked up and smirked at me before continuing. I pursed my lips and looked back towards the road.

"So, which is it? Fantasy, or reality?"

"Why are you so weird, Pope?" I chuckled at JJ's question.

"It's fantasy, but possible reality," Kiara answered.

"Reality," John B answered.

"Virtual reality," JJ mumbled, and I looked at him through the mirror to see him flick open his lighter to start smoking, but Pope reached

over and took the joint from him his mouth. "Keep the signal clear," he said, flicking it somewhere to the back of

I laughed as JJ closed his lighter and pouted.

"You two are absolute children."

the van.

JJ snorted.

"Pope would agree."

"Gotcha."

"Let's go, ladies."

open.

on it.

"Pope, run!"

"Wait!"

against a boat.

"Up here. Go, go, go!"

"You were saying?"

"Stay down."

"Wait, Bobby!"

"Don't you lie."

"Son of a bitch!"

the security guard.

"Alright."

"Sorry."

mouth shut.

asked, breaking the silence.

"How?"

"JJ-"

hands on his leg.

"Did you get them?"

got out of the back.

her.

"Sit down."

and filled up his water cup.

facing him.

slower music.

"Yeah, dude!"

I licked my lips and pursed them for a second.

"You play with your fingers or fiddle with something."

JJ climbed down the ladder first.

"I almost killed you two!"

stay at the Chateau for a few days.

"Wait, what are you-"

boat and slowly stood up.

gain the dog's attention.

"You know what your problem is?" JJ asked as I stopped the car. "You?" I rolled my eyes.

"No! It's that you need to relax, man. You're always so tense!" "I'm not too tense," Pope denied as Kiara got out of the van.

I turned around in my seat to glare at the two boys. "Can you two shut up for two seconds, so we can get this done?"

They both looked at me with wide eyes. I rolled mine. "Please?" JJ smirked.

"Much better, sweetheart." I groaned and turned back towards the front, trying to keep the blush o my face.

Also, where did the 'sweetheart's keep coming from?

Twenty minutes later, I was parking the van just down the road from the salvage yard and watching Kie drive up to the gate. JJ, Pope, John B and I ducked down behind a thing made to be able to work on

boats out of water and watched Kie talk to the security dude.

"Let's hope this works," John B mutters, and I nod in agreement.

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focus among us. "It's not awkward, weird, or anything."

"How's it going with Kiara?" JJ suddenly asked, breaking the quiet

he admitted, causing me to slap him in the arm. "What?" "I was one-hundred percent sure she was into you." "I wasn't," I muttered.

"Yeah. Honestly, I did not think you were gonna actually listen to me,"

"Ehh..." Pope mumbled, clearly not agreeing. "So, like, Kie, she, like definitely gave you the Heisman?" "Oh, no question. Yup."

The rest of us turned to look at Pope, and from my position between

John B and JJ, I shook my head. "For being guys, you three sure do act like a bunch of girls," I said

before standing up as the fence began to close.

"Maybe she's just into somebody else."

The four of us ran, barely making it through the closing gate. JJ took the lead once we were in, leading through the maze of random things in the salvage yard. We get to a white building, and he pulled a sticky

A dog barking, caused me to step behind JJ.

he stopped when the dog didn't chase a er us.

And, he did. The dog started running at us.

"What's that, huh? What's that, Tebow?"

I bit my lip, ignoring him, and tried to think of a plan.

"Alright, so I might have the wrong numbers," he admitted, dropping the lock. "Shit," I cursed, pushing my loose hairs back o my face.

note out of his pocket and started working on the combination lock.

"Do you have the right numbers?" Pope asked as JJ continued to pull

He pulled it down, expecting it to be unlocked, but the lock didn't

"That's a cougar," John B said and ran o without us. "Dick!" I yelled a er my brother, still hiding behind JJ. JJ tried talking to the dog, but it kept barking at us. I grabbed onto

JJ's backpack as he took o running around the back of the dog, but

up. "What are you doing?" "I got a toy, boy!" He said ignoring me and waving the cloth around to

telling it to back o . JJ pulled a red cloth out of his pocket and held it

I leaned around him to see Pope waving a metal pipe at the dog,

"Wait, no. I was just kidding. Shit!" We both took o running, JJ grabbing my hand as we ran side by side.

He pulled me to a stop and drug me over to a ladder that was leaned

JJ all but threw me up the ladder, pushing my butt with one hand to make me climb faster. Once we were both up the ladder, we ducked down behind the side of the boat as the dog continued to bark at us. "Maybe he'll leave," I said, trying to sound optimistic.

up there and get your ass!" "Shit." JJ suddenly grabbed my hand, gaining my attention.

"Whoever's up there better come on out! I mean it. Don't make me go

"Don't shoot. It's me, JJ. Luke's kid." "What are you doin'?" "I swear, okay? I didn't want to, okay? My dad made me."

"He told me Captain Leo kept his cutting torch, you know, a er he got

Even though I knew JJ was lying, I could still feel my blood boiling.

We all knew that JJ's dad hit him every once in a while. JJ didn't like

to talk about it, so we never said anything when he suddenly asked to

I had tried multiple times to get JJ to go to the police, but he said

That was three years ago. They obviously haven't done shit.

"I know," JJ sni ed, and I followed him down the ladder.

as I jumped the last few rungs. "Tell him I couldn't find it."

"I'll just come up with somethin'," JJ said before o ering me a hand

JJ didn't let go of my hand as we started walking away. I shook my

We walked back to the van, still hand in hand, and waiting for John B

and Pope to show up, noticing that Kie's car was already gone. JJ got

head as he smiled and wiped his fake tears away, but I kept my

he'd only get shipped o to his mom or to foster care. I even tried to

go to the police behind his back, but they only said they'd look into it.

I watched with wide eyes as JJ raised his hands over the side of the

He trailed o, lowering his hands to his sides. "He was gonna hit me again." I clenched my fists and closed my eyes.

fired. He said if I didn't get it for him, he was gonna..."

I watched in silence as JJ sounded like he was about to cry.

"I'm sorry." "Come on down." "I, uh, have a friend with me. I begged her to come."

JJ leaned down and helped me to my feet, and I waved awkwardly at

into the passenger seat next to me, and I drummed my fingers against the steering wheel. "They'll be fine." "It's not them I'm worried about right now." JJ leaned forward and grabbed one of my hands and began fiddling with my fingers. I just continued to stare out the windshield.

"Do you know how I can tell when your lying or upset?" He suddenly

I turned towards him as he li ed my hand and pressed a kiss to my

knuckles. His lips lingered for a second before he rested both our

I'm interrupted by the back door sliding open, revealing Pope and

JJ's and fully turned towards them as they pulled two suitcase

looking looks into the van behind them.

John B, both grinning from ear to ear. I quickly pulled my hand out of

John B hollered in victory. "Well, let's go get Kie and celebrate!" I drove to the same spot we dropped her o at, and she quickly agreed that we should celebrate and told me to go to The Wreck. I pulled up outside of the restaurant, and Kiara stuck her head between the two front seats.

"Stealing drones makes you hungry," she joked as John B and Pope

"What I would do to a beer and shrimp and grits right now," JJ said,

We followed Kiara into her family's restaurant, silently walking past

"Don't forget to use the puppy eyes," I whispered to her as I went past

casting me to laugh as the two of us got out.

"It would not be pretty," I heard Pope agree.

her as she stopped to talk to her dad.

The four of us awkwardly watched as they talked, not daring to sit down without permission. I smacked JJ in the chest as they both suddenly turn to look at us. I smiled and waved awkwardly, and Pope and John B did the same while JJ held up a peace sign. Kiara hugged her dad, and I smiled. "I think we're in." Kiara turned to us, dropping the smile.

We all did a mini celebration and sat down at an empty table. Kiara

Normally, I wouldn't have minded him seeing me eat like a slob, but

for some reason, I sat up straight and slowed down and only stuck

John B threw a fry a JJ, who laughed and went to throw one back

when Kiara came up, slapped his feet he propped up on the table,

A good song came on the radio, and Kiara pointed at me while

two or three in my mouth at a time instead of by the handful.

helped her dad bring out the food. I was shoveling fries into my

mouth as fast as I could until I caught JJ looking at me.

and walked up to her, swaying my hips to the music. We danced for a moment before I turned to Pope, gesturing with my finger for him to join me, and Kiara did the same to John B. Pope shook his head as he sulkily ate his grits, and I went to go sit back down, jumping when two hands landed on my hips. I turned

and saw JJ smirking from behind me. I smiled up at him as we both

grabbed one of my hands, twirling me a few times until I ended up

I couldn't keep the laugh in as we started dancing like dorks. He

started to pretend that he had a lasso before 'throwing' it around me.

I hopped towards him as he pulled me in, and we were chest to chest.

We then started snapping to the music and ducking opposite ways to

the beat when he leaned down and acted like he was going to motor

boat me. I laughed and pushed his face away.

trying to fill the quietness between us.

I laughed and shook my head.

He smiled so ly down at me.

started dancing to the music. He took his hands o my hips and

shaking her hips. I laughed and pushed the rest of my fries towards JJ

As the song was ending, he twirled me again, keeping one hand in mine and placing another hand on my back. He started leaning to the side, and I wrapped my free arm around his neck as he dipped me. I dramatically thew my head back with a laugh and kicked a leg up as the song ended and changed to a dierent one. JJ slowly pulled me up, and I put my foot back on the ground. He kept his hand on my back, and I kept mine around his shoulder. Our

other hands were still clasped together. We started to sway to the

"I didn't know you knew how to dance like a gentleman," I joked,

"Please, I know everything about you," I argued, looking up at him.

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"There are some things you don't know about me, JoJo."

"Yeah, you do." I let out a breath through my nose before leaning my head on his shoulder as his stare became too intense for me. We continued dancing to the slower song until it ended and changed to a much faster one. I li ed my head from his shoulder and felt our friends staring at us. I cleared my throat before pulling away and sitting back down and eating my grits, avoiding everyone's gaze.

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