

Chapter Twenty-One



I got woke up with JJ whispering near my ear.

"We're back, sweetheart."

I smiled, my eyes still closed, and stretched my legs out.

"Do I have to get up?"

I heard him chuckle and opened my eyes to see that my head was in his lap as I laid on my back.

"You could sleep all day on the front of Heyward's boat, or you could come surfing with us. Your choice." He shrugged, trying to sound nonchalant.

My smile grew as I looked up at him.

"We're going surfing?"

He chuckled again.

"Your face just lit up like a damn Christmas tree."

I laughed, and he brushed some hair o of my face.

"Yes, we're going surfing."

I whooped before sitting up and all but skipping around the boat to help dock it. I could feel Pope and JJ's concerned gazes land on me every once in a while as we walked towards the beach, but I chose to ignore them and let my excitement for surfing take over.

I saw the van with our surfboards stacked on top and quickly stripped away my shorts and t-shirt, having le Pope's sweatshirt with his dad's boat, grabbed my board from JJ as he got it o the roof of the van, and ran down to the beach, seeing two figures already in the water.

"Hey!" I yelled, gaining John B and Kiara's attention.

"Save some waves for us!" JJ yelled from right behind me.

"Hey, where you been?"

I laughed as I made my way towards my brother.

We spent the rest of the day surfing, having a few beers that Kiara had stolen from her dad, and just enjoying the summer day. All was forgotten about Rafe and Topper, the Royal Merchant, JJ's weird behavior, and the DCS.

That day felt like all the days of summer should feel. Fun.

Later that night, we all were outside the Chateau. Pope, John B, and Kiara were lounging in lawn chairs, and JJ and I shared the hammock. We laid on opposite sides, so his feet were by my head and vice versa.

The five of us sat in silence and listened to the crickets chirping as JJ lazily swung the hammock back and forth. It was pitch black outside, so I couldn't see anybody's face. I shivered slightly as a breeze blew by, my bathing suit and hair still a little damp from our beach day.

The hammock violently rocked back and forth as JJ switched sides, so our heads were on the same end. He put his arm behind my head and pulled me into his side, and I rested my head on his bare shoulder and my hand on his warm chest.

"You really think it's out there? Like, no bullshit?" Pope asked, breaking the silence.

"My father thought it was."

"But do you?"

A distant rumble of thunder had me snuggling closer into JJ, and he turned on his side, his hand resting on my waist.

"A er hearing his voice on that tape, I think I do."

JJ's thumb was brushing across the skin on my waist, causing goosebumps to rise.

"Only one way to find out."

I heard the two bump fists and snap, doing the their handshake.

"Look, we're gonna find it, you know?" Kiara added. "Even JJ believes."

I laughed and li ed my head.

"Oh, my God, JJ, do you really believe?"

"Totally. Wait. Are we talking about four mil?"

"Four hundred mil," Kiara and Pope say at the same time.

"Jinx," the girl added with a laugh.

JJ pulled me closer into his chest.

"I'm gonna dream about shipwrecks. Good night, Bird!"

"Good night, bird shit!"

I couldn't hold in my laugh at my brother's reply, and JJ hugged me tighter into him, crushing me.

"JJ, I can't breath," I laughed, placing both hands on his chest and trying to push myself away.

He placed a kiss on my forehead before relaxing his grip, and I took a dramatic deep breath, causing him to chuckle.

"Good night, Joey."

I smiled and closed my eyes, dri ing o into a peaceful sleep.

The next morning, Pope got his father's boat and brought it back to the Chateau to load up the drone. JJ, having the best control of the bigger boat, drove while I navigated.

"Alright, JJ. Pin it here," I said, holding the GPS with the coordinates my dad le us in my hand.

"Roger that! X marks the spot."

I turned towards my brother and nodded, silently signaling him that we were over the wreck.

"Alright, ladies and gentlemen. To going full Kook."

I rolled my eyes as my brother lowered the drone into the water and leaned against the helm next to JJ, watching Kiara lower the tether.

"Hey, adjust ten seconds northwest. Wind's blowing us around a little bit," I told JJ, looking down at the GPS.

"Yes, ma'am. Ten seconds northwest."

He adjusted, and Kiara called out that the drone was down one-hundred feet.

Pope suddenly gasped, and I ran out of the cabin to look at the video over his shoulder.

"What?" I asked, as John B ran up next to me.

"It's nothing," Pope said, sounding embarrassed.

I glared at the boy from behind my sunglasses before going back by JJ.

"Don't do that to me man!" JJ called out as he made another adjustment.

"And to quote The Hobbit: 'Down, down, to Goblin Town. Down, down, you go, my lad.'"

I whispered the second part of the quote with Pope, and JJ lowered his sunglasses to glare at me.

"Nerd."

The next three hundred feet was spent in pretty much silence, just Kiara calling out the depths.

"The tides turning!"

I looked down at the GPS, noticing we were o mark.

"Hey, ten seconds easy, south-southeast."

"Copy that."

The wind picked up and changed directions, and I looked out the window to see dark clouds rolling in.

Shit.

"Twenty seconds south mid-speed, JJ."

"Aye, aye."

The boat began rocking as the waves grew bigger.

"Keep the tether out of the prop!" JJ yelled to Kiara.

"I'm trying!"

"Hey, keep going."

"Is that good?"

"Perfect."

Kiara called that we were down seven-hundred feet, and I took my sunglasses o , no longer needing them as the clouds blocked the sun.

Thunder rumbled, and the waves were causing the boat to bounce up and down aggressively. JJ and I both stumbled in the cabin.

"Okay," JJ mumbled, holding onto the window for support.

I ended up holding onto his shoulder with one hand as I tried to ignore the rolling in storm.

"We'll be fine," JJ tried to comfort, but I just squeezed his shoulder, silently telling him to shut up.

"Hold it steady!" John B yelled from the stern.

"JJ, we'll turtle in this storm, man," Pope said as Kie yelled out that we were at nine-hundred twenty feet.

"Crank it ten second north by northwest!"

He cranked the wheel hard.

"Now, hard south, southwest!"

"Pick a direction, dude."

"It's not my fault!"

I watch as we align back up with the mark.

"Half speed, steady at this bearing."

The GPS dings as we're right over it.

"Pope, we're right over it man!"

"I'm at the bottom!"

"Steady here, JJ. Steady here at quarter speed!"

"Oh, good God."

I looked to JJ with wide eyes at Pope's exclamation.

"Go!"

I smiled and kissed him on the cheek before joining the rest of our friends around the monitor.

I saw the trumpeting angel figurehead and covered my mouth with my free hand.

"Holy shit."

"Do you see anything?"

"It's the Royal Merchant."

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