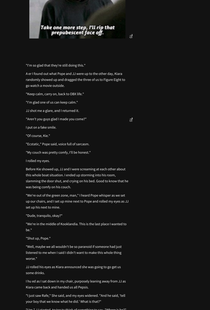

Chapter Twenty-Four

Take one more step, I'll rip that prepubescent face off.

"I'm so glad that they're still doing this."

After I found out what Pope and JJ were up to the other day, Kiara randomly showed up and dragged the three of us to Figure Eight to go watch a movie outside.

"Keep calm, carry on, back to OBX life."

"I'm glad one of us can keep calm."

JJ shot me a glare, and I returned it.

"Aren't you guys glad I made you come?"

I put on a fake smile.

"Of course, Kie."

"Ecstatic," Pope said, voice full of sarcasm.

"My couch was pretty comfy, I'll be honest."

I rolled my eyes.

Before Kie showed up, JJ and I were screaming at each other about this whole boat situation. I ended up storming into his room, slamming the door shut, and crying on his bed. Good to know that he was being comfy on his couch.

"We're out of the green zone, man," I heard Pope whisper as we set up our chairs, and I set up mine next to Pope and rolled my eyes as JJ set up his next to mine.

"Dude, tranquilo, okay?"

"We're in the middle of Kooklandia. This is the last place I wanted to be."

"Shut up, Pope."

"Well, maybe we all wouldn't be so paranoid if someone had just listened to me when I said I didn't want to make this whole thing worse."

JJ rolled his eyes as Kiara announced she was going to go get us some drinks.

I huffed as I sat down in my chair, purposely leaning away from JJ as Kiara came back and handed us all Pepsis.

"I just saw Rafe," She said, and my eyes widened. "And he said, 'tell your boy that we know what he did.' What is that?"

"Um," JJ started, trying to think of something to say. "Where is he?"

"Right there."

I couldn't help but turn my head at the same time as the boys as Kiara pointed out where he was.

Topper caught my gaze and raised his plastic cup with a smirk on his face.

"Great, the whole death squad."

"Guys, don't stare."

JJ put his hand on my head and turned it back forward and leaned over me to talk to Pope as Kiara kept looking behind us.

"Just warning you, bro. If they corner me, I'm coming out swinging, okay? Slice and dicin'. I'm on edge right now. If that doesn't work, I got this right here."

My eyes went wide as JJ held up his backpack.

"So, we just gotta stay in the group. They can't get us in the group."

"Like a school of fish."

"Right, stay in the school. Can't leave the school."

"I'm sorry to interrupt your conversation, but I swear to God JJ if you brought the gun I'm going to kick your ass. There are kids here, JJ."

"No, Joey. I didn't bring the gun. Everything's fine, okay?"

He put on a smile and met my gaze for the first time since I locked myself in his room earlier.

"Oh, wow. Jeez, thank you. That was really convincing. I love you, JJ. Thank you for calming me down." I glared and gave him my best murder look.

"Founding principal, you guys. No secrets amongst Pogues. What is Rafe talking about?"

Pope turned to Kiara and whispered something to her.

"What does that mean? 'It might go down tonight.' What did y'all do?"

"Deny, deny, deny."

I rolled my eyes as JJ whispered to Pope across from me, and Pope told Kiara to drop it and enjoy the movie.

I looked back over my shoulder to see Rafe, Topper, and Kelce still staring us down, and I began nervously tapping on my knee.

JJ's hand envelopes mine, and I pursed my lips and closed my eyes. Pissed that he was trying to calm me down and even more pissed that it was working.

The movie started as the sun started to disappear, and I actually tried to forget about the Kook death squad sitting behind me and enjoy the movie.

About an hour into it, Pope leaned over me.

"I gotta take a piss."

I exhaled loudly and closed my eyes in frustration.

"Hold it," JJ said, squeezing my hand that was still in his.

"I can't hold it. I drank too much soda."

JJ leaned towards me to talk to Pope.

"It's too exposed. They're totally see us."

"I gotta go."

They both turned around.

"They're blocking the bathrooms."

JJ looked around before letting go of my hand. I tried not to be disappointed.

"Come here. I know where."

The two get up.

"Hey, where y'all going?"

"We gotta wring it out."

"What are you gonna do, hold it for each other?"

I couldn't help the laugh that escaped and watched the two boys sneak towards the back of the screen.

I turned around to look for the Kooks, but they weren't there anymore.

"Shit."

I quickly got up, ignoring Kie's questions, and ran through the crowd, apologizing as people threw popcorn at me and told me that they couldn't see.

I got to the back of the screen just as Rafe was coming up behind the guys.

"What's up, Rafe?" JJ asked as the two backed up away from the older Kook.

"How you guys doin' tonight?"

"Isn't it past your bedtime, Rafe?" I asked, gaining his attention away from the boys, and hopped the two would get the sense and run.

"Aw, I just wanna talk to your boys here."

I stood in between JJ and Rafe, and JJ grabbed my wrist and started pulling me back towards where Kelce and Topper had already circled around Pope.

"Hey, that was some nice work you did on my boat."

"I don't know what you mean," Pope denied, and I glared at the three in front of us.

"Not so burly without a gun now, are you?" Rafe asked, and I smirked at him.

"At least you guys actually had the balls to make it even this time."

Rafe lunged at me, and JJ pulled me behind him, letting go of my wrist as he walked up to Rafe.

"Take one more step, and I'll rip that prepubescent face off."

"Hey, do you feel good, stealing shit?"

I scoffed at Topper, pushing him away from me.

"I'm sorry, aren't you the one who stole the beers from me?"

Kelce reached out and grabbed onto my wrist. I tried punching him with my other hand, but he caught that one too.

I heard Pope let out a battle cry and turned just in time to watch him headbutt Topper. I kicked Kelce in the shin, and he let go of me.

"Atta boy, with your fist, like this, okay?" JJ quickly instructed Pope how to punch before lunging at Rafe.

The older boy ducked under his punch and wrapped his arms around JJ's middle. Kelce made a grab for me again, but I backed away from him.

"I don't wanna hurt you, Josephine."

I smirked.

"Too bad for you, I don't share the same sentiment."

And I kicked him as hard as I could right in the nuts.

He fell to the ground, and I turned to see Rafe punching JJ in the face.

"Get away from him, you asshole!"

I grabbed onto the arm that Rafe was using to punch JJ with, which gave JJ the perfect opportunity to return the favor. He hit the older boy in the jaw, and I was suddenly tackled to the ground.

"Get off of me!" I screamed at Rafe, noticing that Kelce had gotten up and was holding back JJ.

"I told you to stay off Figure Eight, bitch."

I spat in his face, glaring up at him.

"You're gonna pay for that."

"Get off of her!"

Kiara came out of nowhere and pushed Rafe off of me. I quickly scrambled to my feet and rushed toward JJ and Kelce.

JJ elbowed Kelce in the stomach and got free, coming up to me.

"You okay?"

I nodded and before I could ask the same, I was picked up and quite literally thrown into Kelce who grabbed me tightly by the wrists, causing me to cry out in pain.

"Get your hands off of her!"

JJ tried to come help, but Rafe punched him right in the jaw, causing him to stumble.

"JJ!"

Rafe grabbed him by the front of the shirt and just started throwing punch after punch.

My eyes burnt with unshed tears as I watched the person who was more than a best friend get pummeled. I tried pulling out of Kelce's grip, but it was too strong and it only hurt my already bruised wrists even more.

Suddenly, the movie screen was in flames.

Kelce's grip loosened, and I shoved him away from me before shoving a stunned Rafe away from JJ. JJ stumbled forward, and I caught him around the middle, wrapping his arm over my shoulder and taking some of his weight as Kiara did the same to Pope.

Us girls somehow got the guys to Kiara's car. Pope sat up front while JJ and I sat in the back. We were all silent as Kie began driving us home.

She dropped Pope off first and was going to do me next, but I told her to just go to JJ's because I had stuff there. She offered to wait and drive me back to the Chateau, but I told her to go ahead.

I walked behind JJ as we walked into the house, glad to see that his dad's truck still wasn't outside. I closed the door behind me and leaned on it.

I looked at JJ only to see him staring at the floor, split lip bleeding, and a bruise forming on his chin.

"Let's get your cleaned up."

I pushed myself off the door and headed to the single bathroom, grabbing a wash cloth and looking for rubbing alcohol or some sort of disinfecting thing.

"Looks like water will have to do," I muttered to myself, wetting the wash cloth under the sink.

I came back into the family room, confused when I don't see JJ.

"Marco?"

"Polo."

I let out a short laugh and followed the sound of his voice into his bedroom.

"Jo, I really don't need your help," he said, fiddling with his bloody knuckles on his bed.

I shrugged before getting on the bed, sitting on my knees. I tried to clean the blood off his chin, but he pulled away.

"Jo-"

"JJ, I know you don't need it, and I swear if you try to make a joke about being used to it, I might burst into tears, so please just let me focus on cleaning your face instead of the emotional breakdown I having building up, okay?"

The blond nodded, looking back down to his knuckles.

I wiped the wet washcloth under his lip, being careful not to irritate the split skin. Once his face is cleaned of blood, I started on his knuckles. He didn't even flinch when I touched the split and scratched skin, and I don't know if that was better than him wigging out.

I found that I kept playing with his hands once they were cleaned up. I lifted one up and pressed a kiss to his knuckles before doing the same with the other. I felt a blush rise on my cheeks as I kept holding onto one.

"Sorry," I whispered.

He sat up, and twisted our hands over and begin fiddling with my fingers.

"Don't be."

I looked up and met his bright eyes. His stare held that same intense look it did at The Wreck, so I cleared my throat and looked back down to our hands.

"I know you don't usually like this idea, but could I stay here tonight?"

He clenched my hand in his, going still.

"It's just that I don't know if the DSC or Deputy-"

"Deputy No-Neck?"

I laughed, chancing a quick look up to his eyes before retuning to our hands.

"Yeah, I don't know if they're watching the Chateau, the chance that they are is probably high."

There was a long pause before he squeezed my hand again.

"Sure."

"Thanks," I sighed, my shoulders sagging in slight relief. "Uh, one more thing?"

He raised his eyebrows as I smiled sheepishly at him.

"Can I barrow a shirt or something to sleep in?"

He nodded before dropping my hands and getting off the bed. I raised my head to watch him rifle through a drawer before pulling out an old Pelican Marina shirt, causing me to laugh.

"How many of those shirts do you have?"

He laughed too, shrugging before throwing the shirt to me.

"I'll leave you to change."

Once the door was closed, I got up from the bed and slipped off my t-shirt before pulling on JJ's over my swimsuit top. It was too big for me, the hem going past my shorts and the sleeves looking way too long because it was too big in the shoulders.

I debated leaving my shorts on but quickly decided to take them off after kicking off my shoes. I was shoving my clothes into my backpack when the door opened again.

"Are you descent?"

I laughed as JJ walked in with his hands covering his eyes, his fingers leaving slight gaps for him to look through.

"Even if I wasn't, you'd still be able to see!"

He dropped his hand and wiggled his eyebrows at me suggestively, causing me to roll my eyes and blush.

"So, I guess, I'll see you in the morning," I said, awkwardly shuffling towards the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To the couch," I pointed towards the piece of furniture that I could see behind him in the living room. "I'm not gonna steal your bed at your house, JJ."

"Why don't we just share it? Like we normally do at the Chateau?"

"Well, I didn't know your house rules, and I'm trying to be polite, and I'm not wearing any pants."

JJ's eyebrows shot up as his eyes traveled down my legs.

"JJ!" I whined, pulling the hem of the shirt down further.

He held his hands up in surrender, a smirk clearly displayed on his face.

"No house rules, and I don't mind if you don't, sweetheart."

I nodded before walking back towards the bed and lying down, careful to keep my legs together until I was under the blanket. JJ bellyflopped down next to me after turning off the lights.

"Question," I said into the darkness while staring up at the ceiling, and JJ hummed for me to continue. "Why did you suddenly start calling me sweetheart?"

I felt him move around.

"Why? Does it bother you?"

I thought about his questions for a minute and fiddled with my fingers before answering.

"No, it's just," I paused. "Different."

"Different how?"

"I mean, you never call Kiara 'sweetheart' or anything."

"Do you want me to call Kiara sweetheart?"

"No, I mean, unless you want to, but you never answered my question."

It was his turn to pause, and it seemed to drag on.

"I don't know, it just, suits you."

"Oh, okay."

That wasn't exactly the answer I was looking for. I didn't know what answer I wanted, but that definitely wasn't it.

"You sound disappointed."

"I'm not."

"You sure?"

"Goodnight, JJ."

I heard him chuckle.

"Goodnight, sweetheart."

I rolled my eyes at the laughter in his voice before turning my back to him and closing my eyes. I found myself slowly drifting off when hands pulled me backwards. My back was pulled into JJ's chest, and I smiled before falling into unconsciousness.

Continue reading next part