Chapter Twenty-Nine



JJ and I shared a log by the fire as John B started the debriefing at Rixon's. He had taken o his uniform and returned to his normal JJ self, snapback on his head and everything. I leaned my head on his shoulder as Pope dumped more wood on the fire.

"Hey, guys. So, like, my dad's already gonna kill me. So what's this mandatory meeting about?"

John B did finger guns towards JJ and I. JJ threw his arm around my shoulders.

"Might as well tell him, man, before we're ga ed."

I rolled my eyes.

"You ready for this?"

"Yeah."

"So," John B started, sounding all mysterious. "The gold never went down with the Royal Merchant."

"Oh, my God. Here we go again with this."

"Hey, Pope, just shut up and hear him out, okay?" I said, laughing and throwing a small stick at his leg.

"It's been here the whole time. It's on the island."

Kiara looked to me for any giveaways that John B was pulling her leg.

"Are you serious?"

I gave her an excited nod.

"Oh, my God."

"I'd like to voice my skepticism."

"Of course you would, Pope. You wouldn't be you if you didn't."

Pope glared at me.

"Before you do, can I please preset you with my evidence, sir?"

"Proceed."

"Alright, so, in my backpack, I have a letter from Denmark Tanny."

"Who the hell's that?"

John B turned to Kiara.

"Denmark Tanny was a slave that survived the Royal Merchant wreck. Check this out."

He unfolded the piece of paper he produced from his backpack and handed it to Kiara.

"Okay, slaves weren't mentioned as crew members on the ship, but our dad, he found the complete manifest. That was his big discovery. So, Tanny used the gold from the Merchant to buy his freedom."

Kiara whistled, gaining my attention, and passed the letter to me. I passed it to JJ who leaned us both to the right to pass it on to Pope.

"A er that, he bought his farm. Drumroll, please, because that farm is..." the four of us slap our legs, and I leaned over to JJ.

"This feels like we're at a summer camp camp fire or something."

He laughed as John B reveled the big find.

"Tannyhill Plantation."

"Tannyhill?" Kiara asked in disbelief.

"Yeah, so, a er that, he used his money to free even more slaves, and then he sold a shit-ton of rice, which pisses o all the white planters,

and then they decided to lynch him."

John B paused, and I knew it was for dramatic e ect.

"So on the day they were coming to get him, he writes a letter to his son as a farewell, and in the last line of that letter, he leaves a coded message about where to find the gold." "Where?"

"Harvest the wheat in parcel nine, near the water. Except, there's no wheat. You see, wheat is code for gold. Check this out. The gold is in parcel nine, near the water."

"Holy shit."

"All we need is an original survey map of the property, and we've found the gold."

"Okay, so this might have a small chance of being actually true."

I laughed as JJ stood up and hugged John B, li ing him o his feet.

"Hello! Fire! You're near the fire. You're gonna burn."

"I'm so proud of you right now," JJ said, putting my brother back down on his feet.

"Thank you," John B said, placing both hands on his face. "That's really sweet of you."

"Okay, so, guys. What's the plan?"

"Good question."

I casted JJ a look, darting my eyes over to Kiara and shaking my head.

"So, Sara Cameron's coming tonight. She'll bring an original survey map-"

"Wait, wait. Hold on."

<u>Oh crap.</u> Here it comes.

"Sarah? Wh-why Sarah?"

"This is gonna be good," JJ mumbles from just behind me, and I glare at him, silently telling him to shut up.

"Sara, um, she got me into the archives in Chapel Hill yesterday, and that's where I got the letter."

"You were in Chapel Hill with Sarah Cameron?"

"Yeah, um-"

"He was mackin' on her."

"JJ!"

"I wasn't macking."

"You were totally macking Sarah Cameron."

I backhanded JJ in the stomach, noticing the hurt look on Kiara's face.

"I wasn't macking on her, okay? I was using her for access."

"There was access, alright."

I shoved the blond, and he laughed, grabbing onto my hand.

"Did you tell her about the treasure?"

"I was just trying to get into the archives."

"Is that a yes?"

"I le_out key details."

"Yo what? You let a Kook in on our secret? What about Pogue Lyfe? What about the T-shirt Company, bro?"

"I was just using her for information."

"Why don't I believe you?"

"I'm trying to make us filthy rich here. Okay, so that we can pay o a boat, or, uh, send you to autopsy school to study dead bodies. Look, you guys know me. Do I look like the type of person to fall for Sarah Cameron?"

"Uh," JJ started, but shut up when he saw my death glare.

"Do you want us to answer that, or-"

"Just stop."

"Look, you don't know her yet. I do! You can't trust her."

"Her brother did attack Jo at the golf course."

"Rafe and Sarah are two di erent human beings."

"What did she do to you, exactly?" JJ asked, turning to Kiara.

I scratched the back of my head, doubting she'd share. She told me at the beginning of the summer, and I thought it was the pettiest shit, but I didn't tell Kiara that. Instead, I had changed the subject during that conversation.

"She's like a, like a spitting cobra. First, she, she blinds you, and then-

JJ sent me a confused look, and I shook my head.

"This is a bad analogy."

'Later,' I mouthed to JJ. He nodded.

"Listen to me! Whatever we get, she's gonna try to take."

"Look, why don't we all just take a deep breath and calm down a little bit. We need a plat map of the island, and Sarah Cameron can get us one tonight, so why don't we just get the map and worry about the rest tomorrow."

That seemed to tame Kiara for the moment, at least enough for her to agree to go to the Hawk's Nest to get the map with us.

A er going back to the Chateau to get the van, I drove while JJ rode shotgun with John B, Pope, and Kiara in the back.

I parked the van and got out, sliding the back door open.

"Let's go ladies, recon mission!"

John B was the first out and placed a hand on my shoulder as he stopped everyone else from getting out.

"Uh, so, I think I'm gonna do this one by myself."

Kiara rolled her eyes, and thunder rumbled in the distance.

"Really?" JJ asked, sounding disappointed in the front seat.

"What?"

"Nothin', brother," he said, pulling his hat o and running a hand through his hair.

"Look, I just don't want spook Sarah with the peanut gallery."

"I just don't understand why we're involving her at all."

"Kie, we're not involving her, okay? It's, it's just, uh, like a business meeting."

I sco ed, and JJ acted like he was giving a blowjob to the blunt he was holding.

"Look, once we get what we need, we cut her loose, alright? Plus, we need the map."

"Promise me nothing's happening between you two."

"Nothing is happening, Kie."

"I'm being serious."

"Okay!"

"This isn't about you, and this isn't about us. This is about her. Dude, she's gonna get inside your head. Just promise me nothing's happening between you guys."

"I promise."

"Wow, bro. That was really believable."

John B shoved me away from him.

"A hundred percent believable."

"Anyways, um. I'm gonna take care of business."

"You're gonna take care of that business so well."

"We'll just sit here, in the hot ass car while it's lightning."

John B grabbed his backpack and walked away.

I leaned against JJ's door, crossing my arms over my chest.

"Kiara, holding onto your grudge is like drinking poison and thinking Sarah will die."

"Oh, now that's a good analogy, Pope."

"Exactly."

JJ tugged on a piece of my hair, and I turned around, laying my arms

across the open window.

"Yeah?" I'm not sure why I whispered, but JJ went a long with it.

"I just wanted to tell you..."

"yeah?"

"That you looked really beautiful punching Rafe in the face in that dress."

I laughed, shaking my head at his goofiness, but still felt a blush burn my cheeks.

"Thank you."

"Anytime, sweetheart."

He started messing with his lighter, but I reached into the car and lightly tugged on a piece of his hair.

"Yeah?"

"I just wanted to tell you," I paused in my whispering for dramatic

e ect and to build up the confidence to say it.

"Yeah?"

"You looked really good tonight, too."

He leaned towards me, and Pope started laughing at something Kiara had said, causing him to pause.

"Should we tell them?" I whispered, laying my head down to rest on my arms and looking up at him.

"Tell them what?"

Well, shit.

In all of this mess, we hadn't had time to discuss what happened at his house. What if he wanted it to just be a one time thing? But, he said the thing about having to ask permission to kiss me in the future. He could've just been being his usual smart-ass self, though.

I shook my head and looked anywhere but at his face.

I heard him sigh and took a quick glance at him to see him getting ready to say something, but a huge crash of thunder interrupted him, and I nearly screamed.

"Wanna get in the car?"

I nodded as the thunder continued in a low rumble.

"Yes please."

Lightning flashed and another crack of thunder sounded, and I nearly just jumped through the window.

JJ quickly opened his door and pulled me into the van. I was going to move over into my seat, but another loud clap of thunder had me jumping into his lap, wrapping my arms around his neck and burying my face in the cook of his neck, and curling myself into a ball.

I heard JJ shut the door before Kiara spoke up.

"You okay up there, Jo?"

"Doin' just dandy."

JJ laughed at my sarcastic answer and wrapped his arms around me, bringing me closer into his chest.

The thunder continued, and I jumped at every loud crash of thunder, causing JJ to squeeze me. He soon started playing with my hair as he started telling Pope and Kiara what happened at Midsummers.

"Wait," Kiara spoke, interrupting JJ at the part Rafe and Kelce followed us into the locker room. "Do you guys hear that?"

I li ed my head from JJ's shoulder as Kiara shushed the guys.

"What?"

"Please, somebody help!"

"Shit."

"Oh, wait, no, I hear that."

JJ opened the door, and I jumped out of the car, hiking up my dress and running towards the pleas for help.

I ran past the sign for the Hawk's Nest and saw Sarah leaning over something on the ground.

"Sarah, what happened?"

She sat up, and I stopped dead in my tracks.

John B lied motionless on his back in the dirt.

"I don't know what to do. He needs help. Topper shoved him."

"Where the hell is he?" I growled, walking the rest of the way towards Sarah.

"Please, please get help. I don't care who. Just call someone."

"Go!" JJ shoved Pope into a run.

"Pope, hurry!"

I fell to my knees beside my brother and grabbed onto his hand.

"John B, stay with me, please."

Sarah leaned down and kissed him, and I just clutched his hand to my chest.

"Pope! Come on!"

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