

Chapter Sixteen



We all piled out of the van and all but ran into the Chateau. JJ said that he needed something to eat first before we opened the envelope, causing the rest of us to roll our eyes or groan in frustration.

"That bread had mold on it three days ago," I told JJ from my seat at the table, bouncing my leg up and down while fiddling with my fingers.

"I'll just pull o the bad parts. Plus, mold is good for you. It's just a natural organism."

I rolled my eyes, unable to come up with something witty in return.

"JJ."

"Yup, yup, yup! Hot damn! Let's do it!"

John B picked up the envelope and tore it open. I couldn't help but chuckle as JJ gags a er taking a bite of his mold infested sandwich and disgustedly watched as he spat the bite out into his hand.

My attention went back to my brother as he began unfolding a large piece of paper. He laid it out as flat as he could on the messy table, and my eyes widened.

"It's a map," I breathed out, noting the coordinates, a hand drawn swirl, and an X written on it in sharpie.

"Oh, X marks the spot," Pope said, pointing to said X.

"Longitude, latitude, wait. There's somethin' else in there."

John B moved the map o the envelope and dumped it over his hands, producing a small rectangular object.

"What's that?" JJ asked as John B flipped the object over.

"It's a tape recorder," I answered, grabbing it from John B before pushing the play button.

"Dumbass," Kiara added.

' Dear Bird and Roo,'

'Who are Bird and Roo?'

Unable to answer JJ's question due me covering my mouth with my free hand at the sound of my father's voice, John B spoke up as my eyes stayed glued to the tape recorder in my hand.

"That's what our dad called us."

' I hate to say, 'I told you so,' but I told you so. And you two doubted your old man. I suspect at this moment, you're filled with guilt and self-loathing over our last fight, Bird, but don't kill yourself just yet, and don't you let him, Roo. I didn't expect to the find the Merchant either.

'You were probably right to call me out. I wasn't exactly Father of the Decade. What can I say, kids? I could smell the barn. Hopefully, we're listenin' to this in our brand new sugar-shake down in Costa Rica, livin' o passive investments and pulling on permits. If not, and you two find this for less than optimal reasons, well, that's what the map is for.

'There she is, the wreck of the Merchant. If somethin' happens to me, finish was I started. Go for the gold, kids. I love you, Bird, and I love you, Roo, even if I didn't always act like it.

'I'll see you on the other side.'

There was a click, and static filled the room as everyone was quiet for a second. I gently placed the tape recorder on the table, and John B got up and walked out of the room.

I felt my breathing get shaky and uneven as I tried to keep my composure in front of my friends.

"Holy shit, he did it! Big John, he found the Merchant-"

"Can you, can you please?" Kie interrupted JJ's excitement and went a er John B.

My vision got blurry, and I chocked on a sob, gaining Pope and JJ's attention.

I tried to escape into my room, but Pope stood in front of me and enveloped me in a hug. That made the tears explode out of my eyes and the sobs to escape from where they had been caught in my throat.

Pope wasn't one who typically got involved in any type of display of a ection, so when the boy wrapped me up in his arms and leaned his cheek on the top of my head and began whispering that everything would be alright, I lost it.

I buried my face into his chest, and I felt another presence behind me, making the hug a group one. I continued to sob with Pope and JJ's arms wrapped around me protectively.

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