

Chapter Twenty-Two



There's a moment in every kid's life when you feel like anything's possible, when you feel like you've got the total mojo. You could free-climb El Capitan, land on Mars, or get elected president. The whole world's there for the taking if you've got the balls to go for it.

But, there's always something that brings it all crashing down. When you least expect it, some Kook shows up and tells you there's no eternal mystery, and all that talk about free-climbing, going to Mars, and being the president becomes bullshit. The magic gets cancer and dies.

The drone went over the wreck for the third time before I stormed back into the cabin with JJ.

"Just pull the damn thing up," I yelled over my shoulder before sliding to the floor behind the half wall.

I tossed the GPS to the floor, pulled up my knees to my chest, and rested my chin on them, trying not to have a full mental breakdown.

My friends started arguing about whether they believed the gold was still down there or not, but I just pulled my hood over my head and sulked.

The disappointment that was flooding through me was enough to crush my heart into the size of a peanut. Not only was I disappointed that the gold wasn't anywhere to be found, I felt that I had disappointed my dad.

On that tape, he told my brother and I to find the gold. We went to where he told us to go, and we did what he told us to do. Yet, still no gold.

I angrily swiped a tear off my cheek, glaring at my toes as I felt JJ's eyes on me. I didn't even try to pretend that I was okay.

JJ ended up dropping John B and I off first before taking Kie and Pope home. I walked up the dock behind my brother, neither of us saying a word. I pulled open the door and grabbed the box of Cheerios off the front table and shoved a handful in my mouth.

"Hey, guys."

I nearly choked on the cereal as I turned to the couch to see Cheryl sitting there in her perfect suit with her perfect hair. I really wanted to throw the box at her head.

"You know, Cheryl, it's kind of a bad time for a check-in," John B said, grabbing the box from my hand and sitting down at the table.

"Not a check-in. We're here to take you."

My eyes widened.

"We?"

"Today? Really?"

This might as well happen today.

"It's just for a few weeks until your hearing."

I rubbed a hand over my face before glaring at the lady sitting on my couch.

"Look, Cheryl. We're not going into foster care, okay? We aren't going to be apart of your little, screwed up system."

A radio beeped causing me to turn towards the kitchen to see a Deputy saunter into the room. I pursed my lips and took a step toward the door.

"John B, Josephine, this is Deputy Thomas. He works with juveniles for the sheriff's department."

John B got up from the table as the Deputy walked towards him.

"Look, I know Uncle T is down in Mississippi working at a casino."

Shit.

"He hasn't been here in months."

Double shit.

John B tried to make a run for the back to escape, but Deputy No-Neck jumped in front of him.

Triple shit.

"No, see, that's my nightmare right there. We want emancipation."

I shook my head, knowing it wouldn't work.

"Emancipation from who? There's nobody here but you two."

"Asylum, then."

"On what grounds?"

"On solid grounds. On holy grounds."

"On the grounds that you're a bitch," I mutter to myself, looking for a way out with the Deputy blocking the back and Cheryl blocking the front.

"Look, I feel real, real prosecuted right now by you and especially Mr. Big Head over here. What are you lookin' at, bro? What're you gonna do? You gonna tase me?"

John B once again tried to run towards the back, and I dashed for the front. Cheryl grabbed onto my wrist, right where the bruise was, causing me to wince and stop running. She firmly kept her hand there as John B and Deputy start dancing around the table before the Deputy put John B in a headlock.

"Enough! Relax, John."

We're shu led toward the back to pack our stu .

I caught John B's eyes who simply nodded, and I returned it.

Play nice for now.

I started shoving random shit into my backpack. My phone, even though it was dead, the book I was currently reading, and I changed out of my flip-flops and into a pair of vans. Just in case.

I grabbed a photo of Dad off the wall, gently running my thumb over his face before turning to Cheryl.

"Do you know who this is? Yeah, this is my dad. The one who wants me to stay right here with my brother, and you're taking us away from him! You! You're breaking up my family! Do you understand that?"

My yells grew more and more desperate as I tried thinking of a plan, and Cheryl just looked at me sadly.

"It's the law, Josephine."

I scoo ed.

"Well then, the law's screwed up."

I angrily bumped her shoulder as I walked by, meeting John B and Deputy Thomas by the door. I wiped a tear from my face.

John B and I got into the back of the police SUV, and Cheryl cracked the windows for us in the back. I held tightly onto the picture of my dad, not wanting it to blow out of the car.

Wait...

I nudged John B's foot with mine and gave him a pointed look. He nodded.

I held up the photo, gazing at my father's face, before letting it to the crack in the window and letting it slip through my fingers.

"Shit! Stop, stop, stop! Please stop!"

Cheryl turned back to look at me.

"My picture! It's the last picture of my dad, please!" I cried, pulling on the handle of the car door even though I knew it wouldn't open.

"Not gonna happen, kid," Deputy Dickhead says.

"Please just stop the car! That's all I have left of my dad."

I forced a couple of tears to run down my face, and Cheryl nodded at the deputy. I tried not to smile as the car slowed down and the Deputy got out. I nudged John B's foot with mine again.

I turned in my seat and watched the Deputy walk back down the road.

"Cheryl, can I help him look? Please?"

"He's got it."

I scoo ed.

"He's looking on the wrong side of the road. It's gonna get trashed. Cheryl, please. It's our final keepsake of our dad. Are you really gonna let that happen?"

"Make it quick."

I grabbed onto my backpack as she unlocked the door.

I smirked.

"Thanks, Cheryl."

I jumped out of the car at the same time John B did, and we took off down the road.

"Later Thomas!"

John B shouted, and I whooped as we went left. We ran between two cars and jumped an iron fence.

"We should split up!"

My eyes widened at my brother's words.

"What?"

"Go to JJ's house and I'll circle around and get the picture and meet you back at the Chateau tomorrow night."

I grabbed his hand and pulled him to a stop.

"Be careful."

We gave each other a quick hug before running in opposite directions.