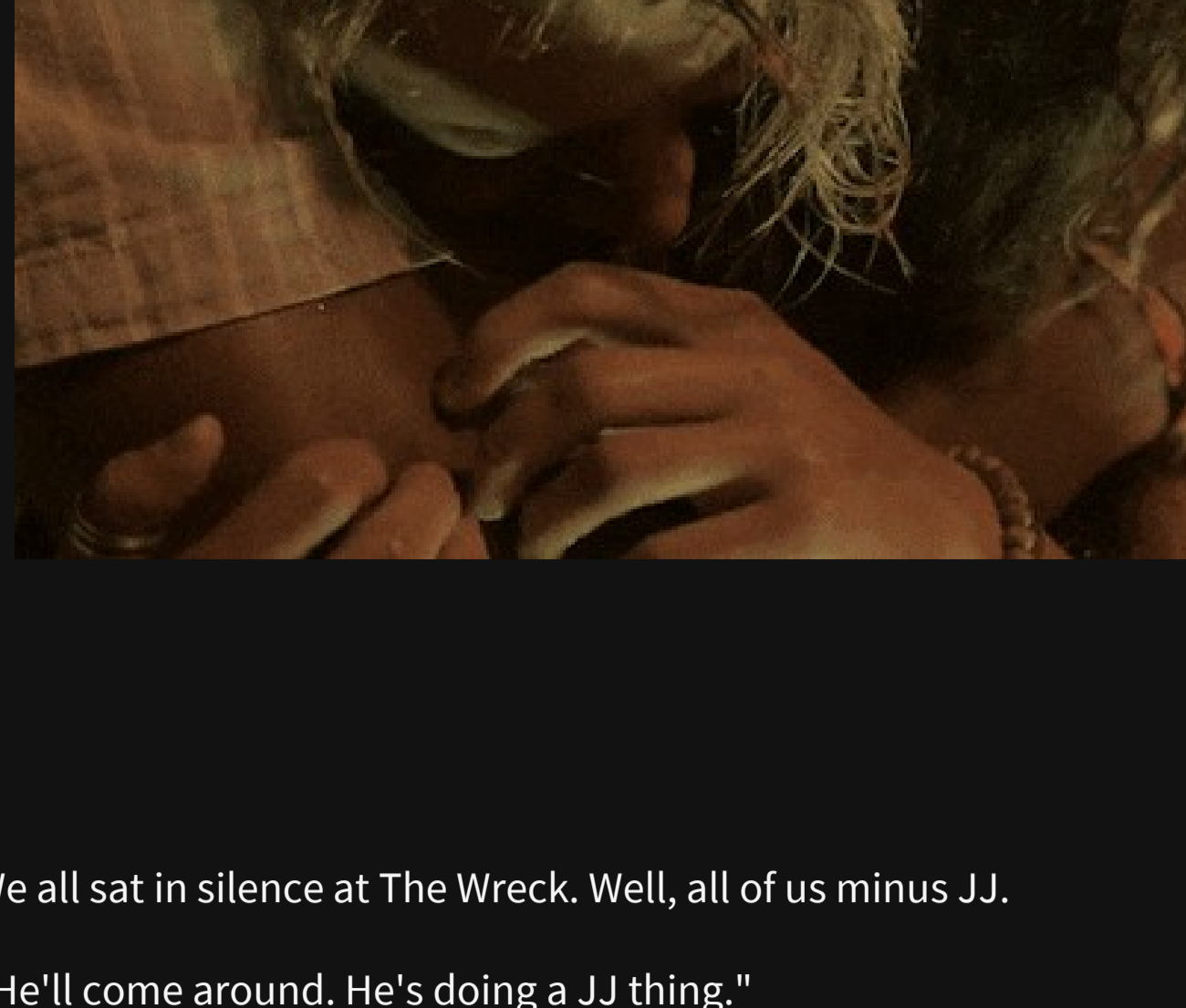


Chapter Thirty-Nine



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We all sat in silence at The Wreck. Well, all of us minus JJ.

"He'll come around. He's doing a JJ thing."

I glared at the table.

"You think he'll go home?"

My chin began trembling as I grew angry.

"There's about a zero percent chance that JJ goes home."

Angry tears gathered in my eyes.

"You okay?"

"Yeah," Sarah responded. "Are you?"

"I mean, I'm on one piece, so..."

"Okay," Pope sighs. "It's too dangerous to pawn this thing o

piecemeal, so our best bet is to go down there and get the rest of it,

bring it all up at once, put it in, in a safe or vault or something. I don't

know, just until we can find someone who won't rip us o .

"I can figure it out tonight, get it done, and we can be out there as

early as tomorrow morning."

"Alright, let's do it. Let's go."

"What about that thing with my dad?"

"Shit."

"What thing?" I asked, still glaring at the table.

"I have to go fishing with Ward."

I sco ed, smiling humorlessly.

"You can't get four-hundred mil 'cause you're gonna go kill fish?"

"Look, I have to go."

"Blow it o . It's four-hundred million in gold!"

"Make something up!"

"Look, I have to, okay? He saved me, alright? If it weren't for Ward, I'd

be in foster care, so I have to go. Plus it'll be better to do it at night."

There's a long pause.

"Fine. Fine, go fishing."

"And, at least JJ will probably have washed up by then."

My chair scraping loudly against the floor had all eyes on me as I

stood up.

"Washed up like the trash you just treated him like?"

"Jo--"

"No! Shut up, Pope. He took the fucking fall for you. He wen't to jail,

so you wouldn't lose your precious scholarship."

Pope didn't say anything.

"Josephine, relax--"

"Relax? You want me to relax? You don't know me, Sarah! You don't

even know JJ, so how could you even begin to understand what we

are going through right now? When you sit in your fucking plantation

mansion and get everything handed to you on a silver platter, how

could you possibly know the struggles?"

John B stood from his seat.

"That's enough."

I glared at him.

"You're right. It's enough. I've had enough."

I shook my head as I made my way out of the restaurant.

"Where are you going?"

I wheeled around to face John B with tears streaming down my face.

"I'm going to go find my fucking best friend! But, don't you worry

about it, John B, go enjoy your fucking fishing trip with your guardian

angel who rescued you from your horrible, horrible life!"

This time nobody stopped me from leaving.

I spent all day looking for JJ. I checked our usual surf spots, the

Boneyard. Hell, I even checked the police station, but he wasn't

anywhere.

The sun began to set as I was once again told to leave the police

station. There was only one last place to check.

His house.

The sun was gone by the time I walked up the driveway with a

flashlight in my hand. I didn't see his dad's truck or JJ's dirt bike. I

went up and knocked on the front door. I knocked again when I didn't

hear anything.

I sighed and turned around and went around back.

"JJ?" I yelled, coming around the corner of the house.

I gasped when I saw that one of the screen panels had been ripped

out. I went up on the porch. The splatters of dried blood didn't go

unnoticed. I covered my mouth with my free hand as a sob ripped

through my chest. I leaned against the back door and slid down it

before sobbing into my knees.

I stayed like that for a while, sobbing and letting out a few screams of

frustration. When my throat was raw and I didn't seem to have any

more tears to cry, I got o the porch and started making my way back

home.

Part of me was glad I didn't find him at his house. The other part of

me was worried sick about where he was and what trouble he was

getting himself into. Walking up the driveway, I heard Pope and

Kiara's voices. I really didn't want to deal with them.

I abandoned the driveway and was on my way to going around, when

a whole bunch of lights suddenly turned on.

"What the hell?" I muttered, following the sound of running water to

the back.

What I saw had my mouth falling open.

Sitting in a hot tube with string lights and fairy lights hanging on the

tree above him, was the blond I'd been searching for all day. I walked

in front of him as he popped a bottle of champagne.

"JJ?"

"Hey, Josephine! I've been waiting for you."

I didn't say anything as he raised the champagne bottle up in the air.

"What did you do, JJ?"

I couldn't take my unbelieving eyes o of JJ at the sound of Pope's

voice.

"I got a jet going straight in my butt right now," JJ answered, and my

mouth dropped open. "Y'all should get in immediately, you hear

me?"

He filled up two champagne glasses.

"Salude!"

"How much did this cost?" Pope asked over JJ's laughs.

"Uh, well, with the generator, the petrol, and oh, hey, express

delivery, pretty much all of it, yeah."

I still couldn't do anything but stare at him.

"All of it?"

"Yeah, all of it."

"You spent all the money in one day?"

"Yeah, burned a hole right through my pocket, but I mean, like, come

on, guys, like, look at this!"

He held his arms out, gesturing to the hot tub.

"Finest in jet-based massage therapy, that's what they told me. Kie,

what? Can't a man have a little luxury in life?"

He was spiraling.

"Come on, all this scrimpin' and scrapin', I mean, like, guys, we, you

only live once, right?"

Tears began to silently fall down my cheeks, and JJ finally looked at

me.

"Enough of this emotional shit. Get in the Cat's Ass. Come on."

"In the what?" Kie asked.

"In the Cat's Ass. That's what I named her. Oh, hey, yo, I almost

forgot."

He pushed a button and the jets got stronger and a disco ball lit up

and started spinning as the lights inside the hot tub started to flash

di erent colors.

"Huh? Yeah, that's right, I know. Disco mode. That's right, baby!"

"Are you kidding me? You could have paid for restitution!"

"Or literally given it to any charity!"

"Or better yet, you could have helped us buy supplies to get the rest

of the gold out of the well!"

I watched in silence as Kiara and Pope yelled and JJ pinched his nose

in frustration.

"Okay, well, you know what? I didn't do that!"

I gasped, choking on a sob when JJ stood up out of the water. Three

massive bruises scattered his torso.

"I got a hot tub! For my friends. I got a hot tub for my friends. You

know what? No, you know what? Screw friends. I got a hot tub for my

family!"

"JJ, what the hell?"

"I got this for you," JJ motioned toward me. "Guys, look what I did for

you! Alright? Look at this."

"JJ."

When I spoke, my voice cracked, and I watched JJ's facade begin to as

well.

"No, you stop being emotional. It's fine, okay?" He hung his head for a

moment, and I walked up to him. "I mean, it's sweet, right? Everyone,

just get in."

I stepped into the hot tub, ignoring the fact I still had on my shoes

and my jean shorts, and pulled JJ into a hug.

I threw one arm around his shoulder and the other around his torso,

both of my hands resting on his back. I buried my face into his neck as

we both let out a choked sob.

"I just couldn't do it."

His arms wrapped loosely around my waist as he sobbed again,

resting his forehead on my shoulder.

"I can't take him anymore!"

His arms tightened around my waist as he yelled.

"I know," I whispered around my own sobs, running a hand through

his hair and squeezing his shoulder with the other, and pulled him

even tighter against me.

"I was gonna kill him."

My heart shattered as his voice broke.

"It's okay."

I rubbed a hand up and down his bare back as Kiara and Pope joined

us in the hot tub, encasing us in more hugs, Kiara on my right and

Pope on my le .

"I just wanna do the right thing."

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I pressed a kiss into where his neck meets his shoulder.

"I know."

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