



Episode Thirty-One

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Boxer Falls: Episode 31

by MJ O'Shea

"Jesus! How far is this place?" Adam had to yell to even hear himself over the wind. It had gone from ominous to whipping against his face in mere minutes. He dropped his sweatshirt and nearly fell pulling it from the bramble underfoot.

Zach ran behind him, dragging the rest of their things. Rider was a few feet ahead. Neither of them answered him. The tree tops tossed in the gathering storm, black clouds swarmed, coming from the east. Everything had changed so quickly. Sun to clouds, clouds to driving wind. The rain was always next. It would come soon, pouring down to scour everything clean. Adam only hoped they could get to shelter before the rains came. He didn't want them to get washed away.

"It's around that corner!" Rider shouted.

They were almost there. Good thing. The wind had become nearly unbearable. Adam was worried about the mainland, about Dot and Quinn at the restaurant. They had no way of getting back there, though, and the chance of his phone working in the middle of a storm like that? Pretty much zero.

The three of them huddled on the porch of the cabin shivering and covered with goosebumps. Zach hadn't even bothered to put on a shirt when they'd fled the beach. Adam leaned closer and rubbed his hands up and down Zach's arms, trying to take away the bluish cast.

"Thanks," Zach muttered. He gave Adam a shy smile over his shoulder. Sometimes it felt like they were just getting used to each other even if they'd been friends practically since birth.

"I thought you knew where the key was," Adam finally asked. He was freezing his nuts off and he wanted to get in out of the wind...and the rain. A wet chilly drop splatted on the back of his neck and made a long, uncomfortable trip down his spine and into the back of his shorts.

"I did. He must've moved it. Let me check in the other usual spot."

Adam wrapped his arms around Zach and stood waiting for Rider to come up with a key. Zach felt tense. Not cold tense. Different. Like he'd felt when Zach was rubbing sunscreen into his scars. There was something there. He leaned over and kissed the side of Zach's neck.

"It's gonna be fine," He murmured. "The storm will blow over and we'll go back."

"I know." Zack did relax a bit after that, leaning against Adam until Rider came back around to their side of the house, key brandished triumphantly. The few drops of rain had turned into a sideways drizzle that even a covered porch couldn't shield them from.

Zach flinched when he brushed by Rider, who was holding the door open for them.

"Hey," Adam whispered into his hair as soon as they were in. "What's going on, huh?"

Zach simply shook his head. "It's nothing."

"Okay," Rider said, rubbing his hands together. "Let's see if we can start a fire." He smiled, clearly aware of the awkwardness that hung thick in the room. Maybe he knew

more about it than Adam did. Adam doubted it, though. There had been something up with Zach ever since Rider pulled up on the beach.

Adam had a feeling it wasn't going to stay bottled up forever.

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"Why aren't you answering your phone?" Oz muttered to himself.

He clenched his jaw, then tried to relax. It was fine, wasn't it? Not likely. That was four calls. No answer. Sure, the cell towers were practically fricasseed by the storm and power was out all over town but he had to find Quinn. He *had* to get to Quinn. Oz wondered when it had happened. When Quinn had become the first and last thought on his mind. He wanted to throw his own phone across the room. Just the memory of that crack, loud and echoing across town. He had know know Quinn was safe.

"I need to go."

Tony scowled. "Oz, you can't go out in this. You'd have to be crazy."

"I need to find-" he almost said it. He almost let Quinn's name slip out. *Damn*. It was too much. Crazy or not he had to go. Cause if Tony watched him long enough, he'd see Oz fly right the fuck out of his skin for needing to get to Quinn and he couldn't have that. "I'll be back. I just want to check on a few things."

Tony shook his head. "You're out of your mind."

"Maybe." Oz shot him a smile, tried to play it off, but just the idea of jogging towards his car, closer to Quinn nearly floored him. "I'll see you later."

The roads were a disaster. And getting worse. High winds and driving rain made it pretty much impossible to see. A loud crack and a branch crashing onto the street made Oz's heart jump. He had to pull over and breathe for long minutes. He tried to call Quinn again but his phone wouldn't even dial. Oz's hands started to sweat.

Just get to town. Get to - He refused to say it again. He was worried about his *father*. Yes, his father. That's who Oz wanted to find. His dad had called a while ago pretty heated

up over a missing golf cart and a missing Rider, right? So then he'd go to town to look for both of them. And if he happened to stop by and make sure everything was kosher at the Bear n Bones, then it would just be coincidental.

If he happened to kiss Quinn until neither of them could breathe any more and then strangle him for getting Oz so damn worried, well that would just be a coincidence too.

He kept crawling along, block after block, each one taking about a million years to get through. But he was getting closer. Closer to the bar, closer to Quinn. He turned his windshield wipers up. Just then, a huge branch blew across the street and Oz slammed on the breaks. The branch blew a few more feet and skidded to a stop right in front of him, still blocking the road.

C'mon, move!

The branch stayed in the road, blocking his lane. It wasn't going anywhere. Oz grumbled and fought the wind to open his car door. Rain slashed into his eyes and soaked his shirt through in seconds. He held his arm up to shield his face but still he could barely see. The branch was there, only a few feet in front of Oz's idling car.

He struggled the branch to the side of the road, and was about to turn back when a sickening metallic crunch split through the rain and the wind.

"You've gotta be fucking kidding me!"

A jeep sat right up on his bumper. No, make that his crumpled ruined bumper. *Goddamned son of a bitch!*

Oz glanced through torrents of wind and rain towards the Bear & Bones, then back at the irate tourist who was climbing out of his jeep.

"Just give me your number. I'm trying to get to- to my father," Oz called through the storm.

"What were you doing stopped in the street?"

Oz gestured towards the branch, frantic to get the hell out of there. "I was moving *that* so I could keep going. Give me your phone number. I need to go."

He didn't care what else was happening. The second he found Quinn...

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"Hey, Elliot, you want me to close down all the windows?"

Seriously? "Quinn. Not Elliot, Quinn. And yes, thanks." Quinn didn't want the floor to get soaked and the storm didn't seem to be going anywhere any time soon.

"Quinn, I think we're going to hang here for a while too, if you don't mind," Sam said, glancing out the window. Quinn didn't blame him. The sky had gotten dark and heavy, and the wind howled through the window frames. He had already picked up their plates and Gino had been nursing the same beer for a while but he hated to kick them out into the storm. It could go from not so bad to dangerous really quickly.

Blake glared at Gino. "I think you two should head out before the worst of it starts."

"Hey," Quinn barked. "Leave the customers alone."

"I just-" Blake was cut off by the loudest crack Quinn had ever heard. Everyone jumped. Moments later, the crack was followed by shattering of glass when the windows in the front of the restaurant imploded under the weight of a gigantic tree branch. Screams from outside, from the bed and breakfast next door, erupted.

Everything seemed to happen all at once. Fuck that slow motion shit that they always showed in the movies. The window shattered and the bricks around it made this sickening crunching noise. He lunged towards Sam and Gino just as they dove for the back of the restaurant. Quinn grabbed Sam's jacket and hauled him out of the way. Gino got himself out, skidding along the floor and away from the rubble. Quinn pushed Sam into the far wall but winced when a burning pain split through his thigh. He looked down. Trickling out from under his kilt was a thick red stream of blood. A shard of glass had gone through the wool of his kilt and embedded itself in his thigh.

Fuck.

Quinn looked up, away from his leg before he puked. Blood had never been his favorite thing. The place where their table had once been was a trunk, wet and covered with bark. Old George had finally bit the big one, and it landed right on top of the Bear & Bones.

Sparks flew from the power line that had gone down and the wind blew in violently, no longer blocked by glass. Sam scrambled up and tried to run for the broken front door, to get outside. Maybe he wanted to see if other people were out there hurt but Quinn wasn't letting someone do anything that stupid on his watch.

"No, stay in here. The kitchen!" He shouted over the noise. The kitchen should still be sheltered. They'd be fine in there until help came. His leg hurt like hell, but Quinn saw the looks on the others' faces. None of them would take over if he didn't. So he gritted his teeth and limped towards the back of the restaurant, herding Blake, Sam, and Gino into the cramped space.

Shit What a mess.

If nothing else, he'd be out of a job for a week or two while they rebuilt the front of the damn restaurant. And he probably needed stitches.

"Hey, Pop?" Quinn muttered when they'd all gathered in the kitchen, dark from the storm and all power out.

"Yeah?" Blake was scrounging around the kitchen looking for anything that might be useful.

Quinn pointed to his leg where the sickeningly sharp shard of glass was still embedded. "I think I'm gonna need some help."

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Things hadn't gotten any better in the cabin. Zach stood, huddled by the fire, trying to dry his soaking wet shirt. Not really. He was trying to avoid looking at Rider, like maybe Rider would be able to tell just from his face. Zach didn't want to be the one to tell him, even though one look at their faces and people had to be able to know.

"Zach, what's up with you?" Adam muttered. "You've been acting weird ever since Rider showed up."

Zach didn't want to get into it.

"You have," Rider chimed in. "Is it me? I know I was..." he hesitated like he didn't want to admit where he'd been. Like that had anything to do with it.

"It's nothing," Zach said.

"It's not nothing," Rider prodded. "Just tell me what I did."

"You were born. I was born. I'm your cousin, okay?" Zach cried out. He gestured at his face then at Rider. "You think this is just a coincidence?" He hadn't meant to say it like that. Or at all. It wasn't Rider's fault, and really Zach wouldn't change anything about his childhood. Just the knowledge that he hadn't been wanted still kind of hurt.

Rider blanched. Zach saw the memory of that night in the club flying across it. The thought of how he'd fooled around with his freaking *cousin* had made him gag more than once since he found out. He didn't blame Rider for having that same reaction. "You can't be serious..."

A bolt of lightning lit the cabin and was followed by a rolling clap of thunder. Adam jumped. Even in his anger, Zach wanted to reach out and comfort him.

"I'm serious. In case you were going to ask, I haven't known long."

Adam's eyebrows drew together and Zack could've sworn that he stepped away. Just a touch, nothing that most people would recognize.

Zach knew Adam's signs though. He swore silently. "What?" he asked then.

"Nothing," Adam said.

Zach saw it on Adam's face. *Nothing my ass.*

"Who-?" Rider had backed against the wall and was raking his hands through his hair, head hung, body racked with jitters.

"Not your Dad. I didn't say brothers, did I?" *'Cause that wouldn't be all kinds of fucked up.*

"Just drop it, okay, you two? It's fine." Adam stalked over to their bags and pulled out the beach blanket. He dropped onto a chair and wrapped himself up. It had gotten cold in the cabin with the rain and the clouds. Even the fire hadn't helped much. Zach went over to where Adam was sitting. Brooding was more like it.

He didn't have to ask what Adam was upset about. It wasn't that something had happened between him and Rider...probably. It was the fact that he hadn't told Adam something really important about himself. And he'd meant to. He just hadn't found the right time yet. It never seemed to be the right time to say 'oh, by the way I guess I'm a Cotten.'

"Can I sit here too?" Zach asked. He needed Adam. He'd always needed Adam.

A few moments of silence was followed by a quiet, "Yeah." Adam lifted the blanket and Zach squished in next to him. Rider took the other chair nearer to the fire and they sat in the gathering darkness listening to the wind howl and the rain lash the cabin. Eventually, Zach, warmed by Adam's body and lulled by the rhythmic pounding of the rain, fell asleep.

* * * *

"Quinn!"

Oz? What the...

"Quinn, are you in here?"

"We're back here." Quinn stood, hardly able to believe he was really hearing it, and struggled to his feet before limping towards the front door. He'd never been so relieved to see anyone. The feeling rushed through him, turning his knees to water.

Oz's face looked like his knees felt. Like everything that had happened in the past hour had bottled up and was draining off in a rush. Oz rushed over to Quinn and dragged him into his arms. Oz was soaked and freezing but he didn't seem to notice. He was running his hands up and down Quinn's back.

"I was so worried," he whispered. Then he looked down. "You're hurt!"

"It's not a big deal." Quinn rubbed his forehead on Oz's wet shoulder. Nothing mattered anymore. It wasn't them standing there, not Quinn's prickly standoffishness or Oz's typical take charge attitude, but it felt good. Different. *Right*.

"Come here." Oz pulled Quinn's face close and kissed him hard and long. The kiss started at their mouths and went all the way to Quinn's curled toes.

"Okay?" Oz asked, when he pulled back breathless.

Quinn knew what Oz was asking, knew what the answer would mean.

He nodded anyway. "Okay."

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The morning dawned, gray and cloudy. Rider woke, stretching the aches and pains of a night in the armchair out of his body. Adam and Zach were still asleep, cuddled together like two little animals who needed each other to survive. He was envious of what they had sometimes. Wondered if he could have it himself. With Sam...with anyone.

"Hey, guys?" He said quietly. He hated to wake them, but they had to get back to the mainland and help out. The storm had been violent. There was sure to be damage.

Zach woke first, rubbing his eyes sleepily and yawning. "What time is it?"

Rider looked at his phone and shrugged. "I don't know. Service is still out."

"We should get back." Zach wriggled out of the chair, waking Adam in the process.

The three gathered up their stuff and locked the cabin before heading back to the beach where their boats...*had* been moored. The only thing left was a tangle of broken branches and the large stretch of water between the island and town.

They were stuck.

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- * *How will Rider, Zach, and Adam make it off the island?*
- * *With Rider tell Zach's secret?*
- * *Have Oz and Quinn finally moved onto the next level?*
- * *Who else was caught in the path of Old George's destruction?*

TUNE IN NEXT WEEK!

Boxer Falls: The bigger they are...

AUTHOR BIO:

M.J. O'Shea has been writing romance since algebra class in sixth grade (when most of her stories starred her and Leonardo DiCaprio). When she's not writing, she loves listening to nearly all types of music, painting, reading great authors, and on those elusive sunny days in the Pacific Northwest, she loves driving on the freeway with her windows rolled down and her stereo on high.

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