

The Adventures of B.J. Craft

By Michael J. Allen

Episode Four: Wishful Dying

The officer pointed his gun down at Pihaa. “Drop it, *chica*. You’re only going to reach a hospital in time if you surrender now.”

BJ stared at the tableaux. His imagination held a gun pointed up at the last of the Mexican authorities. Her confiscated revolver pointed at the man’s heart without the tiniest shake, even despite the blood running down one perfect breast.

The other two officers lay supine in jungle mud. He didn’t have any ID—probably swapped by Pihaa for the stolen goods as some kind of joke—so they hadn’t identified him. The ship would dock in Mexico once more before they made it home. They knew he was on a cruise ship. They could find him.

“Surrender or die,” the officer said. “What are you going to do?”

“I’m not sure.” Pihaa said. “Usually there’re voices in my ear, telling me what to do. The cheers and boos of a cosmic reader, but everything is very, very quiet right now. Just me and how I’m made.”

“Put the gun down.”

“Thought through the plot lines down each path?” She fixed BJ with her eyes. “BJ, haven’t you worked it out yet?”

The officer fired once then again before turning the gun toward BJ. “On your knees.”

“Why?” BJ stared at Pihaa, the burn on his arm prickling. A small part of him felt relief that she was gone, but she’d been like a real person. He’d never seen anyone actually killed before. He knelt in the mud, eyes never leaving the pert smile on her lips.

“Had to put the crazy bitch down. Hands behind your head.”

Her life’s over, but mine’s ruined. What am I going to do now?

Pihaa’s words ran through his mind as cold metal wrapped around his wrists. He considered the situation like a novel. If she’d killed one she’d have had to kill the others. Guilt alone would’ve forced him to confess—even if her actions weren’t completely his doing. If she’d left them unconscious, they might’ve searched all the cruise ships. They might’ve located him, adding assaulting an officer, resisting arrest and who knew what else to the battery of charges. They’d arrested him for petty theft. It was a disaster, but it might be one he could get out of yet.

But was that all she meant?

The officer left him where he was, rousing the other two. They lifted him and led him back toward the ruins. Another horseback excursion group rode by, all eyes on his walk of shame. Something about one the riders struck him as familiar. He wrenched his neck around. She met his eyes. It wasn’t Pihaa.

Wishful thinking?

They shoved him forward, prodding him occasionally until they stepped out of the jungle into the huge clearing around the ruins. He scanned for police vehicles.

How'd the souvenir shop get them out here so fast?

They dragged BJ around the tourist trap, in a backdoor and inside a tiny room that reeked of cigar smoke and beer. A card game lay abandoned in the first room. An archway opened up to a table, a cot and a tiny empty cell.

"Rudy, call it in," the first officer said.

"Why me, Julio?" the second officer asked. "Why not Miguel?"

"Don't volunteer me, *pendejo*," Miguel said.

Julio pointed. "Rudy, radio. Miguel, print him."

Rudy rubbed the spot Pihaa'd hit him and dragged his feet over to a radio. Miguel dug through filing cabinet drawers beneath the table, retrieving a camera several decades out of date and a fingerprinting kit.

They manhandled BJ through both and shoved him into the cell. Urine overtook cigar as a fax machine squealed on the old table. He flopped down onto concrete and stared into space trying to figure out what he should do next. A girl showed up an hour later with a basket containing three meals. The scent roused his stomach, but he didn't get one.

BJ reached for his phone out of habit, before he remembered that Pihaa'd stolen it before she died. He found it in his pocket. He'd missed three calls and a half dozen texts from Morgan.

How the hell? Should I text her back? Tell her to call a lawyer? His thoughts shifted to her soft and warm against him. Their last words had been an argument. They'd made love that morning—before the fight—though it felt like he hadn't seen her in a month. *Which will she remember if I don't make it out of this? Stop it, BJ, this is just petty theft. All those stories about Latin American jails are just that, stories. She'll get me a lawyer. It'll be fine. I'll buy a ring and...*

The door slammed open. Everyone jumped. A woman strode into the room in a pant suit and sunglasses. She smirked at BJ and slapped a stack of paperwork onto the card table. "I'm here for the prisoner."

Pihaa? BJ gaped. Her hair was slightly changed and either her clothes made her build look different or it actually was, but there could be no question. *But how? They shot her. She died.*

All three officers looked at BJ then turned their heads slowly back to her. Julio spoke. "Who are you?"

She leaned close enough to kiss him, her nose wrinkling as she jabbed the paperwork. "All you need to know is right there."

"You look familiar," Rudy said.

"You don't," Pihaa said. "But you can get him out of that cell so I can be on my way."

Julio put down the paperwork. "This says he's a known terrorist."

"Yup," Pihaa smiled.

"That guy?" Julio asked.

"Yep," she said.

BJ struggled against stiff joints to stand against the bars.

"*That* guy?" he repeated.

Pihaa exhaled. "Yes, the guy in your cell has masterminded more crimes and acts of terror than Robert Ludlum."

“Who?” Miguel asked.

She patted his cheeks. “Get a library card, sweetie.”

BJ restrained a groan.

“I’m radioing this in,” Julio said.

Pihaa shrugged. “Suit yourself, but I don’t have all night.”

She stepped through the alcove while the officer talked to his headquarters.

“We’ve got you now, you sick bastard.” She sneered at BJ. She snatched up the photo, the fingerprint card and the combined fax of them both. “You’re going to pay for all the good guys and nefarious characters you’ve tortured.”

“What are you doing?” Miguel asked.

“It’s all in the transfer order,” Pihaa said. “We need all the evidence. Wouldn’t want him to escape even an hour of what he deserves.”

Julio put down the radio. BJ’d been so distracted by the walking corpse, he hadn’t listened to their conversation. The set of the officer’s jaw made BJ’s gut writhe. Pihaa’s back was to Julio, if he attacked her, what would happen?

Are we busted? Do I warn her or let her play this out?