

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

I SCOURED THE INTERNET, TRYING TO FIND OUT MORE about the guy with the doomsday preparation website. It was all vague, except there was a list of meetings in the Seattle area. Which made me wonder. Did the guy with the website just happen to live in the Seattle area? Or had he purposely moved here because of my father? Because of what the world knew about us . . . and the Compound?

A knock on my door made me jump. "Yeah?"

"Can I come in?"

Lexie.

"Yeah, come on in."

She opened the door and peeked around it, then stepped in and pulled it shut behind her. Her dark hair was down and she wore black yoga pants and a white T-shirt that bore a primping Marilyn Monroe. She walked over to my bed and sat down. She looked down at her hands and didn't say anything.

"What's going on?"

She had kind of half a smile on her face. "I know you thought it was dumb the other day, but I can't stop thinking about it and . . . I decided that I really want to find my biological parents."

Hadn't we been over all that? I sighed. "Why is this all coming up now? Before the other day you never even brought this up before."

Lexie rolled her eyes. "Well, let's see. Hmmm. The past six years I thought the entire rest of the world had been destroyed."

"Valid point." I scratched my head, wondering what I could say to talk her out of it. "Seriously though. Why now? We're just starting over, figuring out how to live in this world again."

"Exactly. I'm almost eighteen, I'm going to be an adult and I don't know the first thing about . . ." She trailed off. "I just want to know where I come from."

I didn't get it. "Why?"

"Because I do! I thought you would help me." She stood up. "God, just forget it. Obviously it was too much to ask."

I grabbed her arm as she started to walk past me. "Stop. Just stop."

She turned and stood there, tears welling in her eyes.

"Lex, I'm sorry. Sit down. Of course I'll help."

She leaned against the back of my chair. "I hate not knowing. I don't want to . . ." She sighed. "It's not like I

want a relationship with them or anything, but I want to know." She waited for me to say something. When I didn't, she said, "Is that so bad?"

I shook my head. "But I have no idea what Mom will think."

"We don't have to tell her."

My mouth dropped. Was she planning to keep it a secret from everyone but me? "You'd actually do this without telling her?"

Lexie stood up and paced to my windows and back. "You're right." She leaned forward and put her hand on my arm. "Will you ask her with me? Please?"

Her eyes were tear filled and her expression was so sad.

"Tomorrow," I said. "First thing. We'll go to Mom and tell her you want to find your birth parents."

"Thanks. I'm glad I have someone to trust." My sister lightly kicked my shin, then dodged my reach as I grabbed for her. She laughed as she skipped out of the room.

Eddy walked in just as she walked out. "What was that all about?"

I shook my head. "Nothing. Hey, look at this, will you?"

I showed him the discussions I'd found about our whereabouts.

Eddy frowned. "It was inevitable, wasn't it? We can't hide forever."

*True, but still . . .* "Aren't you worried about it? People knowing where we are?"

He shook his head. "They don't know where we live. Maybe someone saw us at Costco. Maybe someone saw us at the aquarium."

I pointed at the icon of the little girl. "I definitely saw her at the aquarium."

Eddy said, "But they don't know for sure. One person jumps on the wagon, and they all jump on."  
"Should we tell Mom?"

"No way. She's got enough to worry about. I really don't think it's anything to stress about." He squeezed my shoulder. "Holy crap, you're like one big knot."

I put a hand on each temple and rubbed. "I'm just stressed." I pointed at the screen. "Between this, and Lucas going missing and Lexie—" I stopped. How could I have let that out?

"Lexie what?"

"Nothing."

Eddy sat down on the desk and met my gaze. "What is she up to?"

I said, "Well . . . she's decided she wants to find her biological parents."

His eyes narrowed. "That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

I kept my tone light, tried to make it seem like no big deal. "People do it all the time. It's not like she wants to move in with them or anything. She just wants to know where she comes from."

Eddy raised his arms out to the sides. "Here! She comes from here. She has everything she wants. Why

would she go looking for anything else?" He stood up. "She can't do this. All it's going to do is hurt Mom. I'm not letting Lexie do this." He stormed out.

"Are you kidding me? Eddy!" I ran after him, wishing I had kept my mouth shut.

I reached Eddy just as he was knocking on Lexie's door.

"Eddy! Seriously." I grabbed his arm to keep him from knocking again. "She hasn't done anything."

He yanked his arm back. "She's about to break Mom's heart. There's been enough of that."

Lexie opened the door. "What?" Her gaze went from my face and then to Eddy's. She glared at me. "You told him?" She shoved me. "Leave me alone." She started to shut her door, but Eddy managed to get in the way.

He said, "You can't do this. Mom can't take this."

Lexie backed into her room. Like mine, it had a bank of windows, but instead of Lake Washington, hers looked out on the pool and veranda, and one opened onto a balcony. The room was all colored in oranges and yellows, with bold stripes on her-matching bedding and draperies. She went over to her window seat and sat down, looking out the window, blinking fast. Clementine was curled up, sleeping, and Lexie dragged her into her lap.

I pushed by Eddy with a low "Way to go," and went and sat next to Lexie. "I'm sorry, he just asked and I told him."

She didn't look at me, and didn't answer either. She reached up and wiped her eyes. "I should have known not to trust you."

I breathed in deep. I was so stupid. "I'm sorry. You can trust me." I held out my hands, palms up. "I only told Eddy."

She narrowed her eyes at me. "Yeah." She flung out a hand toward him. "That turned out so well."

Eddy sat down on the end of Lexie's bed. "Don't you think Mom already has enough to worry about?"

"This isn't about Mom! It's about me." Lexie set a hand on her chest. "I want to know who my real parents are."

Eddy shook his head. "Your real parents are the same ones I have."

"Yeah, you're right." Lexie dropped her hand and leaned her head against the window. "We have the same father who made sure to leave his entire company to you and Eli. That the *same one* you're talking about?"

Eddy's mouth opened slightly, and then snapped shut. Apparently he didn't have an answer for that.

I sat down on the window seat. "He just did that because we're the boys."

She glared at me.

I bit my lip. "I mean, probably that's why."

Eddy added, "It was more to do with you being a girl than adopted."

"Oh, wow," said Lexie, scorn in her tone. "Now I feel so much better."

"That's not what I meant. It's a lot of pressure, to know we have to run the company. And Dad probably didn't want you to have to deal with that."

I shot him a look, trying to shut him up. If the plan was to talk Lexie out of searching for her biological parents, he was being his own worst enemy.

Lexie rolled her eyes. "Maybe I want to know for medical reasons."

Eddy stood up. "Did something happen when you were . . . *away*?"

I shook my head and saw Lexie was doing the same. She said, "There's just a lot I'd like to know. What if there's some medical history I should know about? What if I want to have kids someday and might pass something bad to them?"

"I understand that." Eddy sat back down. "I do. But you don't have to do it now."

She lifted and lowered one shoulder. "Fine, I'll wait." *What?* Lexie would never give in so fast. Especially not to Eddy, given their current state of animosity toward each other.

"Really?" Eddy asked.

Lexie nodded. "Really. I'll wait until things calm down."

"Cool." Eddy smiled. "I just don't think Mom could deal right now." He stood up and looked at me. "Want to play some basketball?"

I shook my head.

"Lex?"

"No thanks."

After he left, I leaned over and set a hand on Lexie's arm. "You okay with waiting?"

"I'm *not* waiting." Her lip curled. "I'm just tired of him

thinking he can tell me what to do." She sighed. "I really don't care that much about you guys getting the company. It's not my thing." She looked at me. "Don't tell Eddy that though."

I leaned back. "You're still going to go through with it?"

She nodded. "I want to know. Now. I don't want to wait." She looked down for a moment as she stroked the cat.

"What? What's wrong?"

"I think . . ." She hesitated, then went on. "When we were down there? The last six months or so? I think something was wrong."

I let out a sharp laugh. "Uh, yeah. That's an understatement if I've ever heard one."

"No." She stopped petting Clementine and leaned forward, lowering her voice to a whisper. "With me. I was just so . . . depressed all the time. Or mad. Or something."

"Lex, we were all depressed. Or mad." I smiled. "Or something."

Clementine meowed and stood up, then jumped to the floor and went out the door. Lexie bent her knees and hugged them. "What if it was more than that?"

I shook my head. "It wasn't. It was the situation."

"Then why can't I seem to stop crying? What if it is something? Eli, I need to know. I *have* to know. Will you help me?" Her eyes were shiny with tears.

I looked out the window. The afternoon sky was dark. A lot like the mood in the room. "Eddy wouldn't agree."

"I don't give a crap what he thinks."

I glanced at her. "I do care. And he wouldn't like me being involved when he's so against it."

Lexie said, "Eddy doesn't have to know everything you do."

Didn't he? I'd missed him for so long. I was so glad to have him back. How could I help Lexie, knowing I'd cause a rift between me and my brother if he found out? I was positive he would never keep anything from me.

Lexie grabbed my arm. "Please."

I whispered, "No."

She rolled her eyes and sat up straight against the wall.

I quickly said, "I mean . . . no." I shook my head. "Eddy doesn't have to know everything." I hoped I was making the right choice.

Lexie breathed out, a look of relief on her face. "Thank you." She smiled. "Thank you." She went over to her desk and opened the center drawer, then pulled out a manila folder. She came back to me and held it out. "Here."

I took it from her. "What's this?"

"All I know."

I opened it and pulled out a birth certificate. I quickly scanned it, noting Lexie's birth date and our parents' names. I frowned. "Why are they listed as parents? Wouldn't your biological parents be on there?"

"Believe me, I've been online, reading everything about this." She took a deep breath. "In a closed adoption, the

records get sealed by the state of Washington. The judge, or whoever, issues an amended birth certificate with the adopting parents' names on it." She pointed. "That's my official birth certificate. At least, the one Mom and Dad used to get me passports and into school and everything."

I turned it over. The back was empty. "But how does someone even find their birth parents if the records are sealed?"

Lexie said, "I can get them opened with a court order."

"How do you do that?"

"I don't." She sighed. "Until I'm twenty-one, I need Mom's consent. But..."

"What?" I leaned back against the window, which was chilly on my back. "Are you still going to ask her?"

"I think there may be another way. I can get non-identifying information right now from the Department of Social and Health Services." She looked down at the paper.

"What does that mean?" I asked.

Her eyes met mine. "First name, occupation, heritage, education."

"That could be pretty vague. I mean, suppose your birth father is a white guy named John or Tom or Jim who is... a mechanic or a salesman or a plumber? You know how many men in the country fit any of those descriptions?"

"I know. It's a long shot. But Eddy *was* right about one thing. I don't want to make Mom upset." She looked around. "But what else do I have to do?"

I nodded. "So we could actually investigate without involving Mom. What information do you need for that?"

"Time and place of birth."

I pointed at her birth certificate. "Which you have, right?"

She nodded. "Just the county."

"So you know you were born in King County, and—"

"No. I wasn't."

"You weren't born in Seattle?"

She shook her head. The paper in her hand rattled. "Pierce County."

I thought for a second. "That's next to King. Really close."

"But it could be so many towns. What if I need to know the exact town?" She set the paper down on the bed. "I have to ask Mom."

I said, "I think we can do this without Mom. Without getting the court order."

Lexie held out her hands, palms up. "How?"

"Quinn's birthday is coming up and we can get Mom talking about when all of us were born." I paused. "I mean, I doubt she's going to really want to go on and on about a birth in the Compound. So we get her thinking about when Eddy and I were born. Or Reese. And then you. Maybe we can find things out."

Lexie said, "What if she doesn't know? I spent the first year of my life at the orphanage."

"Crap, I forgot that." I met her gaze. "Do you remember anything about that?"

She rolled her eyes. "I was one. I barely remember anything before kindergarten." She sighed. "Maybe Mom doesn't even know."

If Mom couldn't provide any information, I wasn't sure what else to do. But listening to Lexie worried me. Maybe the time in the Compound affected her more than I ever thought. Maybe she was clinically depressed at some point, but that was probably due to the circumstances. We all had to be at least borderline depressed.

But the thought of it being inherited had never crossed my mind. There were definitely valid reasons to actually find out more about her birth parents. In all honesty, I would probably feel the same way.

Which was something Eddy didn't get; he would never understand what we had gone through, how it affected us.

And for about the third time that week, I found myself feeling envious of my brother. Eddy *had* been acting superior to Lexie. Maybe even to me. Like we were visitors in his world and he needed to tell us what to do. So down deep, maybe I felt a little happy that I actually had a secret with our sister that I needed to keep from him.