

# TWELVE

CHAPTER

BACK IN MY ROOM, I BEGAN TO PICK UP SOME OF MY clothes off the floor. I grabbed a pair of jeans and my phone fell out of the pocket. I picked it up. I'd forgotten to lock the screen, and my contacts were lit up. I couldn't help but notice Verity's name. Without thinking, I pushed the call icon and held the phone up to my ear.

Three rings, a click, and then a "Hello?"

I almost couldn't speak. She had to say hello again before I said, "Hey. Verity. This is E—" I almost said

*Eli*: "EJ. We met at—"

"EJ."

I wasn't sure how, but I could tell she was smiling, which made me smile as well. "What are you doing?"

"Homework. Chemistry. Know anything about that?"

"A bit." I heard paper rustling and then a book slammed.

"That's enough of that. What are you doing?"

I sank down onto the side of my bed. "Not much."  
"How's your paper coming?"

"Huh?"

"The paper? The one you had to write about your visit?"

*Stupid.* "Oh. I'm . . . still working on it." Trying to sound more certain of myself, I added, "I'm not a big fan of papers."

"Who is?"

I laughed. Apparently, being dishonest *and* talking to a girl my age made me sweat. I wiped off my forehead with the back of my sleeve.

"So." Verity breathed out. "Did you want something?"

"No, I just . . . called. I guess." I scrunched my eyes together and smacked my forehead with my hand. *Could I sound any dumber?*

"Want to do something this weekend?"

*Did she just ask me out?* "This weekend?"

She laughed a little. "Yeah. A movie or something?" I swallowed. "I'll have to see. I mean, my mom is always planning stuff for us all. So . . . can I check and get back to you?" I knew Mom would never let me out of the house. But explaining the entire story was definitely not an option.

She sighed. "You don't have to make up excuses. If you don't want to, just say so."

I blurted out, "No, I do, I totally do, but I—"

"Okay." I could tell she was smiling again. "Just checking. I can't on Saturday. My family has this thing."

I took the easy way out and lied. "And I'm busy Sunday."

"Oh." The disappointment was obvious.

I felt bad. "But maybe I can get out of it."

"Okay." She was smiling again. "Text me when you find out."

I smiled. "I will. Text you."

"Cool. I'll be waiting to hear from you."

"Okay," I said.

"Okay." She hung up.

I sat there for a moment, smiling at the phone before I set it down.

What was I thinking? I couldn't go out on a date like a normal person. Especially not with people out there watching for us.

Watching for *us*.

Maybe no one would be watching for just me and a girl.

I sighed. *Not gonna happen.* Even if I had any idea what to do on a date, Mom was going to put an end to the outings after the aquarium fiasco. And if I told her what I saw online, she absolutely would.

I knew I should say something. Say that there were people looking for us, watching.

I stewed over it until dinner, and then went downstairs. I really didn't want to bring it up in front of everyone, so I decided to tell Eddy about everything later, see what he thought. I slid into the spot between Lex and Eddy and grabbed a piece of garlic bread.

"Grace!" admonished Terese, who bowed her head. I dropped the bread on my plate. We all bowed our heads.

We'd barely gotten to amen when Mom said, "So, I have an announcement."

We all waited for her to speak.

She said, "I know what happened with Lucas was an accident and will never happen again, am I right?" She looked pointedly at me and Eddy.

We nodded.

Mom smiled a little. "So, I've arranged an outing for all of us. Saturday. The Mariners game."

"Yes!" said Eddy.

Reese and Lexie looked at each other, and my older sister said, "Seriously? Baseball?"

Mom shrugged. "It'll be fun."

Eddy asked, "Do we have the YK suite?"

Mom shook her head. "No, it's being used, but I rented a smaller one that'll work better for us. It'll be private, with just our family, and we can go in the VIP entrance, not have to deal with the general public."

Her words sounded so elitist, but I understood her meaning. If all went as planned, barely anyone would see us the entire game. A private, secure outing.

"Can I invite Tony?" asked Eddy.

I frowned.

Eddy saw my look and glared back at me. "What? It can be a thank-you for finding Lucas."

Mom started to shake her head, but Eddy said, "Please?" "Let me think about it." The words were barely out of Mom's mouth when Lexie said, "I can't believe Quinn's birthday is almost here."

I shot her a glance, like, *Seriously, you couldn't wait five more minutes?* I started dishing some of Gram's lasagna onto a plate for Lucas.

Mom smiled. "Time goes so fast. Seems like yesterday he was born."

Lexie ignored me and turned to Mom. "You probably don't remember anything about when I was born."

Terese burst out, "But you were adopted. Mom wasn't there."

Mom frowned at Terese. "That doesn't mean I don't remember it." She looked at Lexie. "I know we didn't bring you home until you were one, but I was there when you were born."

Next to me, Lexie sounded like she had stopped breathing. "You were?"

Mom nodded at Lexie. "Well, maybe I wasn't there when you came into this world, but I was there the next day." She smiled. "Your father got a call from the orphanage. The flu had swept through the staff, and they were shorthanded when the call came to go pick up a newborn. Rex asked if I wanted to go . . ." She breathed deep and I saw her eyes mist over. "I'll never forget it. I don't know why, I just wanted to go. I dressed so fast I left the house in my bedroom slippers." She picked up a napkin and

dabbed at the corner of her eye. "It was raining and your dad was driving much too fast. But he was as anxious as I was to get there."

Lexie shoved her elbow into my side.

"Where?" I asked. "Same hospital Eddy and I were born?"

Mom shook her head. "Gig Harbor." She went on, talking about when they got there and the nurse handed Lexie over to them. How she had fallen in love with her the instant she saw her. She went on about the next year, and how happy she was when the adoption went through months later, and Lexie was part of the family for good.

But I'd stopped listening and Lexie seemed frozen.

She took my hand and squeezed so hard it hurt.

We didn't need to know anymore. We'd gotten what we needed.

Gig Harbor.