

THIRTEEN

CHAPTER

AS SOON AS DINNER WAS OVER, LEXIE GRABBED MY ARM and whispered, "Your room."

I helped carry dishes into the kitchen, made sure everyone was busy, and then headed up to my room. Lexie was already there, pacing. Her eyes lit up. "Finally!"

On my computer, I pulled up the website for birth records. We found the correct paperwork to fill out online. But as I started to fill in her name, I stopped. "Crap."

"What?" she asked.

This was one time I couldn't use a fake last name. "I have to use your real name."

"So do it," she said.

I hesitated. "But if someone..."

Lexie grabbed my wrist. "Eli. I need to do this."

"Okay." I printed it out when we'd finished. Lexie held the papers in her hand and looked them over. "You're sure it's right?"

I nodded. "It's everything we know. We'll mail it out tomorrow and then we wait."

Lexie's eyes met mine. "What if—"
"What?"

"What if . . . they're weird or something?" Her eyes filled with tears. "Or worse, what if they're awesome? And they just didn't want me?"

"Stop." I reminded her, "You're not going to get any life stories. Not yet. You'll get nonidentifying information. Maybe it won't be enough to tell you anything." Honestly, I was certain we were in the middle of a wild goose chase that would end with my sister being very disappointed.

"Right." She nodded. "You're right," she said, and stood up. "Thanks, Eli." She closed the door after her.

My room was too quiet, so I turned on some music.

Since getting back to Seattle, I'd gone through a stack of iTunes gift cards that Gram had gotten for me when she'd purchased all the other cards for Lexie and Reese and all the online shopping. Maybe it made me seem spoiled, to have all this at my disposal, but I figured after all those years of being underground, a couple hundred new songs weren't going to morally bankrupt me. I had some punk band from Wisconsin blaring as the door opened.

Eddy came in, kicked the door shut behind him, and threw himself on my bed. "Hey."

I nodded at him.

He lay there on his stomach, chin propped upon his crossed arms. "What's going on with you?"

"Whadya mean?"

He rolled his eyes. "Come on. It started the other day when you went to that progeria place. And you were seriously quiet at dinner."

I didn't want to tell him what was going on with Lexie; that we were going through with the search for her biological parents. I also didn't want to tell him that I was still worried about the doomsday people who may or may not know where we lived. But I knew him. He wouldn't leave without something.

"The other day, at the lab"—I leaned forward, rested my elbows on my knees, and lowered my voice—"I met a girl."

Eddy's eyes widened. "Like a *girl* girl?"

I laughed. "Living, breathing, yes."

"Sweet!" Eddy propped himself up on his elbows. "What's her name?"

"Verity. Her little brother has progeria."

Eddy lowered back down. "So did you call her?"

"How do you know I even have her number?"

Eddy laughed and rolled over onto his back. He grabbed one of my pillows and started tossing it up and catching it. "You totally called her."

"What if I did?" It pissed me off he was no longer looking at me, so I walked over to the bed and grabbed the pillow as he tossed it.

"What?" He looked up at me. "It's no big deal you called her."

I dropped the pillow on his face and sat down, leaning back against the headboard. "It's not?"

He shook his head.

"But what about . . ."

He raised his eyebrows. "What?"

I shrugged. "We're kind of trying to stay hidden, aren't we? I can't exactly start . . . I don't know . . ."

"*Dating*," said Eddy. "It's called dating."

"Really?" I grabbed a pillow and threw it at him. "When was the last date you went on?"

He rolled over to face me. "Just a group thing in Hawaii. With kids from families that Gram knew." He sighed. "There was one girl I talked to, but I couldn't tell her who I really was. None of my Hawaii friends know who I really am." His gaze met mine. "That's our biggest obstacle, you know. Does a girl ever like us for us—"

"Or because of who we are. And what we have." I'd never realized Eddy felt that same way. He just always seemed so sure of himself. I said, "But when we were younger and went to school like everyone else, we had friends." It all seemed so long ago. "Didn't we?"

He blew out a breath and fell onto his back. "Yeah, I guess. But we always had cool parties and stuff." He smiled. "You'd have to be stupid *not* to be friends with you and me."

"Well, *you* anyway. They put up with me to hang out

with you." I remembered that part of it pretty well. Eddy was popular. I was his bratty, tagalong twin.

Eddy said, "It's all different now. We're not just famous for being rich anymore."

"We're freaks," I said.

"No," said Eddy. "We're not."

"Right," I said. "*We're* not." I tapped my chest. "I am. Lexie is. Terese is." I shook my head. "I don't know what the little kids are."

Eddy reached over and grabbed my foot. "You are not freaks. You were put in a totally crappy situation. It wasn't your fault." He paused. "You might have experienced stuff no one else in the world has, but it doesn't make you a freak."

"Then why don't I feel that way?" I asked. "Even just talking to Verity that day . . ."

"What?" Eddy asked.

I shrugged. "It's, like . . . we had a conversation. A normal conversation. We just talked. And it seemed so normal. I even seemed normal. But . . ."

"But what?"

"There was so much still there, beneath the surface. So much still on my shoulders. How can I ever tell anyone who I really am? What I've been through?"

Eddy started to say something, but I stopped him.

"No, listen. What if I had said, 'Hey, I'm Eli Yanakakis?' There would have been this momentary pause on her face as the wheels started turning. And she would have thought, *Oh, Eli Yanakakis, son of Rex, who started*

YK, who—oh my God—he's been underground for six years." I sighed. "I can see it now."

Eddy said, "But you didn't say that."

I shook my head.

"So you don't know."

I rolled my eyes. "Oh, believe me, I know."

"It's too much pressure to keep everything a secret. We can't do it that much longer. Even Mom knows that."

Eddy sat up. "One day you'll have to trust someone enough to tell them."

I nodded. "Yeah. I guess. But what if they want nothing to do with me after I tell them?"

Eddy smiled. "You'll always have me." He jumped off the bed. "Els made an apple pie earlier. Coming?"

"Yeah," I said. Pie sounded good. Anything to get my mind off a girl who, if I had any brains, I would never try to see again.