

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WEARING A PINK MARINERS JERSEY, DENIM CAPRIS, AND white flip-flops, Verity just stood there, hands on her hips, looking at me with her eyebrows raised.

"Why are you here?" The words spilled out before I realized how rude they sounded.

She cocked her head toward the party going on in the suite. "We came here with my brother. A wish-filling charity thing." Her eyes narrowed. "Why are you here? Another research paper?"

"No. I'm just here at the game with my family." I started to motion toward the small suite, and then realized what that might lead to. So I gestured back toward the bathroom, and the steps that led to the general seating. "My mom surprised us. I'm way over in the nosebleeds but I wandered and ended up here." Way too many details. Truth is always simpler. I shrugged. "I better go before someone catches me up here."

"Wait," she said. "You could come in with me. They have tons of food."

I glanced inside the door. "I probably shouldn't. I better get back." I smiled at her. "Thanks though. I'm glad I ran into you."

She frowned. "Are you really? Because I thought, when you didn't text me back, that—"

"No, I was just . . . busy. Trying to write that stupid paper." I shrugged.

"So you'll text me?"

I nodded. "Definitely."

"Okay." She set her hand on my arm for a moment, then went back into the suite.

I breathed out, relieved, and went to head back to my suite.

As I turned the corner, I ran smack into a man in a black T-shirt and black jeans. "Oh, excuse me, I—." As I looked more closely at him, my eyes narrowed. Was he the man from Costco? The man from the doomsday preparation site? I started to doubt myself, but as he looked up at me, his eyes widened, and he started to back off.

I reached for him, but he dodged me and jolted forward, and I had to turn around to chase after him. "Wait!" I called. I ran after him, glad the hallway was fairly empty so no one seemed to notice.

What was he doing there? Following me again? Following us? But how did he know where we'd be?

I had nearly caught up to him when a door to one of

the luxury suites opened and a bunch of kids Reese's age poured out, cutting me off from him. I tried to swim my way through, but there were too many.

I saw the man farther down the corridor. He had stopped right at the stairway and was looking back at me. There was a smile on his face, like he was glad he got away. But then he reached in his pocket and pulled out a small white card.

A business card?

He held up the card, making sure I saw. Then he pulled out a pen, jotted something on the back of the card, and placed it on the railing of the stairs. He looked back at me.

I nodded.

He disappeared down the stairs.

As soon as I could get through the crowd, I headed over there and grabbed the card. I glanced at the back. A phone number. I flipped the card over. The front was a picture of a very nice kitchen with granite countertops. He obviously wasn't trying to hide from me, leaving the card proved that. But if he wanted to talk, why did he run?

After the game, we dropped Tony off at the strip mall. Eddy got out for a minute and walked him over to the bus stop. I watched them laughing, and then Eddy waved and walked back to the car.

I couldn't believe Eddy would trust him that much.

As soon as we pulled out of the parking lot, I asked, "Does he know who we are?"

Eddy said, "No. Duh. He just thinks we're some rich people. That's all."

Lexie said, "I think he's cool. You should tell him who we are, Eddy."

"Why?" I asked.

Lexie shrugged. "He wouldn't tell anyone, I bet."

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah, why ruin a good thing?"

I just stared out the window the rest of the drive. Back at the house, I went up to my room and pulled the business card out of my back pocket. The phone number on the back had a Seattle area code. I wasn't all that sure I was ready to call him up. What could he want from me?

I flipped the card over and looked at the photo of the kitchen. The top line read, TRINITY CONDOS. Under that were the words: *A Luxury Survival Development*.

"What?" My heart started to race as I went to my computer and typed in the website for Trinity Condos.

The first thing to pop up was a picture of a steel door and the words: **Click here if you want to survive.** "You've got to be frickin' kidding me." Still, I clicked and went into the site and read the headline.

Trinity Condos! Secure, high-quality living during a long-term survival situation. Our luxury condos are built to withstand a nuclear explosion.

Below that were several tabs. I clicked on the one labeled *Amenities*.

Each three-bedroom, two-bath condo contains a

five-year supply of freeze-dried survival food per person, for a maximum of six people. The food has a shelf life of 25 years and is stored in oxygen-free containers.

Dad should have thought of that.

The description of amenities continued, describing how the twenty available condos were all part of a larger space, which had, among other things, a community library, theater, gym, and . . . a hydroponics lab. *To provide fresh produce for the duration of your underground stay.*

I shuddered. God, it sounded like the Compound. I clicked on the tab labeled *History*.

The Trinity Condo units are inside a former US nuclear missile base in rural Kansas, six stories underground with elevator access.

I skimmed the rest, then went back to the home page and clicked on *Prices*.

Prices start at \$2.5 million.

"Holy crap." Was the guy who left the card the developer of the condos? Did they really exist or was it a scam to get people's money? If they did exist . . . it meant people were on their way to being just as nuts as Dad had been. Except that, to my father, survival had turned into a game. A game that needed to be switched up now and then, a game to control.

But I doubted anyone spending that much money looked at survival as a game.

Before I could rethink it, I grabbed my phone and dialed the number on the card. There was one ring, then a click.

"Hello?"

I said, "You probably know who this is."

He breathed out: "Mr. Yanakakis."

"Why'd you run?" I asked.

"What?"

"If you want to talk to me, which you obviously do since you've been following us, why'd you run?" I waited. He didn't answer for a moment, but then said, "You seemed a bit . . . volatile."

Volatile? "Seriously? Why wouldn't I be! You've been following me and my family and—"

"Please! Just give me a chance to explain." He sounded desperate.

Honestly, I kind of wanted to know what he had to say. "Fine," I said. "Explain."

"My name is Tom Barron. I'm a developer."

"Yeah." I glanced at the computer screen. "I looked up your site."

"Really?" He sounded excited. "What did you think?"

What did I think? I frowned. "I think you're nuts."

He was quiet. Then he said, "You of all people should understand the seriousness of the situation."

I had to laugh. "Are you kidding me? I spent six years under the frickin' ground because my father was insane! I think anybody who would willingly shell out millions of dollars to do the same thing is just as nuts as he was."

"Your father wasn't crazy," said Tom Barron. "Ever heard of Nightwatch?"

I let the name roll around in my head a bit. "No."

"Do you have a computer there?"

"Yeah."

He said, "Look it up."

I typed it in and waited. Several sites popped up, some with pictures. "It's a jet," I said.

"Not just any jet," he said. "It's the Doomsday Jet. There are some very solid stories to substantiate that it was flying around on 9/11."

I was sure that, if pressed, he would turn out to have "solid stories" to substantiate both Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster. Still, I wanted to know where he was going. "I don't understand," I said.

He said, "It can withstand a nuclear explosion, never has to land to refuel, and is a flying command post from which the president can command nuclear retaliation."

I sighed. "I'm sure all countries have something like that."

"On twenty-four-hour permanent high alert? They can scramble Nightwatch with five minutes' notice. Right now, there are crews sleeping nearby, ready to get it in the air at a moment's notice. It's an airborne ark."

"So?" I said.

Tom Barron raised his voice a little. "So it means nuclear attack is just as much a threat as it always was. Our government must believe that, otherwise they wouldn't have that aircraft on permanent high alert."

A chill ran through me.

He said, "Your father wasn't crazy. I'm not crazy. These are fearful times. Do you know there are people who spend every spare minute preparing a BOL?"

"What's that?"

"Oh, sorry. Bug Out Location. Somewhere to go when everything collapses."

I sighed. "Nothing is going to collapse. People are trying to cash in."

"Really?" He paused for a second before continuing. "Look online. Check out some typical seed companies. Even they offer survivalist seeds. Doomsday is coming, and people need to be—"

"God, just stop." I shook my head. All those people trying to survive. Underground. I'd been there. Been there long enough to realize survival wasn't all it was cracked up to be. Given the choice a second time? I'd stay outside. Die along with all the people who couldn't afford a BOL. I'd heard enough. "What do you want from me?"

"I was hoping . . ." He trailed off. "I was hoping you, or possibly your whole family, could act as a consultant on the Trinity Condo project. You've experienced survival-living underground, you know what works and what doesn't, and you—"

"No."

"But you would be so valuable—"

"No!" I snarled. "I won't do it. And stop following my family or I'll call the police and take out a restraining order." My tone hid the relief I felt at finding out the person following us was just an opportunist, trying to cash

in. If need be, our lawyers would chew him up and spit him out. Still, I'd rather send him on his way myself, so no one else in my family would even have to know.

But he kept talking. "I never planned to follow you. But when I got that tip, I just couldn't resist trying to—"

I froze in my chair. "What tip?"

"Through the YK sightings website. I got a tip that you all were going to that Costco. Of course, I thought it was a joke, people send me tips all the time, but they always turn out to be fake—"

"Wait!" My throat tightened up. "Someone told you specifically what Costco we were going to?"

"Yes."

I swallowed and tried to keep my voice level, not betray my panic. "Who was the tip from?"

"I don't know. I mean, the first one was just an online message, but the second time he called and—"

Second time?

No one knew those plans but my family. I gave up trying to pretend calm, and demanded, "Who called? Who was he?"

"I don't know. His voice was . . . garbled, sort of? Like he was using one of those voice scramblers to disguise his voice? Heck, maybe it wasn't even a man . . ."

Oh, my God. Someone, other than Trinity Condo Idiot, was watching us, knew where we were, knew where we went.

He said, "I hope you'll think about—"

"No," I said. "No frickin' chance. You're lucky I don't

call the police." I hung up. My hands were trembling and my breaths were shallow.

Who was watching us? What did they want?

And how was I going to find out who they were, and stop them, before something happened?

I had no idea.