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NINETEEN

CHAPTER

ALL DAY, I AVOIDED EDDY. EVEN THOUGH I WAS TRYING TO be mature about the whole thing, I had no idea how to approach him. If I went in there begging him to hang out with me, then I'd be exactly the person he had been trying to get away from. But if I went in there all cold and calculated, telling him to hang out with who he wanted to . . . that wouldn't work either.

What did I want?

It was easier to think about what I didn't.

And I didn't want to be left out. I didn't want to have to sit there, night after night, knowing my brother was out running around with some guy he barely knew, because that stranger was more fun than I was.

I wanted to be part of it, too. I wanted to be included. And if that meant throwing aside my paranoia and fear and mistrust of the world, then I would suck it up and do it.

About ten o'clock that night I was watching television and realized I couldn't wait anymore. I turned off the television, not even aware of what had been on the past couple of hours. In stocking feet, I walked down to Eddy's room and knocked.

"Yeah, come in."

I pushed the door open. He was lying on his bed, an arm over his face, with only the bedside lamp for light. "Eddy?"

He didn't move. "I think I'm gonna puke."

"Maybe you caught whatever we all had."

"Yeah. Thanks." Then he jumped up and ran for the bathroom.

I heard him throw up. "Ugh." I walked over to the open door and stood beside it, not looking in. "Can I do anything?"

I heard him spit into the toilet and then flush it. "Get me a pillow. I think I'm sleeping in here tonight."

I grabbed a pillow from his bed and a light blanket off the end of his bed and carried them into the bathroom.

"Thanks." He took the pillow and put it on the floor, then lay down on the tile, knees up, and put his arm over his eyes. "Oh, God."

I set the blanket on the floor beside him. "Want me to stay?"

"No."

"Feel better." I shut the door and turned to go.

His room was getting chilly, and I noticed the glass door to the balcony was open. The sweatshirt he'd worn

at dinner was slung over a chair, and I put it on, then turned off his light. I felt like I should stay for a little while, anyway, so I sunk down into the comfy chair by the balcony and stared out at the night sky, which I couldn't see for all the lights. I missed Hawaii, where I could see the stars every night. I hadn't seen the stars since we'd been back in Seattle.

I went to check on Eddy, but his breathing was slow and deep. Maybe he'd actually fallen asleep. I'd done the same thing when I had the stomach virus, slept on the floor of the bathroom all night.

I stepped back into his room, reluctant to leave. Being there reminded me of when we shared a room, whispered secrets in the dark before finally falling asleep.

Something skittered across the balcony. I stepped outside. A little rock hit my face. "Ow."

"Eddy?" A loud whisper came from below.

I leaned over the railing without saying anything.

Tony stepped out into the light and smiled up at me, waving. I knew I was in shadow, at least partial darkness, so he couldn't see my face, my reaction to him. Which was good, because I realized this was an opportunity. A chance to show I could relax about my fears and paranoia.

Better yet, it was a chance to see what Eddy did when he ran off with Tony.

"You coming or what?" he asked.

I hesitated only slightly, then waved back. "Yeah. Be right down."

I put on a pair of Eddy's Nikes, then went out into the

hallway. Everything seemed quiet as I made my way downstairs, but I took every corner slowly in case someone was still up. No one was.

Then I stopped.

Was that how Eddy snuck out? The front door?

I turned back toward his room. There were trellises next to all the balconies. Maybe . . .

I went back into Eddy's room and out to the balcony, pausing before I stepped outside. Could I pull it off? Make Tony think I was Eddy?

I pulled the hood up over my head and went outside.

Tony was standing down below, arms crossed, tapping a foot. "Did you take a dump or what?"

"Sorry." I reached out a hand and grabbed the metal trellis. It was firm and didn't move. I put one leg over the edge of the balcony, pulled myself over, and used it as a ladder, hoping the whole time it wouldn't break and send me falling to the concrete below.

When I was a few feet from the ground, I jumped.

"Cool," said Tony. "You should do that from now on instead of going out the front."

Seriously?

Tony grinned. "Ready?"

I forced myself to grin back. "Yeah."

He turned and jogged away from the front gate, over to the patch of trees at the edge of the property. I followed. When we got to the fence, he climbed up and over, then dropped to the ground on the other side. He turned and looked at me. "Need an invitation?"

I shook my head and reached up for a handhold. I stuck my toe in a gap in the fence and pulled myself up with my arms. Then I lifted one of my legs over and managed to get to the top. I jumped down beside Tony.

I was outside the fence. Unprotected. Or free. Depending on how you looked at it.

I was undecided.

Tony headed through the woods, obviously sure of where he was going. Unless I wanted to climb back over the fence, I had no choice but to follow him, trying not to trip over tree roots in the dark as I pretended I'd been there before. The woods ended fairly abruptly and we stepped out onto a deserted access road where a dark blue muscle car was parked.

My dad had never been into old cars, not even the nice ones. With him, it was always the latest, the newest, the most innovative.

And me? I knew nothing about old cars, but I could appreciate them. And this one was a beauty. I almost whistled, but caught myself. Maybe Eddy had seen this car before. If so, my acting like I'd never seen it before would be a dead giveaway.

"What do you think?" said Tony. He patted the hood as he walked around the front to the driver's side. "1969 Camaro."

Eddy hadn't seen it yet. So I whistled. "She's a beauty." I suspected the answer would be no, but still I asked, "Yours?"

Tony shook his head as he opened the door. "Neighbor's."

I opened the door on my side. The smell of leather rushed out at me as I sat down. "Your neighbor lets you drive it?" I shut the door, and the sound was solid.

Tony turned the key and the engine was loud. He revved it, making it even louder. "I wash it for him. One time he forgot he'd given me a key and gave me another. I kept one."

I turned and looked at him in the glow of the dashboard. "You took the car without asking?"

He shook his head. "He's out of town. He'll never know."

I knew that I should get out of the car. I should get out of the car, climb back over the fence, and go to bed. I knew that I should.

Instead, I buckled my seat belt as Tony pulled out onto the access road, which soon hit the main road. He braked at the stop sign, gunned the engine, and we flew out onto the road, heading for the bridge.

He turned on the stereo, and Iron Maiden soon drowned out the revving engine. I rolled down my window and stuck my head out, letting the wind rush at my face.

I was in a speeding car, possibly stolen, with a kid I hardly knew, no bodyguard in sight. I hadn't even grabbed my cell phone when I left.

I was on my own. Possibly heading into harm's way.

Remember, you're Eddy.

What would Eddy do? Eddy, who didn't have my hang-ups, wasn't afraid of everyone in the world?

I grinned. And then I whooped out the window, as loud as I could, as we flew all the way over the bridge.

Tony slapped the steering wheel and laughed at me.

After a second, I laughed, too.

I realized that if I wasn't so jealous of Tony, I would like to have him as a friend. Eddy certainly did. And, for the moment at least, Eddy was who I was.

I settled back into the seat, ready for the night to begin.