

CHAPTER TWO

THE DAILY ROUTINES THAT HAD BEEN SO CONFINING, SO infuriating, while I was underground became something to cling to once we got out. Maybe it was because every morning I still woke up feeling angry and trapped. But then I looked around, saw the late-summer sunshine, smelled coffee and cinnamon, heard birds singing outside my open window. An extra dose of my new-and-improved reality came that morning when Lucas's foot kicked me in the gut, and I realized he'd snuck into my bed sometime in the night. And then Cocoa stuck her cold nose in my face.

Every morning I got to realize it all over again; the nightmare was done. We were out. Safe. Together as a family.

Lucas was still zonked, so I covered him up and took Cocoa outside, then filled her dish with food. In the kitchen, Els was busy making breakfast on one of the two stoves and

Gram was the only other one awake yet. She didn't ever speak in those early-morning moments, instead she simply set a hand on my shoulder and squeezed, then set a steaming cup of coffee and milk in front of me as I slid up on a bar stool at the counter.

She passed the box of natural sweetener to me, along with a spoon. As I stirred, I wondered if she knew how much I was still adjusting. For whatever reason, I appreciated it, this early-morning time with just the breeze ruffling the lace curtains at the window above the sink as I sipped my hot drink. The quiet moments that ended when the rest of my family woke up.

First Finnegan—Finn—the baby, wailing, until Mom pulled him out of his crib to snuggle with her. A few minutes after that my younger sister Terese—Reese—staggered in, long dark hair loose and mussed, wearing an old Seahawks jersey of Eddy's, so long that it skimmed the top of her skinny knees. She carried our cat, Clementine, and took her into the laundry room. Cat food rattled, then Reese came back out and stood still for a hug and kiss from Gram before climbing up to sit next to me. I put an arm around her shoulder and she leaned in to me. Reese smelled clean, like shampoo. Little wonder, since both she and our older sister, Lexie, spent a lot of time taking baths in the big garden tub in Mom's master suite.

I didn't get the appeal of baths, never did. But it was some sort of therapy for them, apparently. Part of me was worried, still, that Reese had been too young when we entered

the Compound, that she'd been too affected. I was worried that one day she'd revert, start speaking with the English accent she'd spoken with for her years underground. But in the weeks since we'd been out, she had changed. As far as I could tell, she actually seemed like a normal eleven-year-old.

I'd like to give credit to the family time, that simply being in a nice place with Gram and Eddy was enough to make us whole. But I have to place the blame, or credit, with television. Even though she was limited to two hours a day, those two hours consisted of all the tweener shows that told Reese exactly what she'd missed of American civilization in those six years of being *away*.

That's what we called it when we had to refer to our time in the Compound.

Away.

When we were *away* . . .

The word soft-pedaled the messed-up reality of the situation. We weren't trapped or confined or unwilling prisoners. We were simply . . . *away*.

We talked a lot about that period of our lives. How could we not? That had been the reality of the past six years of our life, and Eddy and Gram wanted to know. We couldn't pretend we weren't there. But, as we replied, we could leave out the worst of the Compound; the worst of what my father did. And we could use euphemisms that took some of the pain out of answering the questions.

"What did you eat when you were *away*?"

"What did you do for fun when you were *away*?"

We'd been at Gram's in Hawaii for a few days when Eddy asked me, "Did you think of me when you were away?"

How to answer that one? Because to answer only yes would not have done justice to the truth, that he was never out of my mind; that I thought of him constantly as I blamed myself for his death. For six years, I wore that guilt-like an ugly shirt I couldn't take off.

Since being out, being back with my brother, at least once a day I found myself having to touch him to prove he was real.

Usually I settled for punching him on the arm or elbowing him or putting him in a headlock. Because reaching out and touching him and saying, "*Just had to check if you were real because I think you are just in my imagination and I'm terrified I'm going to wake up and realize I'm still in the Com-pound.*" . . . well, that might make me seem like a freak.

And I already felt that way enough of the time.

Next in the morning parade came my older sister, Lexie, in pajamas with pink lip prints all over them. Her eyes were red and puffy, and I assumed she'd been crying again. Her room was next to mine and I often heard her at night. Her dark hair was twisted in a messy bun at her neck. In her arms she carried Cara, whom she handed off to me. "I checked on Quinn, but he's still asleep. Which I would be if this little poop hadn't woken me up." She kissed the top of Cara's head, then accepted a cup of Kona from Gram and went and sat on the flowered couch in the sunroom by the fireplace and television.

My older sister seemed to be affected the most. Honestly, I could barely remember what she was like before the Compound. Spoiled like the rest of us: Did any of us even think about one another before that experience? But we'd actually become friends since we got out. She was quiet, though, maybe too quiet; I wasn't sure I'd ever seen her that subdued. And she was sad.

Lexie had been closer to Dad than any of us had. So it made sense that, despite all he had done, maybe she was still grieving for him.

So I made sure to be nice to her. She seemed too fragile to not treat kindly. I couldn't help thinking she had secrets. But we'd all spent the last six years in a confined space. Not many secrets you can keep in a situation like that. Maybe she thought none of us would understand how much she was missing Dad. And maybe she was right; maybe none of us would.

Mom came in, yawning, with dark circles under her eyes. She set the baby monitor on the counter. "Sweet thing went right back to sleep."

Gram asked, "Why didn't you?"

Mom shrugged. "I tried. But I smelled coffee."

I knew the Phil thing was stressing her out. That was why she couldn't sleep. Cara twisted around in my lap, kneeling so she could put her arms around my neck. Then she settled in, as if she was going to go back to sleep, her breath warm on my skin.

Mom kissed Gram on the cheek, then came over and did the same to me and Cara and Reese. She doctored

her coffee with cream and sweetener and then went to sit with Lexie.

Eddy walked in, carrying his tablet computer. Barefoot, he wore a pair of faded gray sweatpants with holes in the knees and a nearly threadbare Nirvana T-shirt. Gram shook her head at him. "I'm gonna throw those out the next time I see them in the wash."

"No way." Eddy grinned and put Gram in a gentle headlock. "They just got broken in."

I glanced down at the clothes I wore: black running shorts and an orange T-shirt, both brand-new, not even close to being faded. Neither had any holes. Neither was broken in. Like the rest of the clothes in my closet.

Our first two weeks in Hawaii, Lexie and Mom and Reese had spent hours online, ordering clothes for all of us. Other than some dress clothes, Eddy didn't need anything.

So everything I owned was new. I had no favorites. I hadn't been on the outside long enough to break something in.

And suddenly I wanted something like the clothes Eddy wore. Something old. Something with holes in it. Something of my own that I'd had for longer than a month, something that wasn't so frickin' *new*.

Eddy poured himself a glass of juice. Our cat, Clementine, rubbed against his leg. Thanks to some new allergy shots, the cat no longer bothered him.

I looked sideways at my brother.

He was so . . . relaxed. So normal, with his worn-out, comfortable clothes. He totally fit in wherever he was.

Eddy's eyes narrowed as he looked at something on his tablet. He put a hand over his mouth as he paled.

I asked, "What's wrong?"

Eddy turned the screen my way to show me the front page of the *Seattle Times*. "It's Phil."

I sighed and looked away. "What's he done now?" I'd had enough of Phil the day before.

Eddy's eyes were wide. "He's disappeared."

My mouth dropped open. "What?"

"They suspect foul play." He sunk down onto a stool. Reaching out with one hand while still holding Cara with the other, I grabbed his computer and quickly scanned the story.

Philip A. Whitaker . . . 38 . . . missing . . . blood-spattered apartment . . . The article was short, but it got my heart pounding. What if something had happened to Phil? What if he was gone forever? I started to smile, but then I looked up at Eddy. "Why are you so upset?"

Eddy shook his head and wouldn't look at me. "I know you don't get it, but Phil was good to me and Gram while you guys were . . . away. I didn't know what had happened. I only knew you were all gone and Gram and Phil were all I had." He looked at Gram.

She nodded. "He made sure we had everything we needed. But if I'd known . . ." She made a fist and smacked it into the palm of her other hand.

I set the tablet down, then put a hand on Eddy's arm. "I'm sorry." But, really, I wasn't. Not even close.

Eddy went into where Mom and Lexie were watching television, and flipped the channel to the news. I followed, carrying Cara. The story about Phil was big news. "How long do you think they'll wait?" I asked Mom.

"For what?"

I shrugged. "If he's gone . . . I mean, someone has to run YK."

She nodded. "Yeah. But I don't know. We'll have to see." A funny smile played at the corner of her lips. She didn't seem surprised at the news.

Did she have something to do with Phil's disappearance?

No way. I shoved away the thought as Els held a platter of fresh cinnamon rolls in front of me. Cara stirred and reached out for one.

"Want one, Cara?"

She nodded, so I carried her back into the kitchen and put her up on a stool, getting her some milk and a small piece of roll. I picked up one and took a bite, then, as Els was passing them around to everyone else, I quickly poured myself a glass of milk and went back up to my room.

I went online and found the article. Eddy had showed me and printed it out. I glanced at the picture of Phil and called him the worst name I could think of. Then I

added, "I hope you did get what you deserved. And that you're gone for good."

I opened my drawer and put the sheet of paper inside, along with the flash drive. I planned on never looking at either again.