

TWENTY

THE TRAFFIC WAS LIGHT AT THAT TIME OF NIGHT. I NOTICED Tony stayed just at the speed limit or barely above, apparently not wanting to attract any unwanted attention. I suppose anyone could drive like that, but it made me wonder how sure he was about his neighbor not noticing the car was gone. For whatever reason, I was glad he wasn't speeding or driving crazy. It was the first time I'd been in a car driven by someone other than my dad or one of our staff.

Maybe it was due to me trying to think like Eddy, but instead of being worried or stressed about it, I felt excited. *Free.*

After about a half hour of driving, I recognized where we were. My heart started to pound as we turned onto the street where our mansion was. Our old house. The high walls of our security fence loomed in the dark, lit up like a 7-Eleven. Had Eddy brought Tony here before?

Obviously.

Tony slowed and pulled over to the side, in front of another walled-in residence. He unbuckled his seat belt and started to get out, then stopped and looked at me. "You coming?"

I nodded. "Yeah."

He said, "I figured it's better to park down here, instead of right in front." He quietly shut his door.

I hesitated before unbuckling my seat belt, then got out and shut my door, letting him lead the way.

My heart was pounding even harder. I didn't know whether there were security guards or not. Even if there weren't, the alarms had to be on and I didn't have a code for them.

When we'd gotten back to Seattle, we hadn't even left the house. And then we'd moved and there'd been no reason for me to learn the security codes.

We headed down the sidewalk. It had started to drizzle, so we stayed under the trees, partially to stay dry but also to stay a bit hidden from anyone who might be looking out.

"The street's so empty," I said, my voice loud in the quiet night.

"It is night."

I didn't reply. I'd been talking about the last time I had been there, all the chaos with the news trucks and satellite dishes. But apparently, Eddy had been there since then. I needed to start being way more careful about what I said if I wanted him to think I was my brother.

We reached the front gate.

There was a black box.

Tony looked at me and raised his eyebrows. When I didn't do anything, he said, "Cool, my turn at last." He flipped up the cover, punched in a code, and the gate slowly opened. My knees threatened to buckle.

Eddy had given him the code? How many times had they been there?

"Hurry up," he said, as the thing seemed to take forever. As soon as the gate opened wide enough, he slipped inside and I followed. The guard building was dark and empty. Why weren't there any guards?

Once we were both inside, Tony went to the black box on the inside of the gate and punched the code to close it.

There we were, in the courtyard.

All was quiet.

I let out a breath I didn't realize I'd been holding.

Despite all the lights being on outside, the house was dark. Lonely. I didn't want to go in. I didn't want to be there without the rest of my family, because it wouldn't be home. At least, I didn't want to walk in there and realize it by myself.

Tony said, "I still can't believe you got away with that."

"With what?"

He pointed at the empty guard building. "Messing up their schedule, so nobody was on tonight. Don't you think they'll catch on eventually?"

I shrugged, but didn't say anything. Again, I wondered just how many times Eddy had been here like this.

With confidence, Tony began striding like he knew exactly where he was headed. Like he'd been here a thousand times before.

I jogged to catch up with him.

We walked across the courtyard and circle drive, then hit the cobblestone walkway that led to the backyard. The lights in the backyard were off, but the pool lights were on, revealing the steam coming off the surface.

But Tony kept going, toward the area I'd only seen from my window, the new addition that seemed made all of concrete.

And I froze when I saw what it was.

A skateboard park. With ramps and tunnels. Everything a skateboarder would want.

My face got hot and my stomach clenched.

When I had been stuck underground—*when my whole family had been stuck underground*—my brother had gotten his own skateboard park in the backyard. When? Before he and Gram went to Hawaii? When they came back to Seattle now and then?

I tried to reason it out, tried to stop being angry.

Eddy had no idea we were still alive. Maybe the skateboard park had been something to make a grieving boy try to get his mind off the loss of his entire family.

I took a deep breath.

Tony said, "This is so sick. I still can't believe you had this in your backyard."

"Yeah," I said, feeling a bit sick myself. I couldn't

skateboard. Well, other than the sad little skills I'd had when I was eight. Which were nowhere close to what Eddy could do on a skateboard. And there was no way I'd be able to convince anyone that I was my twin.

The rain continued to fall as I stood there, motionless. Tony turned back to me. "Do you really want to do this?" "Huh?" I asked. Did he know? Was he messing with me?

Tony jerked a thumb over in the direction of the pool. "That thing is heated, right?"

I nodded, unable to breathe, wondering if I was about to dodge one serious bullet.

Tony unzipped his sweatshirt, dropped it on the ground, then peeled his shirt off and tossed that aside, too. He unbuckled his jeans and took them off, standing there in boxers. He grinned. "Last one in's a douche bag." He shoved his boxers to his ankles, stepped out of them, and sprinted to the pool, where he dove into the water, surfacing a moment later. He yelled, "You coming?"

Relieved to not have to showcase my nonexistent skills on a skateboard, I scooped up all his clothes and jogged over to the pool. The drizzle on my face was chilly, and the warm water looked so inviting that I couldn't resist. I tossed Tony's clothes under a table, out of the rain. Then I stripped, threw my clothes under there, too, and dove in, staying under until I couldn't breathe. I surfaced and gasped. Then I whooped.

Heaven.

With our bodies in the warm water and the cool drizzle hitting our faces, we swam around for a while. Finally, I just floated on my back, looking up at the sky. The rain clouds finally cleared a bit, revealing patches of a few, bright stars. As I lay there, suspended in the warm water, I couldn't hear anything, only see.

How many times had I floated in this pool? Hundreds?

I'm not sure I'd ever felt peace like I felt that moment. Nothing mattered.

It didn't matter what Eddy had done when we were gone or what he was going to do now. We'd made it out. We'd made it back. It was going to be okay. It was. I would figure out whatever I needed to figure out.

Something tugged at my foot and I stood up in the pool. Tony was standing there, a weird look on his face. "What?"

He pointed toward the front gate, in the direction we'd walked up the street. The glow of flashing red and blue lights was visible. He said, "I think we need to go." We quickly got out.

Dripping wet, I went to the pool house, relieved to find a stack of towels. I grabbed two for myself, two for him, and we dried ourselves off and got dressed. I draped the towels over one of the lawn chairs, wondering what the security staff would think the next time they checked.

We went to the front gate and Tony punched in the code. We slipped out the gate and he closed it, then we

stood in the shadows. A police car was parked next to the Camaro, lights flashing as the officer stood there talking on his radio.

Tony swore under his breath.

"What?" I asked.

"I can't deal with the cops right now."

My mouth dropped open. "You stole the car." I wasn't asking.

Tony looked at me and rolled his eyes. "No, I didn't.

It's just . . ."

"What?"

"It's complicated." He sighed. "Trust me. We do not want to walk over there right now. We need to go." He grabbed my sleeve and yanked, pulling me up the street the opposite way. We moved slowly, trying to stay in the shadows of the trees until we reached the first corner. As soon as we turned it, we sprinted, racing down the street.

"Where are we going?" I said, breathing hard as we ran.

"We need a bus." Tony turned and ran down the street to the left and I followed.

We went several more blocks before we hit a street with a bus stop. We stood inside the shelter, doubled over from the sprinting, and just panted for a moment. I asked, "Can I get back home on the bus?"

He nodded. "Yeah. We may have to switch a few times, though." He looked at me. "I'll get you there, don't worry."

A bus showed up a short time later, and Tony paid for both of us. Good thing, because I had no money with me. We were the only ones on that bus. We had just gotten off it to wait for a connecting bus when Tony's phone rang. He glanced at the screen and held up a finger. "Be right back." He stepped away for a minute and I heard him say, "Yeah, boss." He listened for a moment and then said, "Part of the plan. I'll get everything back where it belongs."

His tone was low and I couldn't really hear anything else. Boss? Maybe that car had been stolen and he was supposed to deliver it. Or maybe there were drugs in the trunk. My heart began to pound. Maybe my gut feeling had been right about him. I was glad Eddy wasn't with him . . . But Eddy *was* with him. At least, Tony thought I was Eddy.

Maybe, for Eddy's sake, I should end it. Their friendship. Pick a fight so Tony would never show up at the house again.

Tony hung up and came back over to the bus stop.

"Who was that?" I asked.

"Just this guy I do stuff for. He doesn't always agree with how I get things done." He shrugged.

"Oh," I said. Could I do it? End their friendship right then and there?

But Eddy would wonder why Tony didn't call. And he'd end up calling and then figure it all out. He'd end up being mad at me. Not a chance I wanted to take. Plus, as much as I didn't want to admit it, Tony was fun.

And I could picture the three of us hanging out. So I asked, "Illegal stuff?"

Tony laughed. He laughed so hard he bent over and put his hands on his knees to catch his breath. "Oh, my God."

"What's so funny?" I asked,

He stood back up, still chuckling. "It may be slightly outside the law of certain things, but no. Not illegal."

"I have no idea what that means." I laughed. "I don't think I want to know."

He smiled. "Probably a good idea." A bus pulled onto the street and came toward us. He pointed. "That one will get us back to Mercer."

I said, "You don't have to go with me. I can do it."

He shook his head. "No. I'd probably stay up all night wondering if you made it or not."

I frowned. "No, you wouldn't."

"No, I probably wouldn't." He laughed and smacked me on the arm with the back of his hand. "It sounded sincere, though, didn't it?"

I laughed and shoved him. "Yeah, it did."

The bus squeaked to a stop and Tony handed me some money.

"Thanks. I'll pay you back next time you come over."

He said, "I know you will."

I stepped on the bus and lifted a hand. "See ya."

"Later, Eli."

The door shut behind me.

Eli.

I turned back around. Through the clear doors of the bus, I saw Tony standing there, hands in his pockets, a smirk on his face. He lifted one hand to me as the bus pulled away.

I sunk down into a seat, still looking back at him.

Did Tony know it was me the whole time? I wondered what gave me away. And I wondered what I was going to tell Eddy when he found out.