

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

I SMILED.

What was that smell?

Lovely. So lovely.

Almost like perfume. But it was some kind of flower.

A tropical flower.

Plumeria?

Yes.

Gram's plumeria trees in her front yard in Hawaii.

Reese made leis for the little kids one day. Pink and yellow plumerias.

I loved the smell.

My eyes fluttered. Blurry.

I could smell, but I couldn't see?

I tried to reach up and rub my eyes, but my arms were heavy. So heavy.

I forced myself to hold up my head, but it lolled, a bowling ball on my neck.

I blinked and blinked, finally clearing my vision.

I was still on the jet.

Hadn't we left yet?

"Eddy? Lexie?"

I heard a groan, but no one said anything.

And then I remembered.

Tony. Tony drugged me.

I had to find my brother and sister.

I tried to stand, but something held me down.

My seat belt. Still fastened.

I shook my head, trying to clear my thoughts, shake off the cobwebs in my brain. "Get a grip, dude." My mouth was dry and tasted awful.

With a loud click, the seat belt opened easily for me, and I held on to the seat in front of me and got to my feet. My legs threatened to give out, but they held as I walked to the front of the jet, grasping seats on my way to steady myself.

Eddy was in the same seat he'd been in when I boarded the plane. He opened his eyes, then squinted and held his head. Lexie was next to him, but she was still out cold.

I found a bottle of water and drank about half of it. Then I took another to Eddy and he downed most of it before stopping to take a breath. "Where are we?"

"I don't know," I said.

I walked to the front of the jet and stepped into the open doorway. I squinted at the bright sunshine and had to hold my hand above my eyes.

A breeze hit me then. A distinctly warm, tropical breeze that held the scent of flowers. I chugged the rest of my water and set the empty bottle on the counter. Then I held on to the rail and, still feeling wobbly, went down the steps and onto the tarmac. A tarmac lined by coconut palms and plumeria trees laden with pink blooms.

Through the trees, I caught a glimpse of water. The ocean. Was it real? Could I smell it?

Yes. There. The scent of salt was faint, almost covered completely by the plumerias.

The jet *had* left Seattle, because I was most definitely on an island.

My legs gave out and I fell to the hot tarmac.

"You okay?" Eddy was behind me, and squatted beside me. He put a hand on my shoulder. "Dude?"

I tried to stretch my arms and legs, then shook them. I also slapped myself on the cheeks a couple times. Finally, when I felt strong enough, I got to my feet, still a bit woozy. "I feel like crap."

Eddy slowly stood up, and staggered into me. "Me too." We held each other up.

I said, "Something was in the juice. Tony drugged us." Eddy spit on the ground. "I can't believe he'd do that. I trusted him."

"Do you think it's a kidnapping? Did he drug us and let someone fly us here?" Wherever *here* was.

"I don't know." Eddy scrunched his eyes shut and rubbed them. "My vision is so blurry."

We heard a scream from inside the plane.

Lexie.

We got back up the stairs as quickly as we could, and found Lexie still strapped into her seat, eyes wide. She looked relieved when she saw us. "What's going on?"

"I don't know." I got a bottle of water and handed it to her.

She drank almost the whole thing. "Where's Tony?"

Eddy and I looked at each other. He said, "I don't know. We think maybe—"

"Maybe what?" she asked.

Eddy paused before saying, "We think it might be a kidnapping of some sort."

"But it's a YK jet!" Lexie tried to stand up, but fell back into the seat. "Help me up!"

Eddy grasped her arm and pulled, and when she got out into the aisle, I got on her other side for support. We headed for the door and slowly made our way down the stairs and onto the runway.

"Where are we?" asked Lexie.

Straight ahead and straight behind lay nothing but runway, each option ending in what looked like blue water. So I pointed at the trees. "I think we should head that way." They both seemed to agree, because neither said anything. We started walking, and my head cleared more as the blood got flowing. By the time we reached the trees, I felt almost back to normal.

Eddy said, "I feel better."

But the sun was so hot that my shirt was nearly soaked

through with perspiration. Eddy's and Lexie's faces were beet red and sweaty, just like mine felt.

An opening lay between two particularly large coconut palms, and I led the way through, finding myself steps away from a wooden boardwalk. I stepped onto it, and Lex and Eddy followed, our footsteps clunky and loud as we made our way along.

Lush vegetation was abundant alongside the man-made trail, growing so tightly together that I couldn't see anything besides the path and the green. I certainly couldn't see far enough ahead to get an idea of our destination.

"Shh." I held up my hand and we stopped for a second. I wanted to listen, see if I could hear anything.

I froze. Was that—

"Dripping water," said Eddy.

We headed toward the sound.

The boardwalk went on neatly through the tropical foliage, until it ended at a wall. I knew the wall had to be concrete of some kind, but it was laden with a large relief, taller than I was, of a man kneeling by a pond, sipping from his cupped hands. A constant but light flow of water rippled down the wall into a catchment basin below, making the entire thing seem more like a piece of art than a barrier.

At first I couldn't see any way to get by the wall. Lexie said, "Look." There was a slight crack behind the figure of the man. It was a door, almost hidden. I should

"Eddy, Lexie. *Ellie*!"

Goose bumps sprouted on my arms.

That voice. There was no way. *No way in—*
I turned around.

Our father stood there, smiling at us. He said, "Welcome to the Yanakakis island. I've been waiting."