

THREE

CHAPTER

AS NEARLY TWO WEEKS WENT BY WITH NO SIGN OF PHIL, IT became clear that the company had to make some decisions. Since the will named Eddy and me to take over when we were twenty-five, and Mom was obviously in charge of us, the board named her temporarily in control of YK. She was happy at that, to have Phil out of the way, but she had no desire to actually run the company.

The last week of August, she and Eddy and I were with the seven members of the YK board, in the same meeting room we'd seen Phil the last time. Mom said, "I believe it is apparent to everyone here that I don't have the faculties, or the time, to run this company." She nodded at us. "And my sons aren't ready. But I want them to be part of this company, part of this process. One day this place will belong to them. They need to start learning about it now."

The company lawyer pulled out a sheath of papers and

passed them out to all of us. I glanced down at a list of names; all were people Dad had groomed, thus all were people loyal to my father.

He cleared his throat. "These are the choices to run the company."

My heart started pounding.

Who was to say any of them were better than Phil?

Any, or all of them, could have known about the Com-pound, could have helped keep us down there.

Mom pointed to a name. "Mr. O'Connor. Can we appoint him?"

I grabbed Mom's arm and whispered, "How do we know that—"

"Shh. Eli. I know him." She spoke up for the board. "O'Connor is capable, right?"

The president, a woman in a black pantsuit with a severe blond bob, nodded. "He's on the list."

Mom nodded. "Can we agree to appoint him for six months? See how it goes?"

The board conferred with one another for a moment, but they all seemed to nod. The president spoke again. "Yes, six months."

"And my sons can start being involved?"

My hands turned to fists. I hated that my mother, wife of the founder of YK, had to beg like this, had to bow at their feet to get what she wanted: her sons, the legal heirs of YK, to have some small fingerhold into the company that they would inherit in less than ten years.

I stood up and walked into the hall, letting the door slam

behind me. The door opened and closed quietly. Eddy grabbed my arm and swung me around to face him. "What are you doing?"

I shook my head. "I hate this. All of it." I let out a deep breath. "Mainly I hate that these people are all still loyal to Dad, after everything he did."

Eddy didn't look like he agreed with me. Not at all.

"What?" I asked.

He said, "You don't get it."

"Get what?"

He ran his hands through his hair and then let them drop. "You go on and on about Dad, how bad he was." He lifted a hand. "But he built this place from scratch. He started so many charities that have helped so many people."

"Seriously?" I felt my face turn red. "You're *defending* him? That's ridiculous."

Eddy looked at the floor and didn't say anything for a second. Then he looked at me, his eyes narrowing. "I lost my father when I was nine. You didn't. You had him for six more years. So you don't get to tell me what I can or can't say about him."

"But he—"

"What? He what? Kept you guys down there? Yeah. I know. I hear about it all the time. I *live* it all the time. Every frickin' day. I got my family back, but . . ." He paused for a second. "What exactly did I get? A bunch of people trying to get over something that happened to them that I wasn't a part of. You tell me Dad went nuts, did all this. But that's not the father I remember." He shook his head. "You

don't get it. I lost everything when I was nine. Everything! And now I have most of it back. But it's not the same." He stopped and looked down at the floor. "I have to adjust, too."

"Eddy, I—"

He held up a hand. "You need to let me do it in my own way. I lost my dad when he was still my hero. So that's what he's been the last six years whenever I've thought about him. My hero." He shook his head. "You're not going to change that kind of thinking so fast."

None of that had ever crossed my mind. That the last time Eddy saw our father, Dad still towered over him in more ways than one, still seemed someone to look up to. Eddy hadn't known the father of the past six years. The man I knew, who slowly went mad, and tried to take his family with him.

I would have thought Eddy would be on my side. That he would start thinking differently about our father based solely on what I told him about the past six years. It would take longer for him to see the truth, and I needed to give him the time.

I put my hand on my brother's shoulder. "I'm sorry. I should have thought of how it would make you feel." But the truth was, I couldn't.

"I know." He sighed. "We'd better go back in."

I opened the door and we took our seats again.

"Here they are." The president took out a YK tablet and tapped it with one long red fingernail. "I'll set up a date

for them to come in and decide what they want to do." She looked up. "I'll have the director of charitable contributions clear her schedule for tomorrow morning. Will that do?" Mom looked at me and Eddy. We both nodded, and she said, "Yes."

There were a few more things to discuss, but Eddy leaned over to me and whispered, "Do you even know what you want to do here?"

I started to speak, but then had to pause. Other than getting rid of Phil and making sure Mom was listened to, what *did* I want?

I hadn't thought that far ahead. I had no idea.



THAT NIGHT WE ALL SAT AROUND THE DINING-ROOM TABLE eating Mexican food. Except for Cara, seated next to me, banging her spoon on the table, none of us said anything. There was only the clinking of silver on china as we devoured Els's chicken-and-cheese enchiladas with green sauce.

I dumped another spoonful of guacamole on top of mine, then reached for the crystal bowl of sour cream.

Food was still a bit overwhelming for us all. In the Com-pound, we'd gotten so used to eating the dregs: lame nourishment that wouldn't have even made the cut for a typical food pyramid.

Stale, broken pasta.

Limp, nearly flavorless produce from the flagging hydroponics.

Canned and boxed goods well past their prime.

Meat had been but a memory, something I'd last eaten when I was thirteen; dairy products had disappeared long before that.

The tastes and textures we had missed for so long became something to focus on. Except for the little kids making noise, our meals tended to be silent as we all dug in, savoring the fresh flavors. Only when everyone was full did we start talking.

Eddy said, "School starts soon."

"I want to go to college," said Lexie.

Mom looked up at her. "I was thinking more along the lines of online school for you all. Just for this year, anyway. Until you are all used to being back."

Eddy looked at me, then back at Mom. "I thought we'd go back to our old school."

Mom shook her head. "There's already so much speculation. I'd rather we give it a chance to all blow over."

"Right!" Lexie rolled her eyes. "The richest guy in America keeps his entire family prisoner underground for *years*, and you expect it to blow over? God, Mom, we're never going to stop being freaks. Might as well let us out of the house to be freaks. I want to study something. Take actual dance lessons. Be a real person for once." She shook her head. "I turn eighteen in less than three months."

"I realize that." Mom sighed. "I just think it's too soon."

Lexie glared down at her plate. That was the most outspoken she'd been for weeks. And I had to admit,

I was actually glad to see her mad for once, after being sad for so long.

Gram said, "Eddy was with me in Hawaii most of the time, at the local school. No one around here has seen him since you left."

I blurted out, "No one knows what we look like now." I glanced at Lucas and Cara and Quinn. "And no one has ever seen them. We could use a fake name. Like you do." Mom had been using Gram's grandmother's maiden name for everything: buying the house and all our online ordering. No one had any way of knowing it, and it kept the Yanakakis name off all our mail as well.

Reese said, "Yeah! I don't want to be online. I want friends. Mercer Island has a middle school."

I wasn't sure I could see myself walking into Mercer Island High, pretending to care about making the honor roll and football games and asking someone to homecoming. After what I'd been through, how could I?

Mom narrowed her eyes. "And what will all of you do when your friends want to see where you live? Meet your family?" She shook her head. "I just can't allow anyone in here. I'm not ready."

Reese was quiet a moment, then said, "I could go to their houses until you're ready. And by that time, they'll be my friends and they won't care who I am."

"Good luck with that." I sighed. "People always care who you are." I shoved my food around my plate.

I'd spent enough of my life trapped. Even though our new place was great, I didn't need it to turn into another

bunch of walls keeping me prisoner. "I can't be stuck here like we were stuck there." I met Mom's eyes. "I just can't. I want to get my GED and go to college, too."

Mom said, "Eli, you're fifteen years old."

"So? I've done nothing but study the past three years. I can get my GED and take the SATs while I'm working at YK." I didn't mention that there was no way, after what I'd been through, that I could immerse myself in the shallow, day-to-day dramas of the average teenager. I'd lost any chance there'd ever been to be that person.

Mom shook her head. "You're not working at YK."

"You said you wanted us involved!"

She sighed. "Not in an actual position." She held up her hand before I could protest. "Stop. All of you. I get it."

Eddy said, "We can protect each other."

Mom looked down at her plate. "You have to understand that this is hard as a parent. I worry about every one of you, each and every moment of the day. At least in the Com-pound . . . I always knew where you were. I always knew you were safe. And the thought of just letting you all go to school, out there, where I won't always know where you are . . ." She trailed off.

Lexie said, "Mom, you can't hide us forever. We have to grow up and have lives at some point." She added, "Otherwise, you're no different from Dad."

Mom's mouth fell open and she dropped her fork.

"Lexie!" Eddy snapped so sharply that Cara dropped her spoon and looked up at him with wide eyes. She was

still skittish around Eddy most of the time, so I set a hand on her head to reassure her as I quietly added, "Yeah, Lex. Slight difference there."

Lexie glared at me. "Really? You know you're thinking it. We left one prison for another one with better food and more natural light."

"Stop it, you two." Mom put an elbow on the table and leaned her head into her hand. "I know. I understand what you're all saying. But can't we just hold off a little while?" She looked at Lexie. "Until your birthday? That gives you a couple months to just . . . adjust. In the meantime, you can do things online, study for your SATs—for this first semester—and then decide?"

Eddy looked pissed off, but he didn't say anything.

Reese said, "I want to go out and do stuff. We haven't been anywhere for so long."

I nodded. "I agree. If we do stay home for school, we need to be able to go out." I tilted my head toward Lucas and Cara. "They've never seen anything in Seattle."

Mom shook her head. "I really want you all to stay anonymous for as long as possible. Just . . . just until you all adjust."

She could have said *Just until you all stop being freaks*. That would have been more honest. Except for the fact it was never going to happen.

We would always be freaks.

I stuck my fork in an enchilada and it stayed there, pointing straight up. My appetite was gone.

Lexie said, "I have an idea." She looked around at all

of us. "Mom, what if we agreed to all go out together one day to someplace. Just for fun. Just to get out of here."

Reese asked, "Where?"

"Just a sec." Lexie pushed her chair back and stood up. "Hold on." She left the room and came back a moment later, several pens and a pad of paper in her hand. She held them up. "We all put down a place on here, then draw them out of a hat. Each week, or a couple times a week, we'll go somewhere different." She looked at Mom. "We'll take a car and a bodyguard and we'll stay together."

Reese said, "Yes! I agree with the idea."

I nodded. Eddy looked down at his plate, but I couldn't see the look on his face. Did he not want to go out?

Mom rolled her eyes and said, "Fine. But we're still sticking to the rest until your birthday, right?"

"Yeah," said Lexie. She started tearing off sheets of paper and passing them around.

Reese said, "Cara and Quinn are too little."

Lucas raised his hand. "I'll think of places for them." Then he put his hand back down and looked at me. "I don't know any places."

I beckoned to him. "I'll help you think of some." He came and stood beside my chair. I whispered, "Do you want to see animals?"

He nodded. "Yes!"

"What about an aquarium?"

He frowned. "There's one in my room."

I smiled. "No, buddy. I mean a huge one. Like with sharks and stuff."

His eyes got wide and he nodded. "And I want to see toys. Lots of toys."

"Okay." I tore the sheet of paper into four pieces, and wrote *Zoo*, *Aquarium*, and *Toy Store* on the first three. Then I thought for a moment and wrote *Mariners game* on the fourth. YK had a corporate suite at Safeco Field, which made that outing seem the easiest. And also the most obvious. I crumpled up that piece of paper and set it by my plate.

Lexie dumped the lettuce onto a plate and held out the empty salad bowl to Reese, who dropped in her paper. Eddy hadn't written anything on his. Reese glared at him, so he quickly scrawled something, crumpled the paper in his fist, and dropped it in. I handed the three sheets to Lucas. He dropped them in and Lexie stirred them all up with her hand. She walked over to Mom. "You want to do the honors? Tell us where we are going this week."

Mom shook her head as she looked around at us, but then she smiled. "Fine." She reached in.

Eddy started drumming on the table with his fists. Lucas joined in, then Reese, and soon we were all pounding, even Lexie. Mom held up the piece of paper. "This week's outing is . . ." Her forehead wrinkled and she looked around the table. Then she shrugged. "Costco!" Reese squealed.

Eddy looked at me. "Seriously?"

Lexie said, "I'm staying home."

Lucas asked, "What's Costco?"

I sighed. "You'll find out."