

THIRTY-ONE

I OPENED MY EYES.

Two walls of the room were floor-to-ceiling windows, looking out onto the ocean. Surprised to see the open water after all the jungle, I leaned out the open window. Amid the tops of the trees to the side, three roofs were visible. I stayed there a moment, feeling the breeze and hearing bird sounds.

Rolled up at the top of each window were large white shades, and I reached up to unroll them. I couldn't see any cords, but there was a switch on the wall. I pushed it.

Immediately, the shades began unrolling, slowly covering the windows from the top to the bottom, until the room lay in near darkness.

I went back to the door and flipped the light switch, brightening the room. A king-size canopy bed of bamboo sat along one interior wall, with white matelassé

bedding, accented with bright orange and red floral rectangular pillows.

A desk with a large computer sat along the other interior wall, as well as two wooden doors. I opened the first, and a light automatically came on, revealing a huge walk-in closet, full of clothes. I stepped inside and knelt down. Flip-flops, sneakers, even a pair of dress shoes. Shirts hung in a row along one side, while jeans and trousers filled the other. I had no doubt that everything in there would turn out to fit me perfectly.

Just like my old closet in the Compound.

A dresser was near the back, and I opened the drawers. Shorts, T-shirts, swim trunks, underwear.

I pulled out a T-shirt and a pair of shorts, grabbed a pair of black flip-flops, and stepped back into the bedroom. I opened the other door and again, a light popped on.

A bathroom. Nearly the size of the bedroom itself. Double sinks sat under a long mirror. The toilet was off to the side in an alcove, and at the far end of the room was a monstrous open shower made of black lava rock, like the living-room fireplace. The linen closet held large, white, cushy towels, and I hung two of them, along with the clothes from the closet, on hooks next to the shower.

I undressed, left my clothes in a pile on the floor, and turned on the water.

The spray came from all directions: the ceiling, the sides, and when I stepped inside, the soothing jets felt better than any shower I'd ever taken. Clear square

containers held thick, pale-colored liquids. I pushed one of the buttons and the contents oozed out into my palm. I held it to my nose. Coconut-scented shampoo.

I stayed in there until the water turned lukewarm.

When I came out, the mirrors were all steamy. I dried off, and in the drawers of the vanity, I found deodorant and toothpaste and floss and everything else I needed.

I felt better, much better. Ready to handle whatever other truths were waiting for me. So I got dressed and went to join my brother and sister for dinner. I hoped it would be the last time we ever had to eat a meal with our father, because I planned on getting us out of there as soon as possible.

Down in the main room, the table was set, but no one was there. I heard water running, and figured maybe the others were showering, too. I wanted to get out to the beach, so I headed back down the hallway and past the staircase, figuring there had to be a door that opened toward the beach.

I reached the end of the hallway and entered a small foyer that set off a large wooden door. I turned the handle and stepped out onto a sidewalk where a breeze hit me. Spread in front of me was the most beautiful white sand beach I'd ever seen. I headed straight for the sparkling, turquoise water.

The sand was like powder under my feet, and not hot at all. I stepped into the water, and it was barely warm. I walked in up to my shins and stood there, letting the waves move between and around my legs. Ahead of me I

saw nothing but water, the surface reflecting the sun so brightly that I had to put up a hand to shade my eyes.

Up the beach to my right, I saw several dwellings: the roofs I'd seen from my window earlier. A sidewalk led along the beach. Reluctantly, I left the water and went to see what I could find.

The first house was much like Dad's, only smaller. There was no one in sight. Same with the second. But at the third, the back of someone's head was visible on the small deck in front. As I got closer, I wondered if I should turn around without saying anything. But if my intention was to find out as much as I could . . .

"Hey there!" I called out.

The person stood up. As he turned around, I started to wave. But my hand froze in midair when I saw who it was.

Tony. *Phil*.

And he did not look happy to see me.