

THIRTY-THREE

"OH, GOD, KID, DON'T DO THIS." TONY REACHED OUT AND grabbed my elbow, pulling me back up to my feet. "Get up. You know I can't help."

"Why not?" I grabbed him by the arms so I was right in his face.

"You know why not." He tried to push me away, not unkindly. "You know my loyalty lies with him."

I dropped my arms and stepped back. My hands turned to fists at my side. "Why?" I asked. "Why do you have to be loyal to him? The rest of the world thinks my father is dead. Eddy and I are set to inherit everything." As much as it disgusted me to say it, I did. "We could give you a permanent place at YK, just like you wanted. You could have your job like it was. I would see to it."

Tony stepped back, shaking his head. "That's not what you want and you know it."

I clasped my hands at the back of my head and looked up at the sky. "What I want is to be back in Seattle with my family. My whole family."

"And Rex? You want your dad, too?" he asked.

That was the worst part. I wanted what any son wanted: a father to be there for me; pick me up after my failures, feel pride at my successes.

I dropped my arms and faced him again. "That man . . . is not my father. Not the father I knew. That man . . . that man . . . is a *monster*."

And in that moment, I knew how Lexie felt, knowing the truth about her birth mother and the atrocities she'd committed. Powerless. I knew my dad's genes were coursing through my own body, my own brain, and I could do nothing about it. Rex Yanakakis, and everything he was, was what I came from.

The difference was that Lexie had the comfort of knowing she had not been raised by her biological monster, that our mother had been nothing like that.

But everything I was—everything I knew—had been affected, cultivated, *bred* by my monster. Nature *and* nurture. There was no escaping that fact. Which meant the only chance for me was to escape *him*.

I asked, "What time do we leave tomorrow?"

"Long flight. Would rather get an early start." Tony glanced at his watch. "About eight?" His eyes were wary. "Listen, whatever you're planning, I can't help you—"
"I know."

He watched me for a moment. "So you'll be ready to leave at eight?"

"Yes." And then I added, "You'd better have the jet ready to go."

So I would be flying out the next day. Without Lexie and Eddy. I would be the one sent to bring back the whole family. But I would never do it. I would never allow Mom and the others to get on a plane and come and be prisoners again. But the only way to prevent that would be to get Eddy and Lexie on the plane with me.

Back at the house, Eddy, Lexie, and our father were seated at the table. They had all showered and changed as well. Eddy wore board shorts and a T-shirt, while Lexie wore a flowered dress.

"Sorry," I said. "I wanted a walk on the beach before dinner."

Dad smiled. "It's lovely, isn't it?"

I answered honestly. "Most beautiful beach I've ever seen in my life." I slid into a chair next to Eddy and he handed me a plate with rib eye steaks on it. I stabbed one with my fork and set it on my plate, then passed them on to my father.

He took one and set the plate down. "I thought we could all walk the beach after dinner."

I dished up some salad and asparagus, then started eating. I was starving and had eaten half my plate before I set my fork down. "So are we leaving tomorrow?"

Dad paused, his fork in midair. "I'll make sure the jet is ready."

Eddy said, "But we just got here."

"Yeah," added Lexie. "I wanted some time on the beach."

Dad smiled. "You two are staying. Eli will go back and get the rest of the family."

Eddy sat up. "They're all coming?"

"Everyone will be together?" Lexie asked. She glanced at me. "Mom is on board for a vacation?"

"It's not a vacation." I turned to my father. "Isn't that right, Dad?"

He looked slightly uncomfortable before catching himself and putting a smile on his face. "We all belong together, and this is the most beautiful place I could find."

How was I going to convince Eddy that he and Lexie needed to be on the plane with me? He was so happy; he'd just gotten his father back, and the island was paradise.

The rest of dinner was small talk, and then Dad stood up. "Should we take that walk now?"

We all went out on the beach, Lexie in front, then me, then Eddy and Dad, all of us walking on the wet, hard-packed sand, leaving footprints that washed away as soon as each wave came in. Behind me, Eddy told Dad, with a slight wobble in his voice, "It is so wonderful to be back with you."

Dad put his arm around Eddy's shoulder. "I missed you, son. Leaving you out of the Compound was the hardest part of the whole thing."

Did he say *leaving him out*? I forced myself to keep walking, pretend I wasn't listening.

Dad continued, "But one of us had to stay in the real world, keep the name going. Otherwise YK might have been broken up, gone downhill."

I whipped around, standing in their path and forcing them to stop. "You're a liar."

Dad's lips trembled for a moment before he forced them into a smile. "It's been a long time, Eli. It's probably hard for you to remember."

I shook my head. "No, I remember it like it was yesterday. And it was not part of your plan to leave him out!"

Eddy said, "Dude, just chill. You were a little kid and—"

"No!" I shouted. "I remember it like it was yesterday because I thought about it every fuckin' day for six years! Dad didn't plan it! He was shocked when he closed the door and you weren't there. I remember!"

Dad said, "Son, you may not have known it at the time, but leaving Eddy out was definitely prearranged."

"No, it wasn't!" I screamed at him.

Dad looked as if I'd hit him.

Eddy turned from Dad to me, and then asked, "How are you so sure?"

I stood there, trying to catch my breath. My heart pounded and my face burned. "I know, because . . ."

Lexie came up beside me and put a hand on my arm.

She knew my secret. I'd told her and Mom in the Compound when we thought Dad was dying. She said, "Tell them."

I looked at Eddy. "It was my fault. I did it. I was the reason you were left out."