

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

VISIONS OF THAT NIGHT, THE NIGHT OF OUR NINTH birthday, all came back to me.

Our ninth birthday. We were excited to be almost in double digits. The annual big party was held the day before, so we could head to the cabin on the actual day. Dad's acreage in eastern Washington was huge, with a ten-room log house we called the cabin. We had an RV, too, which we used to drive farther into the wilderness to go camping. Not that an RV was roughing it, but that's what we called camping anyway.

Gram came with us, sort of. She followed the RV with the Range Rover. She said she always liked to be prepared for emergencies. Although to her, an emergency might constitute running out of marshmallows for the smores we made over the

campfire. A trip in the RV wasn't a trip without Gram driving back to the cabin at least once:

As we drove along, Dad told us he had a big surprise for us. And he did. He'd just bought a new two-seater airplane. It went along with the new landing strip in the middle of the property, which is where we went with the RV. It was already dusk when we reached the site, so Dad promised we'd go flying first thing in the morning. We'd flip a coin to see which birthday boy would go first. Of course, I wanted it to be me.

We were getting ready for bed when Eddy started wheezing. Dad discovered a kitten in the RV. Terese admitted to finding it at the cabin, then smuggling it onto the RV. She started to cry and apologized to Eddy. She said she just wanted to make sure the kitten had a home.

The RV medicine cabinet always had some antihistamine for Eddy, but Mom came back empty-handed. "We better go get some at the cabin."

Gram volunteered.

Eddy said he felt better. Gram insisted. "Just let me tuck Terese in. I'll take the kitten back to the cabin and get it set up in the garage."

Eddy and I crawled into bed. The airplane ride was still on my mind. "Hey, Eddy. I heard Dad and Gram talking. They said they have another surprise back at the cabin for us. What do you think it is?"

Eddy's eyes widened. He loved surprises.

"Guess we'll have to wait for tomorrow." I rolled over and shut my eyes. I counted on the fact that Eddy also loved a mission.

"Eli? I've got an idea."

"What?" I tried to stop them, but the corners of my mouth wanted to go up.

"I could hop in the back of the Range Rover and go with Gram. I could find out what it is."

I sat up. "That's a great idea. But you have to go now, while she's with Terese."

Eddy opened the window and dropped to the ground. I lay back, grinning. I knew once Eddy was in the Range Rover with the kitten, he would start wheezing. And Gram would keep driving to the cabin; insist on staying there overnight. I would be the only birthday boy around in the morning when it was time to ride in Dad's new plane.

The rest I didn't plan on: waking up to shouts, the RV moving wildly from side to side, falling out of bed. Then the darkness, running blind outside, Dad's shouts telling us which way to turn . . .

And then we were in the Compound. The silver door had shut and locked, not to be reopened for twenty years. And I had called for Eddy, even though I knew he wasn't there.

My lie had caused him to be left outside. And at that moment, and for six years after, I'd believed he was dead. Just as I believed my lie had killed him.

Eddy stood there, mouth slack, thick creases in his forehead. "How could you do that?"

"I was nine years old." He was missing the point. "I felt guilty all those years." I pointed at Dad. "Because he let me believe all those years that you were dead!"

Eddy's gaze moved slowly to our father, who was staring out at the water, and the sun that was slowly sinking. His face was entirely relaxed.

"Dad," I said. "Is this it? You don't want to explain any of it to him?" My hope was that Eddy would realize how messed up Dad was. That he wouldn't want anything to do with him, and he would fight to get us off the island.

But Eddy turned to me. "Why are you doing this?"

I froze. "Doing what?"

Eddy shook his head. "You're grasping. Somehow you've built this all up in your head, that Dad is evil." He looked at Dad, who had turned to listen to him. Eddy continued, "But it was just a plan. Dad had a plan and now you're all back and everyone's fine."

Lexie scowled. "Eddy, seriously. You think we made it all up?"

And I realized that we had left out all the bad parts about the Compound. We'd made it sound like we were fine there. Because it wouldn't have done him or Gram

any good to know the whole truth. So there was a lot that Eddy didn't know. And maybe it was time he did.

I turned to Dad. "Are you going to tell him about the yellow room or should I?"

"No." Lexie pulled on my sleeve. "Eli, don't."

Dad ignored me and started walking again.

"Stop!" I yelled. "Tell him! Tell him the frickin' truth!"

Eddy grabbed the collar of my T-shirt and bunched it up in his hand, pulling me toward him. "That's enough. I get it. You felt guilty about what you did. But don't start blaming it all on Dad."

And suddenly I had Eddy's neck in my grasp and I pushed him backward into the sand. We rolled a few times, then I pinned him to the beach. Lexie had her arm around my neck and was trying to pull me back, while Dad had turned around to watch, an amused expression on his face.

"You need to listen!" I yelled at Eddy. "You need to understand! Don't you get it? He messed up the food supply! He tried to push us to the edge. He wanted to see what we would do to survive." I looked up at Dad.

"Tell him about the yellow room. Tell him."

Dad didn't say anything, just crossed his arms.

Eddy tried to shove me off him, and I slipped, so suddenly he had the upper hand and had rolled me over, so he was sitting on me. I was pinned, but it didn't matter. I felt hot tears well up in my eyes as I yelled, "Tell him about the yellow room!"

Eddy leaned down, almost to my face. "What! What was in the yellow room?"

His knee was in my chest and it was hard to get a full breath.

Lexie said, "Don't, Eli! Don't!"

I squeezed my eyes shut but tears still managed to leak out. "The Supplements."

Lexie turned away.

Eddy frowned. "I don't know what that means."

My breathing was even more constricted, and I fought to get free, but he shoved me back. So I gave up and lay there. "Do you really want to know?"

Eddy nodded.

"The Supplements. Lucas. Quinn. Cara. What Finn would have been."

Eddy looked confused, and started to say something, then he stopped. Realization spread across his face and his mouth fell open. He looked over at our father. "What is he saying?"

Dad said nothing. So I did. "They were going to supplement our food supply when it ran out."

"Oh, my God." Eddy got off me and fell face forward into the sand as he tried to get up. When he finally got to his feet, he started walking backward, his horrified gaze going between me and Dad. Finally, he turned and ran up the beach.

I got to my feet and went after him.

Eddy was fast, but I was the runner, and I soon caught up to him. I ran behind him until his legs gave out, then

he dropped to his knees and covered his face with his hands. I dodged to the side, then stopped, and turned to face him. "I'm sorry. I never wanted you to find out."

Eddy lowered his hands. His cheeks were tear streaked and he blinked back more. "I should have been there. I should have been there."

I sank to my knees in front of him. "No."

"Maybe I could have done something." He slapped a hand into the sand. "I feel so guilty that you all went through it and I didn't do anything!"

"You did," I said.

He just looked at me.

I nodded. "I missed you so much. And I felt so guilty for what I'd done. And it was that, the guilt and your absence, which sent me into your room. That's how I found the laptop, and eventually found the wireless signal."

Eddy said, "But I feel terrible I wasn't there! I feel so guilty that I didn't suffer like you all did!"

I grabbed both of his arms. "Don't you get it? If you had been there, *we would still be there*. I wouldn't have found the wireless, wouldn't have discovered Dad was lying to us, and we would still be there, thinking the rest of the world had perished."

Eddy looked off into the distance for a moment, maybe digesting it all. "But we would have all been together."

I didn't say anything. He needed to figure it out for himself.

His voice was almost a whisper. "But it wouldn't have been enough. To be together. Would it?"

I slowly shook my head. "We would still have been Dad's prisoners. Living a lie. Which isn't living. Trust me."

Eddy looked back down the beach, where Dad and Lexie stood about fifty yards apart. "He's doing it again. He's going to get us all here and do it again."

I nodded. "He told me about this place when we were still down there. That is what he planned to do as soon as we got out, bring us here. But I thought he was dead. So I never even considered . . ."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry for not . . . listening to you."

I shrugged. "Not the first time."

"So what do we do? How do we get out of here?" I said, "I think I have a plan."