

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

AFTER I TOLD EDDY MY PLAN, WE WALKED BACK TO LEXIE and Dad. Eddy smiled. "Sorry. We just had to get all that out. We're good."

Lexie scowled at us, but I tried to give her a look to say I'd explain it to her later.

I asked, "So, is there dessert?"

Back at Dad's house, all the dinner dishes had been cleared and the table was reset with dessert plates and forks, and a cake with white frosting and coconut sat in the middle of the table. I dished up slices and passed them around, trying to look much more cheerful than I felt. We started to eat. Eddy said, "I could get used to this."

Dad said, "You'll all have plenty of time for that."

Lexie finished chewing. "Dad? We're going home to Seattle, aren't we?" Her gaze darted to me and then back to Dad. "I don't want to stay here forever."

Dad shut his eyes. He put a hand on each temple and rubbed. "When will you three get it through your heads that"—suddenly, his eyes snapped open and he pounded both fists on the table, hurling his plate through the air and onto the floor, where it smashed, cake skidding everywhere—"I am your FATHER AND I KNOW BEST!"

Lexie shrank back from the table as Eddy grabbed my arm.

My throat tightened. "Dad. She didn't mean anything." Dad slowly tilted his head to one side, then the other, with a slight *crack*. "Really, Eh? She didn't mean anything? She was questioning me, wasn't she?"

Lexie slid out of her chair and came around to stand behind our chairs, putting Eddy and me between her and Dad. I felt her hand on my shoulder and I reached up to grasp it. I said, "She's just saying that she doesn't want to stay here forever. None of us do."

"TT'S NOT YOUR CHOICE!"

The three of us jumped.

I swallowed. We had to get him calmed down. If we didn't, he might not let even one of us leave. And for my plan to work—my loose, probably lousy plan—I needed that plane fueled and ready, with Tony in the cockpit ready to fly.

"Dad," I said. "Remember you talked about adjusting to things slowly?"

He glared at me, but didn't say anything.

I continued, "You need to give us time. Just to . . . get

used to the idea. This place is beautiful and I know we'll all be happy here." Eddy's hand tightened on my arm as Lexie's hand squeezed mine. *Let me work here*, I wanted to tell them. I kept going. "You are already used to the idea, you've been living here. You need to know we'll all need some time. It's another new home for us, and the moving is hard."

Dad let out a sigh and his eyes softened. "I just want things to happen now. I've been without you for so long. I want us to be a family again."

I had to make him believe we were on board. So I nodded. "We all want that. Right?" I widened my eyes at Eddy and, since Lexie was still standing behind me, I squeezed her hand.

"Yeah," said Eddy, probably too forcefully, but Dad didn't seem to notice.

Lexie's voice wobbled as she added, "I want us all together, too."

Dad smiled as he looked at each one of us. He rubbed his hands together. "Well, then that's settled. Tomorrow we'll send Eli to get the rest of the family."

The steak I'd eaten threatened to come back up as I stood and walked over to my father. "I can't wait for our family to be whole again." Then I leaned forward and wrapped my arms around him.

When I stood back up, a man with a dark crew cut, wearing an aloha shirt and khakis, was holding a pitcher of ice water. He filled our glasses and left.

Lexie asked, "Who was that?"

"Gerard." Dad cut into his replacement cake, "One of the staff." He took a bite of cake. "He'd retired from one of my favorite restaurants in Seattle a few years ago." He swallowed and bit off another piece. "He was very happy to get out of the rain. And the retirement home."

Lexie looked at me and I glanced at Eddy. The look on his face proved that he was definitely as ready to get out of here as I was.