

THIRTY-SEVEN

WHEN I HAD CALMED SLIGHTLY, I RAN FOR THE ROOM with the gene gun, pushing through the plastic curtain. I went over to the shelves and picked up the black box I had seen the day before.

My heart started to pound. I was right.

The black remote was exactly like the one in the Compound: the one Dad had used to set off the explosion.

My plan was nothing more than a gamble, but I was betting on the whole island being rigged to go off, just like the Compound had been.

My plan counted on it.

I would go back to the house, Dad would be there with Eddy and Lexie, and I would wield the remote, threaten to blow up the island if he didn't let us go. And if I was right, if Tony still held all his Phil-like qualities, he would want to save his own skin. So he would happily fly us off in the jet.

I heard a sound from the back of the room. I looked that way and saw the closed door I'd seen the other day. I needed to leave, and I headed for the plastic curtain and the way out. But I heard the sound again, almost like a mewling.

Were there research animals back there?

The least I could do would be to release them. Give them a chance to survive on the island. I didn't give a damn what it did to Dad's heinous research.

The latch was locked from the outside, so I easily unlocked it and pulled the door open, releasing a smell of floral-scented disinfectant that didn't entirely mask a much less pleasant odor.

From inside came a mechanical and steady *whoosh whoosh whoosh* that grew louder as I walked farther into the room. But that wasn't the sound I'd heard.

Then I heard the mewling again.

The room held several structures that resembled cribs, except they had solid sides instead of slats, and they were much bigger than those that held babies. Each had a machine hooked up to it, the source of the whooshing sound.

Were they respirators of some kind?

I slowly stepped nearer to the closest one and peered over the side.

I gasped and jumped back, my free hand clasped over my mouth.

What in the—?

My heart began to pound.

That crib held something unnatural. Something impossible.

I took one step only, then leaned forward to look again. Something lay there on the white mattress. Something human, but not human. The being was the shape of a human, with normal-size limbs for an adult, only they looked deflated, like a balloon with no air. Suddenly, one of the saggy arms reached up and the creature rolled toward me. Under an oxygen mask, the flesh on the face looked like it had fallen off the bones. "Help me," it mewed. And the mewling turned louder, until the sound turned to an inhuman shriek. "Help me!"

My throat tightened, and I backed away until I couldn't go any farther. I had backed into another of the cribs, and I twirled around to see another creature that resembled the first, holding out its alien arms to me.

I cried out and stepped back, my hand on my chest, where my heart threatened to pound its way out.

More mewling came from the back of the room, where a curtain was drawn. I trudged forward and reached up to grasp the edge. The metal rings at the top clinked as I yanked it open a few feet.

The room was larger than it first appeared, and went on for another hundred yards at least. Enough space to hold dozens more of the cribs, all with respirators making the same *whoosh whoosh whoosh*. And, spurred on by the two shrieking creatures in the front of the room, a chorus of mewling arose from every crib, growing louder as I stood there.

Did every single crib contain one of those creatures?

"Oh, my God." I started to back up toward the door.

"Pity, but it's not an exact science yet."

I whipped around.

My father stood there, between me and the door, blocking my way out.