

Chapter One

The seaplane growls through the evening sky. It skims beneath a ceiling of gray clouds. Through the round window beside me, I look down to the rocky coastline below. Angry surf crashes against jagged cliffs. Shadowy forests climb away from the edge of the ocean.

It feels like I am trapped between the ocean below and the storm clouds above.

The seaplane is small. Behind me, the cargo hold is stuffed with supplies. Everything a scientist might need for two weeks of research.

"Dr. Ortiz, we'll need to be fast unloading your gear," says the pilot. We all wear headsets to hear each other over the roar of the engines.

"We'll be quick. There's three of us, after all," Rick says.

The pilot nods back toward me and asks, "Is this one of your students?"

Before Rick can answer, I say firmly, "No."

It's the first thing I've said this entire flight.

"Kai is my son," says Rick.

"That's not really true either," I say.

I see the pilot look over at Rick, puzzled.

Rick sighs. "He's my stepson. I got married a few months ago. It's pretty new for both of us."

"Huh," says the pilot. "So he's helping you out?"

"Sort of," says Rick. "I'm doing a research study in Blind Bay. But his mother thought that we could—"

The plane hits a pocket of turbulence and cuts him off.

Spend some time together. I finish his words in my head. My mother thought that two weeks together would make us like each other. Become a real family. I might even help with his research. Maybe get interested in school again.

Not a chance. Rick is a self-absorbed jerk. He doesn't deserve my mom.

Still, my mom needed me to try, she said. So I went along with her plan. I'll do my time out here.

But I don't like it.

We come out of the rough air. The seaplane angles away from the ocean. Begins to descend. We're flying along a narrow strip of water. This must be Blind Bay. Sharp cliffs rise on either side of us. We drop closer and closer to the rippled surface of the water. Finally the whole seaplane shudders as it touches down. The pilot guides the plane over to our temporary home.

It's basically a giant wooden raft with a small building on one end. Before we

left, Rick told me about this place. It's a mobile lab. The first floor of the building is the storage area. It has all the diving and science gear. The second floor is where scientists sleep and eat.

Outside the station there's a small inflatable boat called a Zodiac. A little floating bridge leads from the raft to the land. And, beyond that bridge, a wall of forest. This is our home for the next couple of weeks. A shack floating in the wilderness.

Literally in the middle of nowhere.

Chapter Two

I keep away from the edge of the dock. I watch the black water flex like a muscle. Pushing the big raft up and down. I hate the water. Never learned to swim. Rick taps me on the shoulder, and I turn around. He's holding out a bright-orange life jacket.

"Put this on and give us a hand, okay?"

"I don't need that," I snap. "I'm not a little kid."

"Fine. I promised your mom, but maybe we can let it go," says Rick. "Can you help, though? The pilot needs to get out of here." He walks back toward the open hatch of the plane.

"Yeah, yeah. In a second." I pull out my phone. Not even one bar of reception. *You've got to be kidding me.* I hold up the phone and swivel slowly. Still no signal. *Dammit.* I even bought a waterproof case for the phone. It's my one link to home.

"What's the Wi-Fi password here?" I yell over to him.

"Seriously, Kai? Give us a hand."

I stuff the phone back in my jacket pocket and return to the plane. The pilot is inside, handing things out. He grunts as he lifts a heavy silver canister.

"Watch that," says the pilot. "It's a scuba tank. For diving."

I take it from him. The metal surface is a little wet and hard to hold. As I turn away, it slips from my fingers and slams to the dock. There's a ringing noise that echoes over the bay.

"Kai!" yells Rick. "You've got be careful with those!"

I reach down to pick it up, but Rick waves me off. He kneels down to inspect the tank.

"You're lucky it's not damaged," he says.

"I've seen them go off like a rocket if you break the valve."

"It wasn't my fault," I mumble. "The tank was really slippery."

"Here, why don't you take this instead?" says the pilot. Grunting, he lifts out a plastic dog kennel.

There was one thing I insisted on when I agreed to this stupid plan. My dog, Alfie, needed to come with us. I needed a friend out here.

I gently place the kennel on the dock and open the metal grate. A small golden dog bounds out. Alfie rushes around the dock in circles. He runs across Rick's path. Rick stumbles and almost drops the scuba tank.

"Put his leash on him, Kai!" says Rick over his shoulder.

"Alfie just needs a run. He didn't like being trapped in the plane."

The pilot shakes his head. "Kid, be really careful when you take him onshore. This is cougar territory. And I'd say that dog has all the survival skills of a potato chip. City dogs don't always do well here."

"Right? That's what I told his mother," says Rick. "It's not safe for him here. He doesn't belong."

"You talking about Alfie or me?" I say loudly.

Rick's face tightens up. His eyes get even darker than normal.