



Chapter Two

Cody had read the same paragraph of the article about the progress of the expansion of the San Francisco airport six times. She folded the paper and set it down on top of the stack of mail. The clock said nine-fifty. What time was bedtime? Why hadn't Ryan called? R.J., she reminded herself. Why hadn't R.J. called?

She lifted the phone and turned it on, checked the dial tone and turned it off again. The phone was working. She'd looked over the caller ID box, but the two numbers had been

unavailable, probably telemarketers. She knew Peter's number had shown up in the past. So he hadn't called. She didn't want to embarrass him, but this was ridiculous. She glanced at the school directory that had been open for the past three hours and dialed the number she had memorized nearly that long ago. She cleared her throat and waited for an answer. After one ring, she heard Travis Landon's voice announce that no one was able to answer and would they leave a message. Cody cleared her throat again and waited for the tone.

"It's R.J.'s mom. Just have him give me a quick call when you get this. Thanks." She tried to sound relaxed and breezy, which was anything but what she felt. She looked at the clock again. Nine fifty-two.

Getting up from the couch, she took the stack of freshly folded laundry upstairs, put it away in R.J.'s drawers and sat on the bed she'd made an hour before. She lifted the chambray pillow and brought it to her nose. She loved the smell of him. He still had the slightest remainder of sweet baby smell combined with the scent of ground-in dirt.

Behind that was the pineapple scent of the shampoo she insisted he use twice a week, and the banana suntan lotion she'd put on him before his T-ball game the night before. His games always reminded her of playing softball as a girl. Her mother was very athletic, and she and Megan's father had always encouraged the girls in sports. Her sister Nicole had played soccer at Stanford on a scholarship, but Megan had always loved softball. On Memorial Day they played a family game: Mom and the two oldest girls, Dad and the two youngest. The rivalry had continued up until the last Memorial Day that Mark was alive. She wondered if they still played.

She returned the pillow to its spot and forced herself off the bed. She went into her room and picked up the extension there, dialing the Landons' number again. No one answered.

To hell with it, she cursed to herself, grabbing the car keys off her bureau and heading downstairs. She put on her coat and armed the house as she did even to walk to the small market down the street. She left the house through the back door and jogged to the green Jeep Cherokee that made her look like every other parent in California. She revved the engine, blasted the heat, and drove toward the Landons' house.

She shouldn't be going there, she told herself. She should trust R.J. He would call her before bed. Maybe Peter went to bed later. She knew his mother wasn't around. Maybe Landon let Peter stay up all night. Or maybe Landon had reminded R.J. and he'd just forgotten. But it wasn't like R.J. to forget. He remembered how important it was that they always be able to reach each other. He remembered that night in New Orleans.

The rain started up again and she tightened her grip on the steering wheel as she turned between the large stone pillars that marked the entrance into the exclusive community where Landon lived. The in-law attachments here were bigger than the house she and R.J. shared. She didn't care. Her life wasn't about money or power or any of those things. It never would be, and the thought brought neither disappointment nor envy.

She pulled the Jeep into the circular drive in front of Landon's house and killed the engine. Maybe R.J. had already called her at home and she'd simply missed it. She picked up her cell phone and punched four to dial her home voice mail. The electronic voice told her she had no messages.

Ending the call, she set the phone on the passenger seat and opened her door. She crossed the small grassy yard and took a deep breath before ringing the white bell beside an oak door that looked like it belonged on a king's castle. The sound echoed through what she imagined was an enormous entryway, and she waited to hear the sounds of footsteps. Landon had said the boys would be renting a movie, and she hoped he hadn't decided to take them out instead.

She turned around and looked back at the street as the misty rain turned to drizzle. She didn't see any cars on the street, but the garage was closed. Where the hell was Landon? Where was her son? She turned back and rang the bell again, feeling the fear saturate her blood like alcohol.

"I'm coming, I'm coming," came the scratchy voice.

There was the click of a lock, and the giant oak door opened with a resounding moan.

Travis Landon stood behind it in a pair of pajama pants and nothing else. She diverted her eyes from his tanned chest. He looked tired, but he was handsome the same way Mark had been. He had straight, medium-brown hair that appeared thick and slightly untamed. The whole effect was rugged, and she could imagine he looked slightly out of place in a suit, just like Mark. Travis frowned and ran his hand through his hair.

Cody kept her eyes on his face as she stepped into the foyer and tried not to wipe her wet feet on the beautiful, expensive-looking oriental rug. The house was bigger than she'd thought, with a marble floor and the kind of grandiose style that felt gauche and overdone. "R.J. never called. I just wanted to talk to him for a second. I tried calling, but it went straight to voice mail."

Travis stood motionless with the door in his hand.

Cody shivered against the cool night air.

Travis blinked and looked outside and then closed the door. "R.J.'s--" "It's okay. If he's asleep, I'll just go and talk to him for a second. I promise not to wake up Peter." She heard a squeak from the top of the stairs and looked up. Her heart danced at the form of a small boy standing at the top of the stairs, but she quickly realized it wasn't R.J.

"What's going on, Dad?"

"I'm not sure." Travis looked back at Cody and shook his head.

"R.J.'s not here."

Cody turned to him, looking for the smile, the joke. No one was laughing.

Travis reached out to touch her, but she pulled away. "What do you mean, he's not here?"

Travis looked up at Peter and then back to Cody. "I called you twice on our way home, but no one answered." He raked a hand through his hair. "Jesus, he got picked up."

"Where is he? Where's my son?"

"His father picked him up. Peter, isn't that right?"

Cody nearly choked. She shook her head as her hand covered the gasp that escaped her lips. His father couldn't have picked him up. Ryan's father was dead.