



Things I
Never
Told
you

a novel

BETH K. VOGT

PRAISE FOR BETH K. VOGT

“Beth Vogt has long been a favorite for romance, but she finds her true niche with her first women’s fiction entry, *Things I Never Told You*. Engaging, sympathetic, and almost painfully honest, this story of buried family secrets and hidden trauma will stay with you long after the last page is turned. I’m impatiently awaiting the other titles in this series.”

CARLA LAUREANO, AUTHOR OF *FIVE DAYS IN SKYE* AND
THE SATURDAY NIGHT SUPPER CLUB

“Questions, regrets, and memories hang over all our lives. *Things I Never Told You* authentically explores past and present hurts in a way that will take readers deeper into the heart. Beth’s story will give real hope to anyone struggling with fractured relationships.”

CHRIS FABRY, CHRISTY AWARD–WINNING AUTHOR OF
DOGWOOD AND *THE PROMISE OF JESSE WOODS*

“Talented author Beth Vogt brings her storytelling to a new level in this women’s fiction debut by tackling the messiness and beautiful bond of families in *Things I Never Told You*. Told through the voices of sisters, Vogt uses a clever twist in this tale of love and forgiveness. Readers will savor this one.”

RACHEL HAUCK, *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

“Once again Vogt’s beautiful writing captures the struggles and hopes of her broken characters, this time with a cast of sisters who find themselves forced to confront their pasts, their fears, and the healing power of forgiveness. Powerful, moving, and redemptive. Everything I hope for in a Beth Vogt novel.”

SUSAN MAY WARREN, *USA TODAY* BESTSELLING,
CHRISTY AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

“Earnest. Emotional. Hope-filled and complex . . . With the characteristic depth and heart readers have come to expect from a Beth Vogt novel, *Things I Never Told You* marks the author’s memorable entry into contemporary women’s fiction. Whether sister, mother, daughter, or friend . . . each will find shades of herself in this redemption story. It is a must-read, must-share novel!”

KRISTY CAMBRON, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE LOST
CASTLE AND HIDDEN MASTERPIECE SERIES

“*Things I Never Told You* is a poignant, emotionally moving story that pulled me in from the opening chapter. Compelling threads of past hurts and present fears, long-kept secrets and complex family dynamics, kept me turning pages. Beth Vogt’s latest book, complete with a soul-stirring faith journey, is one that will stick with you long after the end.”

MELISSA TAGG, AUTHOR OF THE WALKER FAMILY SERIES
AND THE ENCHANTED CHRISTMAS COLLECTION

“Beth Vogt is one of those authors who legitimizes the depth of story hidden in dramas not unlike our own. In *Things I Never Told You*, she tugs the reader through the pages as a child might plead, ‘Come and see.’ Before the book’s end, the characters have become the reader’s extended family, their pain and joys our own. Another story well-told.”

CYNTHIA RUCHTI, AUTHOR OF *A FRAGILE HOPE* AND
AS MY PARENTS AGE

“In *Things I Never Told You*, Beth K. Vogt deftly explores family dynamics, the push and pull between sisters, the pain of loss, the journey of grief, the beauty of forgiveness, and so much more. I rejoiced and wept with these characters and was sorry to let them go when I reached the end. Highly recommended!”

ROBIN LEE HATCHER, RITA AND CHRISTY AWARD-
WINNING AUTHOR

“This beautifully told story tugged me into the lives of three sisters separated by tragedy and time. The book is a beautiful tale of redemption and hope in the midst of darkness and fear. It is filled with characters that will stick with you long after you read the final line.”

CARA PUTMAN, AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF
SHADOWED BY GRACE AND *IMPERFECT JUSTICE*

“Rich with spiritual truths, emotionally compelling and endearing characters, *Things I Never Told You* peels back layers of the soul, exposing the dangers of secrets kept, and the freedom found when light shines through the darkness as the truth is told. A beautiful reading experience not to be missed.”

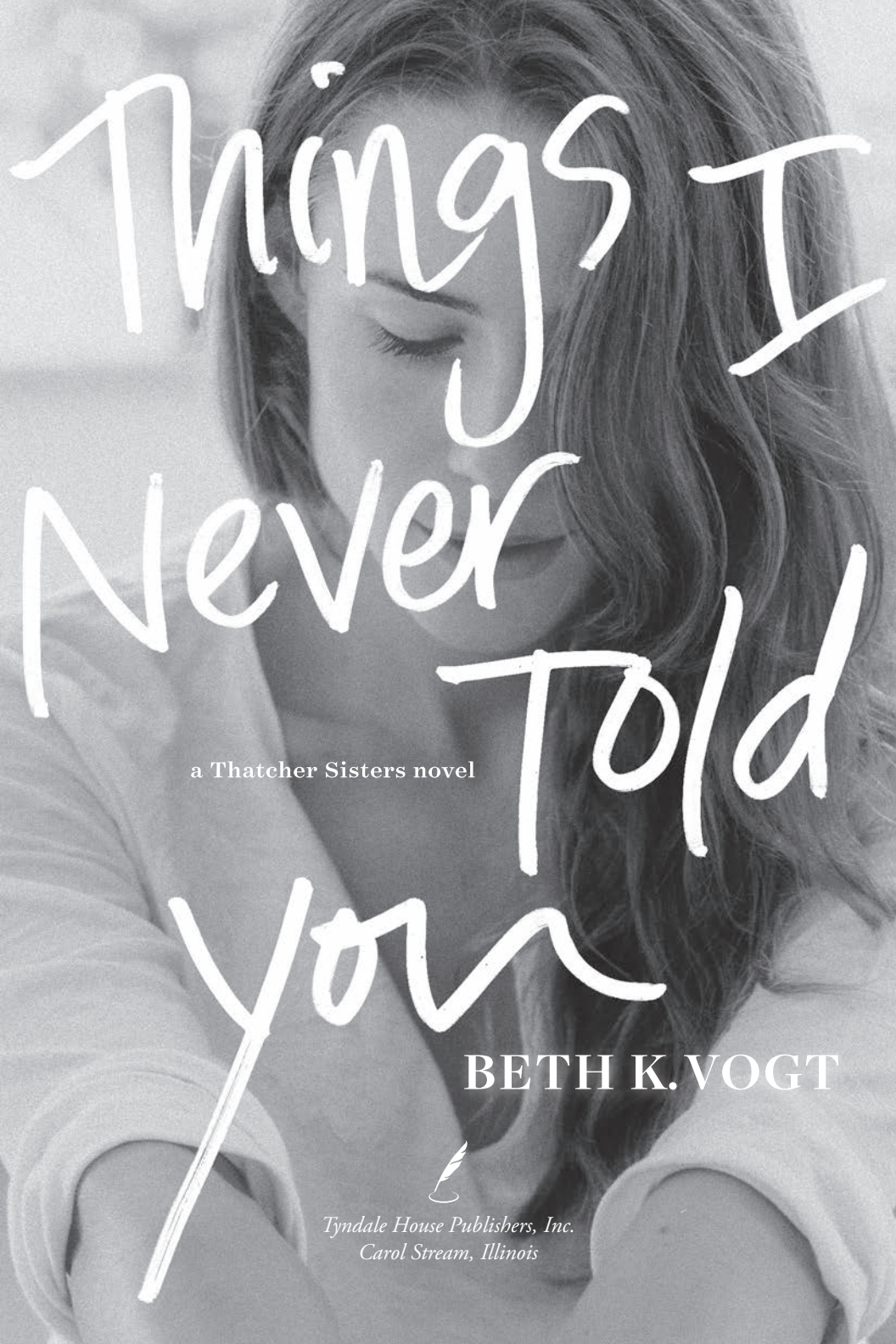
CATHERINE WEST, AUTHOR OF *THE MEMORY OF YOU*

“Beth Vogt has an ability to draw her readers more deeply into a story, revealing secrets only when necessary, and never tell all until the end. Women’s fiction at its finest.”

HANNAH ALEXANDER, AUTHOR OF *THE WEDDING KISS*
AND THE HALLOWED HALLS SERIES

“A book this good is a double-edged sword. It’s a wonderful reading experience and the ultimate frustration because it’s over far too soon. Beth Vogt is truly one of the great ones. She’s established herself as a consummate storyteller and a grand master of her craft.”

EDIE MELSON, DIRECTOR OF THE BLUE RIDGE
MOUNTAINS CHRISTIAN WRITERS CONFERENCE



Things I
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a Thatcher Sisters novel

BETH K. VOGT



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THE WHAT-IFS TAUNTED ME every time I visited my parents, but any hope of beginning again had vanished years ago—if there'd ever been one.

What would have happened if my parents had gone through with selling the house in Colorado Springs my sisters and I had grown up in? If they'd labeled and taped up all the boxes—the clothes, the books, the dishes, the photographs, the awards, and the trophies—and unpacked them in a different house?

A change of location. A chance to start over.

But unexpected loss held my parents captive.

For the most part, our family seemed unchanged. The

kitchen clock—a porcelain plate decorated with bright red-and-yellow flowers but lacking any numerals to designate the passing of time—hung in the same place it had since a dozen Mother’s Days ago. The same white wooden shutters hid the bay windows in the breakfast nook. The same worn round table in the middle, surrounded by four chairs adorned with nondescript blue cushions our mother changed out every few years—whenever Johanna reminded her to do so.

I pushed the Start button on the once-new dishwasher. My parents had installed it at the Realtor’s recommendation when they’d planned to move into the larger house that offered a coveted view of Pikes Peak.

Time to focus on the cheesecakes—the engagement party dessert finale. The hum of the dishwasher blended with garbled conversation as the door between the kitchen and dining room opened, the sound of Jillian’s fiancé’s booming laughter sneaking in. Geoff and his corny jokes.

“Just getting the dessert, Kim—”

“I’m not your timekeeper, little sister.” Johanna’s nonsense voice interrupted my concentration.

I stiffened, gripping the handles of the fridge. Why hadn’t I posted a Do Not Enter sign on the door? Maybe I should have caved to Nash’s insistence to attend the party, even though tonight was more work than play for me. Why not have my boyfriend act as bouncer outside the kitchen? Flex his muscles and run interference?

I had no time for my oldest sister. Any minute now,

Kimberlee would return from setting up the silver carafes of coffee and hot water for tea, along with cream, sugar, spoons, and other necessities. She'd expect the trio of cheesecakes to be arranged on their individual stands—my job tonight, since we'd only had the caterers deliver the food for such a small gathering.

“Do you need something, Johanna?” I pulled the first cheesecake from the fridge, my mouth watering at the thought of key lime and dollops of whipped cream. Being the party planner for tonight meant I'd had no chance to indulge in the hors d'oeuvres or cocktails, despite this being my other sister's engagement party. And vegan or not, I could appreciate a decadent dessert—and postpone interacting with Johanna.

“You and Kimberlee are pretty good at this event-planning business.” Johanna leaned against the kitchen counter.

“Mom and Jillian seem happy. That's the important thing.” I settled the cheesecake on its stand, the plastic wrap clinging to my fingers as I uncovered it. “It's all about finding out what people want and then making it happen.”

“Festivities is making enough to pay the bills, apparently.”

“Yes.”

Not that I was going to produce an Excel spreadsheet of our accounts payable and receivable for my oldest sister.

“You two didn't charge Mom and Dad full price—”

“Really, Johanna?” Not sparing my sister a glance, I shoved the fridge door closed with my hip, a turtle cheesecake balanced in my hands.

“Oh, don’t get in a huff, Payton. Honestly, how do you manage your customers if you’re so touchy?”

And this . . . this was yet another reason why I didn’t come home unless absolutely necessary. I concentrated on transporting the second cheesecake from the fridge to the island, refusing to square off with my sister. Best to change the subject and prep the desserts.

“Jillian and Geoff seem perfect for one another, don’t they?”

Johanna took the bait. “Of course they do. They enjoy the same foods. The same movies. He makes her laugh. They’re content with a typical version of happily ever after.”

And now my question had set Johanna’s sights on Jillian. Should I ignore the unspoken criticism or not? “You don’t approve of Geoff?”

“I wouldn’t marry him. They remind me of that old nursery rhyme. ‘Jack Sprat could eat no fat, his wife could eat no lean . . .’”

“And I suppose one of the reasons you’re marrying Beckett is because you make such a good-looking couple?”

“You’ve got to admit he’s easy on the eyes.”

Easy on the eyes? Who said stuff like that anymore? “Not that he’s around very often for anyone to get a look at him.”

“If I don’t mind being in a long-distance relationship, I don’t see why you should be so critical.” Johanna’s stilettos tapped a sharp staccato on the wood floor, her platinum-blond hair caught up in a tight ponytail that swished down between her shoulder blades.

“I’m not criticizing. Just mentioning that Beckett plays the role of the Invisible Man quite well.”

“You’re almost as funny as Geoff.” Ice frosted Johanna’s words.

Time to change the subject again unless I wanted a full-blown argument with one sister during my other sister’s party. Not that I could think of a topic Johanna and I agreed on. “Isn’t it odd? You and Beckett have been engaged for over two years now. Shouldn’t we be planning your wedding so Jillian and Geoff don’t beat you two down the aisle?”

“It’s not a race. Beckett’s stationed in Wyoming and I don’t want to give up my job to move there—”

“Did I know Beckett was in Wyoming?”

“Honestly, Payton, he’s been there for a year.” Johanna sniffed. “But then, it’s not like we chat every other day, is it? You and Pepper were the close ones—”

Heat flushed my neck. My face. “There’s no need to bring Pepper into the conversation, is there?”

“Why, after all this time, are you still so sensitive about talking about her?”

“I’m not sensitive. I just don’t see why you had to mention Pepper when we were talking about you and Beckett—”

The sound of voices rose once again as the kitchen door opened. Poor Kimberlee. She didn’t know she’d have to assume Jillian’s usual position as the neutral zone between Johanna and me.

“Have you seen Jillian?”

Not Kimberlee. Mom, who was also an expert human buffer.

“Isn’t she with Geoff?” I removed the cling wrap from the cheesecake.

“She was a few moments ago, but now I can’t find her.” Mom circled the island as if she expected to find her middle daughter crouching down hiding from her. “Isn’t it almost time for dessert? And aren’t we supposed to open gifts after that? They certainly received a lot of presents, didn’t they?”

“Yes. It’s a great turnout.” If only the kitchen didn’t feel like a revolving three-ring circus. How would Johanna like it if our family showed up at the hospital pharmacy where she was in charge?

Before I could say anything else, Kimberlee, the one person I’d been waiting for, joined the crowd. “Are we all set in here, Payton?”

“Just about.” I swallowed back the words “*if people would stay out of my kitchen.*” This wasn’t my kitchen. And family or not, Mom was a client, at least for tonight, and needed to be treated like one. And I’d been dealing with Johanna for years. If I wanted tonight to be a success, the less said, the better.

“Mom, why don’t you and Johanna join the guests?” I removed the classic cheesecake from the fridge. “I’ll find Jillian while Kimberlee makes the announcement about dessert and Jillian and Geoff opening their gifts.”

As Johanna and Mom left, I faced my business partner, shook my head, and sighed. “Family. And before that, a

longtime family friend wandered in, asking for the crab dip recipe.”

“It comes with working for relatives.” Kimberlee took the cheesecake from me, the eclectic assortment of rings on her fingers sparkling under the kitchen lights. “But honestly, everything has gone beautifully. There’s hardly any food left.”

“That’s because I know how to plan portions.”

“It’s because we know how to throw a good party.”

“Well, let’s keep things going and get this dessert set up.”

Once the trio of cheesecakes was arranged on the table in my parents’ dining room, I nodded to Kimberlee. “I’ve got to go find our bride-to-be.”

“No problem. I can handle this.” Kimberlee smoothed a wrinkle from the white tablecloth and repositioned the vase filled with bright-red poppies, my mother’s favorite flowers.

“It’s not like she wandered far. She’s probably in the bathroom touching up her makeup.”

Not that Jillian was a “refresh her makeup” kind of gal. Mascara and a little bit of basic eyeliner was her usual routine. Lipstick was reserved for fancier affairs. She’d probably be cajoled by the photographer into wearing some on her wedding day.

The upstairs bathroom was empty, lit only by the flickering flame of a cinnamon-scented candle. Where could Jillian be? A thin band of light shone out from beneath the door of Johanna and Jillian’s former bedroom at the far end of the darkened hallway. Why would my sister be in there? As

I moved past my old bedroom, my fingertips brushed the doorknob for a second. I pulled my hand away, balling my fingers into a fist.

I paused outside the bedroom and then rapped my knuckles against the door. “Jillian?”

Nothing . . . and then, “Payton? Do you need me for something?”

Just for her party. I eased the door open, stepping inside. “What are you doing up here? It’s time to open your gifts.”

What had once been Johanna and Jillian’s room was now a generic guest room. At the moment, the only light came from the slender glass lamp on the bedside table. My sisters’ beds had been replaced by a single larger bed covered in a gray-and-white paisley comforter. An idyllic outdoor scene adorned the wall across from the dark oak dresser.

Jillian, who’d been hunched over on the corner of the bed, straightened her shoulders. “I, um, got a phone call and decided to take it in here away from all the noise.”

“Is everything okay?”

“Yes. Absolutely.” Jillian’s smile seemed to wobble for the briefest second. “Did you need me for something?”

“Your engagement party? It’s time to dismantle that Jenga tower of gifts in the family room.” I shook my head. “*Tsk*. And after all the hard work I put in arranging it.”

“Right.” Jillian smoothed her yellow empire-waist sundress down over her hips. “It’s been a wonderful party, Payton.”

“Thank you for saying so, but it’s not over yet.” I touched Jillian’s shoulder. “You’re really okay?”

She nodded so that the ends of her hair brushed against the back of my hand. “Yes. Nothing that won’t wait until Monday.”

I didn’t know why I’d asked. It wasn’t like Jillian would confide in me. We weren’t the “Will you keep a secret?” kind of sisters. “All right then. Why don’t you go find Geoff and I’ll bring you both some dessert? Do you want key lime, classic, or turtle cheesecake?”

Now it was my sister’s turn to shake her head. “I should skip it altogether. We’re going wedding dress shopping soon enough, and I know I’m going to look awful—”

“Oh, stop! Don’t become a weight-conscious bridezilla.” My comment earned the ghost of a laugh from my sister. “What’s wrong?”

“You know Mrs. Kenton?”

“Of course—the family friend who can get away with saying, ‘Oh, Payton, I knew you when . . .’ and does. Every time she sees me. She pull that on you tonight?”

Red stained my sister’s face. “No. She just said—in the nicest way possible, of course—that she hoped I’d lose a few pounds before the wedding.”

“And what did you say?”

“Nothing.”

Of course she didn’t. “Jillian—”

She waved away my words. “Forget I said anything.”

“It was rude.” And Mrs. Kenton, family friend or not, could forget about ever seeing the recipe she’d requested. “How about I bring you a small slice of each cheesecake? Calories don’t count at engagement parties, you know.”

“Really small slices?”

“I promise. This is a celebration. Your one and only engagement party.”

“You’re right.” Jillian stood, brushing her straight hair away from her face. “Tonight, we celebrate. Tomorrow . . . well, we’re not thinking about that, are we?”

“No, because tomorrow means playing catch-up for me. And prepping for next week.”

And Saturday morning breakfast with my family.

Something else I wasn’t thinking about.



Breakfast at my parents’ always required drinking at least three cups of coffee.

I retrieved the glass coffeepot from the kitchen and brought it to the table, pouring a steady stream of dark liquid fortitude into the Dallas Starbucks mug from one of Dad’s business trips. A trip equaled a coffee mug. Just like everything in the kitchen, the coffeemaker was outdated. Maybe I could convince my sisters to buy our parents a Keurig for Christmas. “Anyone else need a refill?”

Only Dad nodded, moving his faded orange-and-blue Broncos mug closer to me so I could add coffee, the roasted aroma filling the air. After returning the pot to its proper place, I slid into my chair across from Johanna and began sweetening my coffee.

“Three sugars? What is that, your second cup of coffee?”

Johanna wrinkled her nose. “Have you ever heard of Splenda or Stevia?”

“My third. And I prefer the real stuff. I like my caffeine with a jolt of sugar.” I stirred the overabundance of sugar, my spoon clinking against the rim.

“I’m surprised your teeth haven’t rotted out of your head.”

My fingers tightened around the handle of my mug. “Well, if they did, I’d be the one paying my dental bills—”

“Really, girls, it’s barely ten o’clock in the morning,” Mom interrupted the exchange. “And you’re both adults. Stop bickering.”

“Weren’t we discussing the bridal shower?” Dad’s tone was even.

“We’ve discussed the basics.” Johanna scanned the list she’d made on her iPad. “With the wedding in April, we could wait until February for the shower. Or we could do something sooner, say November, and let your friends and coworkers host another shower closer to the wedding date. As maid of honor, I’ll be hosting this party, of course, with Payton and Kimberlee’s company catering it.”

“As long as Jillian’s happy with all that.” I resisted the urge to toss a fourth spoonful of sugar into my coffee. I could either hassle my oldest sister or drink my much-needed eye-opener in peace.

“I’m sorry—what?” Jillian yawned and moved leftover scrambled eggs around her plate with her fork.

“I just said Kimberlee and I are happy to cater the bridal shower so long as you’re good with that.”

“Oh . . . of course. I loved all the appetizers you served.”

“The bison sliders were awesome.” Geoff spoke around a bite of bacon.

“I wouldn’t want anyone else to do my bridal shower.” Jillian smiled when Geoff reached over and squeezed her hand. “But, Payton, could you work something out so you can attend the party, too? I hardly saw you last night.”

“I was there when you opened gifts—well, most of them.” I pressed my fingertips into the knots at the base of my neck. The consequence of setup, cleanup, and loading supplies into the business van Kimberlee drove back to North Denver last night. “I’ll see if we can arrange things so I can be around for more of the actual bridal shower. We can always bring in other people to help.”

Johanna added something to her list. “I’ll get together more specifics about a theme, food, and decor and e-mail you, Payton. And then Jillian just needs to let us know a preferred date.”

“That’ll be fine.” I glanced up from a text from Nash asking when I’d be getting home. Let Johanna take the lead and relegate me to the background. That was easiest. “If we’re done here, I’ll finish my coffee and hit the road . . .”

Mom shifted in her chair. “There is one more thing we need to talk about.”

“There is?”

“Yes. I, um, got a phone call—” Mom made eye contact

with everyone at the table but me—“from Pepper’s high school volleyball coach. Your coach.”

My phone slipped from my hand, bouncing off the edge of the table and tumbling to the faux Persian carpet with a soft thud. “Coach Sydney? Why would she call you?”

Now Mom looked at me, then concentrated on setting her silverware on her empty plate, one piece at a time. “Well, she wanted to tell me the high school is honoring some of their former outstanding athletes. And Pepper is included because of all the school records she set. They plan on retiring her jersey number and displaying it in the gym.”

My hands gripped my jeans-covered knees, and I willed myself to remain still as Mom talked. It was no surprise the school would honor a star athlete like Pepper. Several college coaches had been keeping track of her statistics by the time she was a sophomore.

Mom twisted a strand of her brown hair that was threaded through with gray. “Remember how they called you and Pepper—?”

“Double Trouble.” I whispered the nickname given us by some of our opponents because Pepper and I were identical twins, and we both played middle.

“That’s right. It was always fun to read that in the paper.” Even all these years later, Mom seemed to relish the memory. “Anyway, Sydney was trying to get in touch with you because she hopes you’ll say something about Pepper at the ceremony.”

Mom’s request might as well have been a well-aimed dump by a setter—and me, one of the unsuspecting defenders on

the other side of the volleyball net. “What? No. Surely they can do this ceremony without me being a part of it.”

“Pepper was your twin sister, Payton. She was closer to you than anyone else.”

“Mom, please!” I shoved my chair back, stumbling to my feet, almost stepping on my phone.

“Honey, it’s been ten years since Pepper died—”

“I know how long it’s been, Mom. That doesn’t mean I want to talk about Pepper in front of a bunch of people I don’t know or haven’t seen in years.”

“What is wrong with you?” And now Johanna had to join the conversation. “This is a chance to honor Pepper’s memory. Why don’t you want to be a part of it? Everyone else is on board.”

“Am I the last one to know about this?” I forced myself to face my family instead of walking out of the room. Out of the house.

“Well, you don’t visit that often, do you?” Johanna managed to twist the conversation away from honoring Pepper to skewering me. “Or call. This is the first chance we’ve had to talk with you about the ceremony.”

I’d deal with today’s unexpected issue and ignore Johanna’s typical attack. “And you’re all okay with this idea?”

“Payton, we’re talking about one evening. A couple of hours at most.” Dad’s words were low. Steady. Ever the voice of reason. “We’ll all be there together. Have a chance to remember Pepper and something that was important to her. And you, too. So yes, we all think this is a good idea.”

“I don’t have a choice?” Did anyone else think I sounded like a sulky adolescent?

“Of course you have a choice.” Mom’s smile held the hint of an apology. “We’re not going to force you to participate—”

“But think of how it would look if we all attended and you didn’t.”

“Thank you so much for not forcing me, Johanna.”

“Be an adult, Payton. Stop making this about you.”

“But I’m the one expected to be up front, talking . . . about Pepper.” I swallowed a sudden tightness in my throat.

I should have skipped breakfast and driven straight home. Coming home was like trying to step into a faded family photograph—one that had been partially torn so that the image was incomplete. “When is this event taking place?”

“Sydney said it was scheduled for the middle of September.” Mom twisted her napkin. “I have her phone number if you want to talk to her . . .”

Maybe surrender was my best option for dealing with this ambush—at least for now.

“Fine. I’ll call her and get the details.”

“You’ll do it?”

I bent to retrieve my phone, trying to ignore the hope in Mom’s voice. At least my overnight bag and purse were already by the front door. “I said I’d talk to her. I need to think about this more before I say yes. *If* I say yes. I need to make sure Kimberlee and I don’t have a competing commitment.” Maybe, just maybe, I’d get that lucky. “Text me her

number, please. I need to head home. Nash is hoping to spend part of the day together—maybe catch a movie.”

“Tell him we missed seeing him.” Dad half rose from his chair.

“Of course.” I came close enough for a quick hug, following that up with a similar duck and hug with Mom. “No need to walk me out. We’ll talk soon.”

As I backed up, I nodded to everyone else at the table, hoping a smile would suffice for a good-bye. “Have fun getting all that loot back to your apartment, Jillian.”

“We will, but it’s going to Geoff’s house. He’s got more room.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Johanna didn’t even look up from her iPad. “I’ll be e-mailing you about the bridal shower, Payton.”

“Fine.” Another nod and then more distance.

Welcomed distance.