

BUT I AM WORRIED ABOUT COOP

and the longer it goes without a word from him the more worried I become.

I've lost track of how many recordings I've sent. Two weeks ago I included a self-addressed stamped postcard with a note telling him to send it back to me so I would know if he was okay. All he had to do was drop it in the slot at the post office. It didn't come back. I sent a registered letter he had to sign for. He didn't sign for it. The letter came back. I called the post office in New York and asked a postal worker what they did with regular mail that wasn't picked up. He told me if the letters have return addresses they are sent back to the sender as undeliverable. (All of my unregistered letters and packages had return addresses. None of them have come back.) I asked him if he knew Coop. He said he couldn't tell me, and even if he could, it would be unlikely he would know him anyway. "Kid," he said, "I've been at this post office for over twenty years and I don't even know everyone who works here."

I called the FBI.

I asked for Agent Ryan — the same agent who had showed up at the house when Coop blew up the neighborhood. When she finally got on the phone I was surprised she remembered who I was.

“How’s Coop?” she asked. “I haven’t heard from him in a long time.”

I told her that he was missing and that Dad was going to contact the police in New York.

“Not much else he can do,” Agent Ryan said. “Coop’s eighteen now. He’s probably just out stretching his wings . . . seeing how they work, doing his own thing. Before I joined the FBI I was a New York cop. Finding someone there who doesn’t want to be found is nearly impossible.”

“I’m worried about him,” I said.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” Agent Ryan said. “I’ll send a memo to our New York office. Do you have a recent photo?”

“I can email you one taken before he left. I don’t know if he looks the same.”

“That’ll do. I’m sure Coop looks like he’s always looked . . . charming. The NYPD has a better chance of running him down than we do, but you never know. One of our people might get lucky and come across him.”

“I appreciate it.”

“No problem. Like I told you, I like your brother despite his little accident. There’s something different about him. You know?”

I knew.

Dad hasn’t gotten much further with the cops. He filed a missing person’s report, but the detective told him that Coop was a low priority.

“I was on the phone with the detective for over an hour.

And the only reason he spent that much time talking to me was because I dropped the Nobel laureate bomb.”

(Dad rarely drops the Nobel laureate bomb. He thinks it’s unseemly.)

“He wouldn’t tell me how many missing person’s reports were filed every day in New York, which led me to believe there were a lot of them. He told me the priorities were children and seniors. I emailed him a couple of photos of Cooper, and he said they would run them against the John Does they have in the morgue. He’ll also send Cooper’s name to all the hospitals and clinics. That’s all he could do. A needle in a haystack was how he put it. He said that most of the time the missing person isn’t really missing. They’re just hanging out with friends. Or lying low. Or they’re out of town. They resurface eventually. If Cooper is in trouble — or if he’s injured — there’s a chance they’ll find him. That’s all we can do.”

“We could hire a private detective agency.”

“I asked him about that too. He told me it was a huge rip-off. Private investigators make a fortune on long shots like this, milking the family for everything they have. I know you’re worried about Cooper. He’ll show up when he’s ready. I’ll call that detective when we get back from Belize. Who knows — Cooper might just show up here for Christmas.”

“We’ll be gone.”

“He has a key. Leave him a note. I’m sure he’ll stick around until you get back from Florida.”

I didn’t tell Dad, but . . .