



Chapter 1

Different Paths

Brent Bonham observed his father's meeting. His dad ran a private boot camp called Living Proof. He started it when he retired from the Marines. Today he was addressing the next graduating class.

Brent had heard it all before.

"You can do this."

"You have everything you need."

"I don't expect to see you back here."

"I am here for you."

It was the same story every three months. The boys in the group looked at Brent like he was lucky to have a father who cared. But Brent didn't feel that way. At home, his dad was cold and distant. He did not care. Brent never wanted to be like his dad.

Brent's personality was more like his mom's. She was warm, funny, charming: a down-to-earth Texas-born girl. She worked as an environmental lobbyist. She was opposed to the area's big oil companies. His mother was a person who fought to make sure that big oil did not play dirty with Texsun City.

Mrs. Bonham had been in Washington, D.C., for a couple of months. That left Brent alone with his father. He begged his mom to come home every time they talked. She always promised that it would be soon.

Brent did have a nanny. She lived in the Bonham house. She had been with them for as long as he could remember. His nanny did

everything his parents did not. They were always so busy saving the world. They sometimes forgot about their son's needs.

He was a low-maintenance kid. He never got into trouble and always did what he was told. There were times when rebelling sounded appealing. He wanted to be a free spirit. He would even describe himself that way. But breaking the rules came with weighty consequences. Embarrassing his family was definitely not on his agenda.

There was a mixture of students today at Living Proof. Some of them had been through the boot camp before. A few of them even attended Summit Middle School, where Brent was a seventh grader. He recognized a lot of them, even if they were from across town. He saw them on Friender or FlashChat. With social media, the days of anonymity were long over.

Brent used to sit in these meetings and

not know a soul. But he was catching up to the Living Proof students in age. Slowly, he began to recognize more and more faces.

One person in particular was Coby Reynolds. He had been the leader of his crew since kindergarten. They were hard-core. If there was a fight, Coby and his boys were involved. If there was something stolen, they were involved. Brent typically avoided that type of kid. But they didn't want to hang out with him either. They were on different paths.

Brent sometimes wished he could be as feared as the guys his father mentored. But he didn't even know how to begin. His brain didn't function the way theirs did. He was more straight-laced. He watched them, wondering what their lives were like. Did they go home to cruel and overbearing fathers? Were their mothers at home, making treats and cooking meals?

Brent had a few friends at school, like