

Chapter 1

The pot of water on the stove had just started to boil. Erin Holmes was about to add the pasta when the doorbell rang. “Jay,” she called. “Can you get that?”

There was no answer. Erin knew her brother was in a bad mood. Having dinner with someone was the last thing he wanted to do. He’d have to sit there and pretend to be nice.

“It’ll be boring,” Jay had said.

“You’ll like Victor. He knows a lot about computers.”

“So do I. I’d know more if you would buy me the equipment I need.”

“We can talk about it later,” Erin had said.

The doorbell rang again.

“Jay!” Erin shouted. “Please get the door. I can’t leave the stove.”

It was a few seconds later. Erin heard the door open and then close. She could hear Victor talking to Jay. Then she heard the door to Jay’s room slam.

Now Victor had come into the kitchen. He was holding a bag.

Erin smiled. “I’m sorry about my brother. He has an attitude tonight.”

“It’s okay. I get it,” Victor said. “I was fifteen once.” Then he set the bag on the counter. “I think this will cheer him up. Can you call him in?”

“Jay!” Erin shouted. She turned off the stove. Then she carried the pot to the sink. She was draining the pasta when Jay came into the kitchen.

“What?” he asked.

“Be nice to our guest, Jay,” she said.

“I got you something,” Victor said. He motioned with his head toward the bag.

Erin looked over at her brother. She hoped he wouldn't embarrass her. But with Jay she never knew. He was an angry kid. And not just tonight. It was normal for him.

Jay was only ten when their parents died. They were killed in a car accident. Erin was twelve years older than him. She'd been given custody of him. She was happy about it. They were able to be together. But raising her brother hadn't been easy. Erin had other responsibilities. She had a full-time teaching job. And she was a part-time student. It was a lot to handle.

Victor had taken a seat on the couch. He was looking at Jay. "I hear you're good with computers."

Jay shrugged.

Erin put the baking dish into the oven. Then she walked over to the couch and sat next to Victor.

"Bring the bag over," Victor said to him. "I think you're going to like what's inside."

Jay grabbed the bag off the counter. He brought it over to the coffee table and set it down. Then he fell back into a chair.

“Go ahead,” Erin said. “See what it is.”

Jay picked up the bag and looked inside. The look on his face changed in an instant. It went from disgust to stunned surprise. “No way,” he said.

“What is it?” Erin asked.

“*Point of Impact*,” Jay said.

Erin noticed the way Jay was looking at Victor. It was as if the man had given him a whole store of computer equipment. “Point of what?” Erin asked.

Victor smiled. “*Point of Impact*. It’s the hottest new computer game.”

“But I know how much a game like that costs.” She looked at Victor. “How”— Erin stopped—“You didn’t—”

“Yep,” Victor said, cutting her off. “I found it in a dumpster. That and a TV. Both were in perfect condition. I figured someone tossed

them out by mistake. But you never know. People throw good things out all the time.”

“Who would throw out a game like this? Wait. Did you say a dumpster?” Jay asked.

“You mean your sister hasn’t told you?” Victor said.

Jay looked at Erin. “What’s he talking about?”

“Victor’s hobby,” Erin said. “And I’ve tried to tell you about it. But you don’t listen. It’s that way whenever I mention my friends or coworkers. You don’t want to know anything about them. They’re old and boring to you.”

Jay hadn’t heard the last part of what Erin was saying. Or he was ignoring her. “Your hobby sounds cool,” Jay said to Victor.

“It’s a lot of fun,” he said. “I go through trash, looking for treasure.”

Erin thought about stopping Victor. She wasn’t sure she wanted her brother to hear about this. It might give him ideas.

“I’ve got some great stories,” Victor said. He took off his jacket. Then he draped it over the arm of the couch.

Erin noticed Jay looking at the jacket. It was made of leather. She knew he would love to have one like it. Victor must have also noticed Jay looking at the jacket. “I found that in a dumpster too,” he said.

“Really? A leather jacket?”

“Yes,” Victor said.