

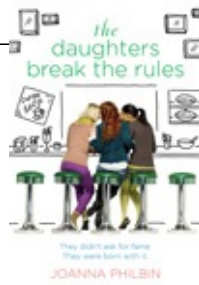


the
daughters
break the rules



They didn't ask for fame.
They were born with it.

JOANNA PHILBIN



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chapter 1

Carina Jurgensen squeezed the rubber stress ball over and over, looking out the tinted window as their car sped across town. Her dad's black Mercedes raced west on Forty-second Street, gliding over potholes and swerving past taxis, as sleek and fast as the Batmobile. They seemed to be headed straight toward the Lincoln Tunnel, which could only mean one thing: they were leaving Manhattan. As they blew past the glittering marquees of Times Square, Carina got the feeling that she was leaving for good.

Beside her in the backseat, her father, Karl Jurgensen, tapped on his BlackBerry with his thumbs, his brows knitted in fierce concentration. From the moment they'd gotten in the car together, he hadn't said a word, not even to their driver, Max. This, she knew, was a bad sign. Wherever they were headed, it was clear that her dad had already made all the arrangements. And he could do anything. That was the thing about having billions of dollars—nothing was impossible. If you wanted to whisk your only child out of New York City on an ordinary November night and make sure she was never seen or heard from again, you could do that. Nobody would stop you.

Her best friends, Lizzie and Hudson, were probably just reaching her building right now. She'd texted them minutes before she left, and now the doorman would tell them that she'd just walked out with her dad and a duffel bag into a waiting car, and they'd panic. They'd been warning her about something like this for weeks. Carina pictured them in her lobby. Hudson would do that frenzied-pacing thing, and Lizzie would stare off into the distance and pull at her red curls, trying to figure out just how serious this was. Of course they'd start firing off texts and phone calls, but she wouldn't get any of them. Her iPhone was in her bag, which was locked up in the trunk and completely out of reach. But she wouldn't be able to talk to them anyway, not with her dad sitting so close to her, emitting a kind of cold rage she'd never felt from him before.

"Where are we going?" she finally asked, daring to turn and look at him.

Karl kept his eyes on his BlackBerry. From this angle, in the dim light of the backseat, Carina thought her forty-two-year-old dad could almost pass for a college kid. It helped that he still had a head of thick brown hair, albeit sprinkled with salt-and-pepper gray, and a strong, movie star's jaw. His days rowing crew at Harvard had given him a lean, broad-shouldered physique, which he maintained with the help of a personal trainer and strict instructions to his chef.

"Dad?" she asked again. "Can you just tell me?"

Without bothering to look up, he shook his head. "You've lost the privilege of more information," he said flatly, still typing.

Carina felt her throat tighten with dread. She'd had plenty of fights with her dad over the years, but this was different. She was in serious trouble—the kind of trouble that could possibly alter her life forever, and not in a good way.

It had all started in September, two months ago. They'd been in the middle of another silent dinner at the twenty-seat dining room table—he at one end, reading a stack of daily status reports on his company and e-mailing his minions on his ever-present BlackBerry; she at the other, doing her geometry homework and texting Lizzie and Hudson—when suddenly he'd said, "Put that away for a second. I'd like to speak with you."

She looked up to see his stern face, and a prickly sense of foreboding ran along her skin. The Jurg (as she and her friends called him) had no time for chitchat. His kind of talk usually fell into two categories: announcements and orders. Whatever he had to say sounded like both.

“I’d like you to start coming into the office,” he said, his brown eyes boring into her like lasers from across the table. “Three days a week. Wednesdays and Fridays after school, and all day on Saturday. We’ll start from there.”

“Come into your *office*?” Her voice bounced off the wood-paneled walls and floated up to the car-size crystal chandelier. “What for?”

The Jurg steepled his hands. “You’re my sole heir, Carina. It’s time you learned about the world you’re going to inherit.”

That world was Metronome Media, his empire of newspapers, magazines, cable television stations and social networking websites. He’d started the company with one weekly newspaper when he was still at Harvard, and twenty years later, it had become the largest media conglomerate in the Western Hemisphere. One in three people read a Metronome publication or visited a Metronome-owned website every day. And all of this success had made the Jurg one of the richest men in the world. He owned five homes, a collection of vintage Jaguars, a fifty-foot yacht, a helicopter, a Gulfstream jet, and a collection of late twentieth-century art that rivaled the Guggenheim Museum’s. Celebrities, socialites, kings of small countries, and even the president called him on his private line. He’d even toyed with running for mayor once or twice, and then backed out at the last minute, much to Carina’s relief.

“Dad, I know all about your world,” Carina said, looking him straight in the eye. “And I don’t want to inherit it.”

The Jurg gave her a grave stare. “Isn’t it a little too soon to know that already? You’re fourteen. You don’t know what you want. And honestly, this is better than having you come into the business when you’re twenty-two,” he said. “By the time you’re out of Wharton you’ll be completely prepared.”

“I’m going to *Wharton*?” she asked.

“You used to love to come into my office when you were a little girl,” he continued, slicing into his steak. “Don’t you remember? Sitting in my chair? Pretending to hold a meeting in the conference room?”

“I was eight. I liked playing with American Girl dolls, too.”

“Carina, I was your age when I had my first job,” he said, more seriously. “Delivering newspapers. Now, I’m not asking you to have a paper route. What I’m asking is a few hours a week.”

“But I have other stuff going on,” she said, sitting up straight in her chair. “I’m the captain of the JV soccer team this year. Did you know that? And I already signed up for Model UN. And what about going to Montauk on the weekends? What about surfing? What about hanging out with my friends?”

Her father put down his fork and a faint, exasperated sigh escaped his lips. “Carina, soccer and Model UN are extracurriculars,” he said. “They’re not your future.”

Before she could respond, the door to the kitchen swung open and Marco walked in. He was dressed in the khakis and polo shirt that the Jurg made all of his help wear, and his sneakers barely made a sound on the wood floor.

“You have a phone call, sir,” he said in his quiet, deferential voice. “Tokyo.”

The Jurg took one last sip of his iced tea—he never drank alcohol—and stood up, dropping his silver napkin on the table. “You’ll start next week,” he said decisively, and walked out.

Carina sat for a moment in the empty dining room, and then pushed her heavy wood chair back

from the table. So it was finally official, she realized. Her dad had no clue who she was.

For the past four years, ever since her parents' divorce, she and the Jurg had lived together like roommates who were determined not to be friends. They avoided each other in the halls, made polite conversation when they had to, and generally pretended the other person wasn't living there. Even though they had dinner together at least twice a week, it was usually silent, with both of them texting or e-mailing in between every mouthful. Carina learned to stick to "her" parts of the three-story penthouse: the den, the kitchen, and her bedroom. There was one obvious perk to all this: most of the time, she could come and go as she pleased, with only Otto, the security guard at the front door, keeping tabs on her. Unlike her friends Lizzie and Hudson, whose parents were sometimes *too* involved in their daughters' lives.

But sometimes the distance between her and the Jurg was depressing. He didn't know a thing about her, and he didn't ask. Weren't fathers supposed to know certain things about their kids, or at least *want* to know? For instance, he had no idea how much she loved to surf the waves at Honolua Bay, or how she couldn't wait to turn eighteen so she could go on Outward Bound's Patagonia trip, or how she had recurring dreams of finally beating Sacred Heart in the soccer championships and being hoisted on the shoulders of her teammates like in some corny sports movie.

But the Jurg had no time for details like this. He marched through the apartment always on his way to something else: the office, a meeting, a workout. He lived his life on a schedule. And there were no slots for her.

And now the fact that he wanted her to "learn the business" only proved how little he knew about her. True, she didn't exactly have a specific life plan yet, aside from taking a year off before college, surf Fiji and then become a certified Outward Bound instructor. But she did know one thing: she would never be a businessperson. She couldn't care less about making money. Or money, in general. And the idea of being around her cold, preoccupied, money-obsessed dad every day for the rest of her life was not an option.

In the days that followed, she pretended to forget their dinnertime talk. It wasn't like her dad was going to *make* her work for him. But she knew from experience that when the Jurg said that he wanted something to happen, there was little besides a bomb or an act of God that could actually stop it. After a few more stony looks across the dining room table and unsubtle hints—like having his assistant call her to arrange an ID card—she gave up her spot on the soccer team, withdrew from Model UN, and went to his office.

As she expected, the work was mind-numbingly boring. All she did was Xerox status reports, memos, and charts of sales figures, none of which made sense. Just like at home, her dad was nowhere to be seen. Instead he'd stuck her with his chief operating officer, Ed Bracken, whom she'd nicknamed the Anteater and Creepy Manservant. Creepy Manservant was in his fifties and had greasy thinning hair, a clammy handshake, and a shuffling walk. He sucked up to the Jurg so much that Carina couldn't believe her eyes half the time. She thought her dad would have been better off with a twenty-five-year-old super-hot MBA grad, or at least a guy who didn't still live with his mother. But Creepy Manservant was by the Jurg's side twenty-four seven, and now she had to answer to him. It was awful.

But even worse than the boredom and Ed Bracken was the sense that her future was slowly closing in around her. As she sat in a small office in her dad's sterile, glass-walled skyscraper, forty floors above Times Square, she felt as trapped as if she were in a stuck elevator. Nothing she wanted to do or learn or try would ever matter. Her entire life was already mapped out, and she was marching in a straight line toward one, and only one, end point: to be her father's Mini-Me.

And then one quiet Saturday morning at the end of September, she came across the memo that

changed everything.

It was about Jurgensenland, her father's annual charity event. Every Labor Day weekend, he turned the grounds of his Montauk estate into an amusement park, complete with spinning teacups, a Ferris wheel, an underwater submarine ride in one of his lakes, and a huge ball at night that cost ten thousand dollars a ticket. All of the proceeds went to Oxfam, the charity devoted to solving poverty and hunger. The Jurg had grown up poor in rural Pennsylvania and knew what it was like to go hungry. Whenever Carina worried that her dad had turned into a shameless moneymaking machine, she always took comfort in his charity work. Finding a solution had become one of his causes. When she saw *Re: Jurgensenland* in the subject line, she picked up the memo from the tray on Ed Bracken's desk. It was from her dad's accountant. It explained that the most recent event had raised three million dollars, but then she read:

Of this, \$2M will go directly to the aforementioned charity. The remaining \$1M will be diverted as discussed for Karl Jurgensen's other use.

Other use. She read the words over and over again. At first she didn't understand what they meant. And then it began to sink in.

He's keeping the money, she realized as a chill went over her. He's cheating the charity.

The more she thought about it, it began to make sense. It wouldn't be the first time her dad had cheated. While her mom had never told her that he'd been with another woman, she'd pieced enough together to explain their divorce. As she stood there in Ed's office with the memo in her hand, her thoughts flashed back to a night when she was ten years old, listening to her parents behind the closed bedroom door, her mother sobbing, her father yelling at the top of his lungs that *I can do whatever I damn well want; you deserve it if you're going to be so selfish.*

She looked behind her, out the door to Ed's office. His assistant had stepped away from her desk. She knew that she didn't have much time.

Quickly she walked the memo down to the copy room. Without stopping to think about it, she placed it on the glass, shut the top cover, and pressed Start. The copy spit out of the machine. A few seconds later she snuck the original back into the file folder and put it in the tray on Ed's desk. Then she folded the copy and stuck it in her messenger bag.

For the next six weeks, she kept the memo in the desk in her bedroom, hidden under her passport and her certification from scuba school. But she thought about it constantly. She talked about it with Lizzie and Hudson. And each night she lay in bed, wondering what would happen if she let it slip out into the world—say, over the Internet. She could always do that if things got really bad.

And then at the beginning of November, things got really bad.

"Ed says that you're not applying yourself," her father said one night after he called her into his office. He leaned back and forth in his swivel chair, stony-faced, and tapped his index finger on his lips, which was code for I've Had It. "He says that most of the time you're there, you're shopping on the Internet. Or that you skulk around, looking bored. And one time he found you asleep on the couch in your office."

She grabbed a rubber stress ball from his desk and started squeezing it. "It's not my fault if there isn't a lot for me to do," she said defensively.

"Then you *find* something to do," the Jurg snapped. "You walk around. You sit in on meetings.

Damn it, Carina, you have to *apply* yourself here. I can't do everything for you. You're supposed to be learning something here."

"Well, if you're so concerned about me learning something then why is your creepy manservant the one in charge of me?" she snapped back, feeling the sting of tears in her eyes.

"Because I have a company to run." He looked down at the stack of papers in front of him and shook his head. "This isn't a joke. I thought you were mature enough to know how to behave. This is my *company*. I guess I overestimated you."

Something that felt painful lodged itself in her throat. She was only trying to please him with this dumb internship, she thought. And now she was being criticized? It wasn't fair.

"Just don't embarrass me," he added, giving her a hard stare. "You're my daughter. Remember that." He uncapped his pen and returned to his work. "You can go now."

She wheeled around and stalked out of the room, too furious to cry. So it wasn't enough that she'd given up everything she loved to do. It wasn't enough that she'd sacrificed her Saturdays—and her social life. Now he was going to yell at her, too?

When she got to her room, she ran to her desk and opened the drawer. If she'd had any scruples about sending the Jurgensenland memo into cyberspace, they were gone now. Her dad was anything but a do-gooder. He was a jerk and a cheat, and she didn't care if the entire world knew it.

The next day, she scanned the memo into one of the Macs in the Chadwick computer lab and then wrote a sinister e-mail:

To Whom It May Concern:

I have reason to believe that Karl Jurgensen, net worth \$225 billion, may not be handing over all the money he raised from his last Jurgensenland charity event. Please see the attached document for proof. Thank you so much.

She created a fake e-mail address, using just her first initial and her middle name as ID. And then with one click, she sent it right to the Smoking Gun, a website known for breaking news stories—and exposing the secrets of the rich and famous. She left the lab and headed to Spanish, feeling very calm and satisfied, as though she'd had a great run. Finally, she'd gotten back at him.

When she got home from school a few hours later, she checked the website on her MacBook Air. The story was already up. A headline in big fire engine-red letters made her gulp: DO-GOODING BILLIONAIRE A THIEF? SEE THE DOCUMENT THAT MAY PROVE IT. Below it was the memo. Beside it, a caption called it a "scathing indictment" from an "unnamed source" within Karl Jurgensen's "inner circle." The words *Karl Jurgensen's other use* were highlighted and blown up, just in case people missed it.

Carina sat on her bed, staring at the screen of her laptop, her mouth open. She felt an immediate need to take it back. But she couldn't. She'd done it. There was no going back. Now it was up there, for the whole world to see...

She jumped as her bedroom door burst open. There, in the doorway, out of breath and red-faced, stood her dad. His jacket was off, the knot of his navy-blue-and-white-striped tie was askew, and his normally slicked-back hair was hanging in pieces over his forehead. He looked like he'd just run forty blocks. She'd never seen him look this upset before. He knew.

"Get your things," he said, still panting. "We're leaving. You have ten minutes."

"Where... where are we going?" she managed to ask. She was almost too stunned to talk.

"Ten minutes," he repeated, and then stormed out, leaving her door wide open as he disappeared

down the hall.

~~She grabbed her iPhone. She had to text Lizzie and Hudson. With her fingers trembling, she typed~~

OMG! Come to my house ASAP!!!!

But as she touched send, she knew it was pointless. They'd never get there in time. When the Jurg said ten minutes, he always meant eight.

She yanked out a duffel bag from underneath her bed as her mind raced in circles. How did he know she'd done it? And where were they going? Their apartment in Paris? Was he so mortified that he had to leave the country? Was he going to ship her off to Hawaii to live with her mother? For a time she'd wanted to go live with her mom, but she'd gotten over that by now. Maui was a twelve-hour plane ride and four time zones away. She'd never see her friends again.

"Carina?" her father yelled from downstairs. "Let's go!"

She threw whatever she could reach into the bag—a few pairs of her Stella McCartney underwear, her purple suede Pumas, her worn-in Cheap Monday skinny jeans, her MacBook. At the last moment, she grabbed the purple stress ball from her desk. She had a feeling she was going to need it.

She ran down the three flights of stairs, and then speed walked down the beige-carpeted hallway toward the front door. The walls were lined with part of her dad's art collection, and Carina said a silent good-bye to all of the paintings as she walked by: *Good-bye, Jasper Johns. Good-bye, Jackson Pollock.* Just next to the Andy Warhol soup can stood the staff. They were in their usual bon voyage huddle, ready to see them off, except this time they were looking at her like she wasn't coming back. Maia, the petite, sad-eyed housekeeper, gave her a teary smile. Nikita, still in her chef's apron, slipped her a bag of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies. Marco gave her a small, official-looking nod. Even Otto, the serious security guard, gave her a brave smile. "Good luck, kid," he whispered as she walked past, as if she were headed into mortal combat.

Just before she reached the front door, she craned her head to look at her dad's Basquiat one last time. It was simply a black crown against a sea of white paint, but it had always spoken to her, even though she didn't quite know what it meant. For all she knew, this would be the last time she'd ever see it. A tear blurred her vision, and then she blinked it away.

"Carina, come on!" her father shouted.

She walked out the front door and saw them waiting in the elevator: her father in his Burberry wool coat, staring coldly past her, and beside him, holding his garment bag and a small valise like it was his life's only purpose, Creepy Manservant himself, Ed Bracken. It was hard to believe, but his comb-over looked even thinner and greasier than usual.

"Hello, Carina," Ed said, giving her one of his typical smirks as she walked into the elevator.

And that's when it hit her. Ed had told her father on her. Somehow, he'd found out that she'd copied the memo and leaked it online. All he'd said was hello, but she knew this with as much certainty as she knew anything. As the elevator dropped down to the lobby, she promised herself that no matter what happened to her, she'd make Ed Bracken pay for this.

Out on the street, Max and the black Mercedes were already waiting for them. Ed handed Max her father's things and then took Carina's duffel bag off her shoulder. "There'll be more room for it in here," he said snidely, dropping it in the trunk. Carina got in the car on the other side from her dad and watched Ed practically salute him as they drove off. *Ugh*, she thought. Of course it had been him.

Now Carina watched as the Mercedes hung a left on Ninth Avenue and barreled straight into the mouth of the Lincoln Tunnel. Her heartbeat sped up into double time. She was definitely leaving New York.

“For your information, I didn’t steal that money,” her dad suddenly said, making her jump in the backseat. “I put it in a foundation. Do you know what a foundation is?”

She looked over at him. He’d put his BlackBerry away and was staring out the window at the blur of white tile inside the Lincoln Tunnel.

“Sort of,” she murmured.

“It’s for tax purposes,” he said slowly. “That extra million is *still* going to the charity, but through the foundation instead of me. If you’d just asked me, you would have known that. Instead, you went ahead and formed your own conclusions.” He turned toward her, and his eyes blazed at her in the dim light. “How could you think I would actually do such a thing?”

Easily, she wanted to say. But she just swallowed and looked away from him.

“Well, this is all going to go away very fast,” the Jurg said briskly, turning back to the window. “Tomorrow morning, I’m releasing a statement that every dime is going to charity, and it’s going to run in every newspaper I own and all the ones I don’t. By the end of tomorrow, nobody’ll even remember this. It’ll be swallowed up by ten more important stories. But that still leaves the problem of what to do with you.”

Carina felt the golf ball in her throat come back. It stretched upward toward her eyes, where it swelled dangerously to the brink of tears. She squeezed her stress ball.

“You’ve had a reckless streak since you were a little girl,” he went on, tapping his steepled finger on the car door. “You got it from your mother. And I stupidly thought you’d grow out of it.” He shook his head and gave a rueful chuckle. “It’s only gotten worse.”

They emerged from the tunnel into the wide-open darkness of New Jersey. As they took the curve of the New Jersey Expressway, Carina could see the skyline of the city west across the Hudson, already so far away it looked like a painting.

“So where are you sending me?” she asked.

“California,” he said crisply. “There’s a school a few hours north of LA, near Big Sur.”

Carina was silent. California: it was almost as far as Hawaii. “Is it a military school or something?”

“Not quite,” her father said. “But close.”

“And why are you coming?”

“To make sure that you actually enroll. I can’t trust you to do that on your own. I wish I could, but I can’t.”

The car turned off the expressway and onto a deserted two-lane highway, and then they finally turned onto a gravel drive, past a sign that read TETERBORO AIRPORT. A chain-link fence opened for them like magic, and they drove into the airport. There, on the tarmac, under the ghostly white lights was her father’s Gulfstream jet, its tiny door flipped open and waiting to ferry her across the country.

“But when will I come back?” she asked, trying to keep her voice even. “When will I come back to New York?”

“June,” he said.

“What about Christmas?” she asked more desperately. “Will I come home then?”

“You’ll spend that with your mother,” he said. “In Hawaii.”

The car finally coasted to a stop a few feet from the plane. Carina heard the trunk pop open. Her heart was racing. She needed to get to her phone. She needed to let Lizzie and Hudson know what wa

happening before she got on that plane.

~~Someone opened the door on her right, letting in the near-freezing air. The roar of the plane's engine was deafening. "Hello, Miss Jurgensen," yelled the airport manager. "Welcome to Teterboro."~~

She leaped past him and ran around to the back of the car. An airport technician with bright orange headphones was lifting her bag out of the trunk.

"I'll take that!" she yelled, and grabbed it out of his hand. *Spoiled brat*, she could practically hear him think, but she didn't care right now.

Her father was already striding toward the plane, the airport manager trotting after him, carrying his things. She didn't have much time. She crouched down to the ground, unzipped the bag, and felt around frantically for her iPhone. At last she felt its glassy, cold surface under her clothes. She swiped the screen with her finger and went to her e-mail.

HELP! Jurg shipping me off to CALI!

she wrote, tapping the screen as quickly as she could.

"Carina!" Her father yelled from where he stood on the bottom stair. "Let's go!"

She threw her phone in her bag and zipped it back up. With the bag over her shoulder, she hurried to the plane, sweat beading her hairline, her heart beating so fast that she thought it might explode. From this moment on, all she had was herself. Her friends couldn't save her. Her old life was gone. But no matter what, she refused to cry. She would never cry in front of her dad. Not ever.

chapter 2

“Welcome back to the Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles, sir,” said the blond, tan hotel manager, clearing his throat as he slid the key card through the slot and pressed the elevator button to the top floor. “I trust you had a good trip?”

“It was very nice, thank you,” the Jurg replied to his shoes.

“Glad to hear it, sir,” the manager said, standing stiffly against the wall with his hands behind his back. “And I know you’ve stayed with us before, but may I remind you of our twenty-four-hour bottle service? I mean, butler service?” he quickly added.

Chill out, Carina wanted to say from where she was slumped in the corner, duffel bag over her shoulder. She’d seen this kind of thing so many times before. The nervous smiles, the strained formality, the unnecessary information. People always got so weird around her dad. Waiters forgot the specials, busboys dropped forks, and women automatically leaned forward to show off their cleavage. She called it the Cha-Ching Effect. Nothing had a more powerful—and embarrassing—effect on people than a billionaire.

“Here we are,” the manager said too loudly when the elevator coasted to a stop.

They stepped out onto the hushed floor and walked down a long, thickly carpeted hall. Finally, they reached the doors at the very end. A gold placard on the wall read PRESIDENTIAL SUITE.

“You’ll see we took your advice about the flat screen, Mr. Jurgensen,” the manager said earnestly as he unlocked the doors with another swipe of the key card. “We’ve hung it on the wall without the glare from the window this time.”

The manager held the doors open and they walked into a black marble foyer. Beyond it Carina could see a palatial, high-ceilinged living room. A baby grand piano stood near a pair of French doors. On the sleek glass coffee table was the usual stunning arrangement of white roses, and next to it stood a gift basket that she knew would be stuffed with Vosges chocolate bars and rare French cheeses.

“Are you familiar with our Scotch selection, sir?” the manager asked. “We have a variety of ten-year-old malts...”

Carina veered to the left and straight out of the room, eager to skip the spiel. She needed to be alone.

She walked past the dining room and the kitchen and around the corner into a spacious, light beige bedroom with a canopied king bed. She dropped her bag on the floor, flopped onto the bed, and yawned into the silk bedspread. She was completely exhausted. For the entire six-hour flight, they’d stayed on opposite ends of the plane and hadn’t spoken a word. Ignoring someone on a Gulfstream wasn’t easy to do, after all. The Jurg sat up near the front reading the *Economist* while she lay on a couch in the back, keeping an eye on the screen that monitored their trip. With every state they crossed, she felt her throat tighten a little more. Even Marsha, their ever-chipper flight attendant, sensed her anxiety. “Everything okay?” she asked Carina brightly as she set down a Diet Coke and her favorite grilled artichoke.

“Fine!” Carina had said, tearing off an artichoke leaf with a fake smile.

Now it felt good to be alone. She hopped off the bed and padded toward the marble bathroom. But when she flipped on the light, she almost didn’t recognize herself in the mirror. She’d done and

undone her ponytail so many times that her blond, chin-length hair looked dark and greasy, and pieces of it fell in chunks around her face. Her brown eyes were bloodshot, and underneath them were dark purplish circles. Her tan and normally freckled skin looked sallow. She looked like a prisoner of war, and this was only the beginning. For the next eight months she'd be held captive in some quasi-military school on the coast. Of course her friends had been right. Releasing that memo had been a huge mistake.

But maybe this was a weird blessing in disguise, she thought, as she splashed some cold water on her face. She'd been miserable living with her dad. Not in a conscious way, but in a low-grade, just-under-the-surface way. He didn't care about her—he didn't even *know* her. And she'd figured out long ago that the only reason he'd wanted her to live with him was just so her mother couldn't have her. So maybe being shipped off was a good thing. If only she could get used to the idea of never seeing Lizzie and Hudson again.

She left the bathroom and went back to her bag. It was time to hear her friends' messages. She knelt on the floor and pulled out her iPhone. There were ten voice mails.

"C? We're standing in your lobby. The doorman said you left. We don't know what's going on. Call us!" Even though Lizzie almost sounded mad, Carina felt a pang of sadness at hearing her voice.

"Carina? Oh my God... Carina? Where are you? We know what happened. We know you sent out that Smoking Gun thing. Oh C, why'd you do it? Did you really have to? Oh C, where are you?" Hudson always sounded like an exasperated, terrified mom, but Carina missed her so much she almost wanted to cry.

Then she scrolled through their texts.

WHERE R U?!!

We <3 u, C!

U ok?

The last text was from Lizzie, sent at ten p.m. New York time.

Hold on. Think yer gonna b fine. Stay tuned...

Carina looked at this one in disbelief. Lizzie wasn't usually this optimistic. And how, exactly, was she going to be fine?

It was the middle of the night in New York right now, so she couldn't call them back. She thought of her mom in Hawaii. It was only ten o'clock there.

She dialed her mom's number and listened to the phone ring once, twice, three times. Finally her voice mail came on.

"Hi, you've reached Mimi... Leave me some love." *BEEP.*

Carina slid her finger across the screen and hung up. She could leave a message, but she had no idea when, and if, her mom would return it. Mimi was a little flaky when it came to messages. When her parents had first gotten divorced, she and her mom had been in constant touch, scheduling phone

calls between New York and Maui and IMing with each other at night. But over the past couple of years, their contact had dwindled to a weekly phone call and an occasional text. Carina suspected her dad had something to do with that. He hadn't even wanted Carina to be in touch with her mom at all when they'd first split up.

Carina yawned again, feeling her eyelids start to droop. She'd write her friends in the morning and try her mom again later in the day. Right now, she just needed to sleep.

Without even bothering to get undressed, she pulled back the covers and climbed into bed. She pulled the thick, soft sheets over her, breathing in their powdery hotel scent, and felt a small measure of comfort. She'd done something terrible, but there was one thing she was proud of.

At least he didn't see me cry, she thought, just before she drifted off to sleep.

*

“Carina?”

She opened her eyes halfway. Even though she'd forgotten to close the curtains before falling asleep, the room was still dark.

“The car'll be here in fifteen minutes. Time to get up.”

At first she could barely make out the slim, tall figure of her dad in the doorway. But as her eyes adjusted to the darkness she saw that he was already dressed in a suit and had the newspaper in his hand.

“Fifteen minutes,” he repeated. “Let's go.”

After he left, Carina propped herself up on her elbows. Her head felt enormous and heavy, like a bowling ball filled with concrete. The clock on the bedside table said six a.m. Leave it to her dad to keep the torture coming.

She dragged herself to the bathroom, where she showered and brushed her teeth with the complimentary toothbrush and paste. She pulled out a Splendid tee and a pair of skinny jeans. Finally she dressed, went to her bag, and picked up her iPhone. There were already two more texts from her friends, sent before she'd woken up.

WHERE R U??

R U ALIVE????

Carina glanced at her watch. It was almost nine thirty in New York. Lizzie would be in honors English and Hudson would be in Spanish. It was time to let them know what was going on.

Except how could she begin to tell them what she needed to in a text? She had to call them. But who first? Lizzie or Hudson?

“Carina?” her father called out to her from the dining room. “Breakfast!”

She tossed her iPhone back in her bag and headed into the dining room. The longer she held off on telling her friends about this, the longer she could pretend that it wasn't happening.

The Jurg sat at the head of the long mahogany table, reading the *Wall Street Journal*. “Eat,” he said, nodding at the lavish spread of eggs, bacon, fruit, croissants, and orange juice he'd ordered. Clearly, he didn't know that she only ate oatmeal for breakfast. “We only have a few minutes until the car's here. And it's a long drive.” He fluttered his paper and went back to it, as if she weren't even there.

She looked out the French doors to the balcony. The sky was just beginning to turn an indigo blue and the palm tree-lined streets of Beverly Hills below looked deserted. It was going to be a long day, and it hadn't even started yet. Suddenly the idea of being trapped with her dad in a town car for hours as they drove up the coast was unbearable.

"You don't have to come with me," she said, speaking to him for the first time. "I can go by myself, it's not a big deal."

"The plane's picking me up in Monterey," he said, turning the page.

"Dad." Carina walked up to one of the hard-backed chairs and held on to it to steady herself. She'd been trying to think of the best way to say this since last night. She had to be careful. She was so tired that anything was liable to tumble out of her mouth. "I'm sorry. I really am. I just want you to know that."

He kept his eyes on the paper. "It's a little late for that," he said.

"But I'm *apologizing*," she pointed out.

He folded the paper noisily and turned the full force of his disapproving stare on her. "I don't understand, Carina. I think I've been a pretty decent parent to you. Even a good parent. I've denied you nothing, for starters. I give you anything you want. And this is how you act?"

"Dad—" she attempted.

He threw the paper down on his empty plate. "Don't I send you to the best school in the city? Don't I pay your credit card bills? Don't I send you on every mountain climbing trip under the sun?"

"Yeah, but..." Her mind whirled around, struggling to come up with an argument. "Is that all that being a father means to you? *Paying* for stuff?"

She knew as soon as she said it that it had been a mistake. The Jurg didn't blink but his right eyebrow twitched, the way it always did when he was about to really get furious.

Ding-dong.

Both turned their heads toward the front door. The doorbell rang again.

"I'll get it," she said, thrilled at the chance to leave the room. It was probably another overeager room service waiter, checking to see whether they were done with breakfast.

She ran out to the foyer and threw open the heavy front door. Instead of a room service waiter it was a short, slim woman sporting a black suit, fuchsia lipstick, and tightly curled black hair. In her right hand she held a shiny caramel leather attaché case with aged clasps, the kind that held ticking bombs and spy secrets in the movies.

"I'm Erica Straker," the woman said abruptly, thrusting out her hand. "Carina, right?"

Carina shook her hand loosely. She wasn't used to adults addressing her by name. "Uh, yes," she said.

"I'm with the law firm of Cantwell and Schrum, here in Century City," she said briskly. "Is your father here?"

"Can I help you?" said the Jurg. He'd come to stand behind Carina.

"Erica Straker. We've met before," she said brusquely. This time she didn't offer her hand. "I represent your ex-wife."

The Jurg didn't move, and without waiting for an invitation Erica Straker stepped right into the room.

"What's this about, Ms. Straker?" the Jurg asked, straining to sound polite.

"My client's been notified about your plan to send Carina away to boarding school," she said matter-of-factly as she lifted her attaché case and placed it on a glass credenza by the door. "And the custody agreement you and my client signed says you are not to change your daughter's living

arrangements without my client's permission." She popped the case and took out a thick, stapled document that seemed to be hundreds of pages. She hefted it out of the case and handed it to the Jurg. "Maybe you forgot that clause?" she asked, cocking her head, as if she didn't already know the answer.

The Jurg swiped the document out of her hands. "These plans came up very quickly," he muttered. "And as you probably know, she's not the easiest person to reach."

Ms. Straker smiled, showing her coffee-stained teeth. "Well, my client understands that you may have forgotten the agreement, so she wanted me to come by and remind you. Of course she'd like Carina to stay in New York. And if you do choose to disregard her wishes," she went on, "she'll have ample grounds to sue you for custody. And she knows how much you'd hate that."

Carina looked down at the gold and crimson Persian rug, aware that her eyes were bugging out of her head. *Lizzie*, she thought. This was why she'd sent her that text saying that everything was going to be fine. Lizzie and Hudson had told her mom. They'd saved her.

The Jurg cleared his throat. "All right then. Tell your client I'm impressed by her quick response. I didn't think she'd have the time. What with her tight yoga schedule and her meditation commitments and all."

With the smugness of someone who knows they've just beaten their opponent—badly—Erica clicked her attaché case shut and pulled it off the table. "Have a nice trip back east, Mr. Jurgensen. And you take care, Carina," she said, winking. Then she walked out the door.

As soon as the door shut, the Jurg tossed the agreement into the trash. "I suppose you had nothing to do with this," he said. His cheeks had turned a dark shade of pink. Karl Jurgensen was not used to being foiled in his plans, much less in front of his daughter.

"I didn't," she said. "I didn't even call her—"

"Don't think for a minute I'm going to forget about this," he interrupted. "Now get your things. We're leaving."

"Ten minutes?" she asked sarcastically. She couldn't help it.

The Jurg turned around and glared at her. "Now," he said.

Carina rushed back into her room and grabbed her iPhone. Now she knew exactly what to say to her friends.

I'M COMING HOME!! she tapped out as the California sun slowly lit up the sky.

chapter 3

“You can pull over here!” Carina yelled from the backseat. “Thanks, Max!”

Max dutifully pulled the black Range Rover over to the curb as Carina unclicked her seat belt. Up the block she could see Lizzie and Hudson turn into the doors of the Chadwick School. She’d gotten home too late from California to call them the night before, and now she couldn’t wait to see them.

“Oh my God, *stop*,” she said as Max opened his car door. “My dad can make you drive me to school, but he can’t make you open the door for me.”

“Have a good day, C,” Max said, smiling at her in the rearview mirror. “Glad you’re back.”

“So am I,” she said before she slammed the door. She took off in a wild run up the block, bounded through the doors, and attacked her best friends in the lobby with a bear hug that practically knocked them down. “Hey guys!” she yelled.

“Oh my God, *hi!!!*” Lizzie yelled back, squeezing Carina so hard that she almost couldn’t breathe. At nearly six feet tall, with huge hazel eyes, full lips, and red curls, Lizzie was the most unique-looking girl Carina had ever seen. But Lizzie had always been uncomfortable with her unruly and unusual looks, especially because her mom was Katia Summers, the supermodel. Over the past couple months Lizzie had been “discovered”—first by a photographer and then by the whole fashion world—and been dubbed the “new face of beauty.” Carina hadn’t been the least bit surprised. Whenever Lizzie walked into a room, people always noticed her—and Carina often wished that she had the same effect on people.

“Yay! You made it!” Hudson cried, her sea green eyes lighting up as she threw her arms around Carina. Hudson was just a little bit taller than Carina but tinier and more delicate, with wavy, shoulder-length black hair and flawless French toast-colored skin. Most of the time Carina felt like a mess just standing next to Hudson, who was always wearing something from either the most avant-garde boutiques in TriBeCa or the coolest vintage stores in the East Village. Her look was bohemian, which meant lots of floaty tunic dresses in metallic fabrics, futuristic necklaces, huge hoop earrings, and floppy hats. Carina loved accessories, too, but generally stuck to gold and silver earrings and bracelets. Hudson’s ability to mix beads, gold, and gun metal was completely beyond her.

“Oh my God, you guys *saved my life*,” Carina gushed. “You should have seen my dad’s face when that lawyer showed up. It was the first time in his life he’d heard the word *no*. I almost wanted to record it on my iPhone.”

“It was Hudson’s idea,” Lizzie said proudly, using her long legs to take the steps to the Upper School two at a time. “She remembered that time when we were talking about boarding school, and you said your mom would need to sign off on it.”

“But Lizzie was the one who actually *called* your mom,” Hudson said, pulling off her gloves. “She talked to her for, like, an hour.”

“You did?” Carina asked. “How’d you get her on the phone?”

“I don’t know, she just picked up,” Lizzie said, shrugging. “And get this: she’d seen my picture in *Rayon*. She knew about the whole modeling thing. I couldn’t believe it. I’d forgotten how cool she was.”

“Yeah,” Carina said wistfully. Mimi Jurgensen was really cool. Much cooler than the man she’d

married. It was never quite clear to Carina what had drawn her parents together. The Jurg was a tense workaholic who cared only about making money, and her mom was a free-spirited Sarah Lawrence grad who couldn't have cared less about belonging to the Maidstone Club or driving a vintage Jaguar. "So... was she really upset when you told her what was happening?" Carina asked.

"Oh yeah," said Lizzie. "Completely. How'd she sound when *you* talked to her?"

"I didn't, I mean, I haven't yet," Carina replied, feeling a little uncomfortable. When she'd gotten off the plane in New York, she'd thought there'd be a voice mail from her mom on her phone, but there was only a text.

Glad to hear things worked out. I miss you! Love, Mom.

Her mom now ran a yoga studio in Maui. From what she could tell, that's all people really did there, besides surf.

"So how are things with your dad now?" Hudson asked, unknitting her cashmere scarf. "Is he still totally furious?"

"I have no idea. We've managed to not speak to each other since the whole lawyer standoff. Which I'm totally fine with, by the way."

Lizzie opened the swinging door that led to the Upper School and they joined the streams of people walking up and down the halls.

"He got the story taken down from the site and put out a press release saying it was a lie and everything," Carina added, breaking into a smile as she waved at people. "So I think it's totally over. Thank God."

"You sure about that?" Lizzie asked skeptically.

"Well, he did say he wasn't going to forget about it or something like that, but I apologized," Carina said. "And it wasn't like I said he was definitely stealing."

Lizzie and Hudson both gave Carina a look.

"What?" she asked them.

"You basically said that your dad was a *thief*," Lizzie pointed out. "That's libel. People go to jail for that."

"But he didn't do it. And have you guys forgotten what he did to *me*?" Carina asked hotly. "If I didn't do something now, he'd have had me working for him full-time in two years. I probably wouldn't have even graduated!" Carina pulled her blond hair back into a ponytail, which always calmed her down. "Look, if he's got some huge horrible punishment coming my way, then fine. I know I screwed up. But I had to do something. And I really *did* think that he was doing something wrong."

"I want to know how he caught you," Hudson put in. "Did you ever find out?"

"Oh, this is the best: Creepy Manservant."

"No way!" Hudson shrieked.

"Are you sure it was him?" Lizzie asked.

"Totally. He was in the apartment when it all went down. And he gave me this really smug smile when my dad was yelling at me. But don't worry. I'm getting him back. I have a plan for revenge."

"Oh no, not more revenge," Lizzie groaned.

"No, this is awesome." Carina took a page out of her book bag. "Look at this." She handed the page

to Lizzie and Hudson.

“‘If I never feel you in my arms again,’” Lizzie read out loud. “‘If I never feel your tender kiss again, if I never hear “I love you” now and then...’” Lizzie stopped and looked up with a confused squint. “Isn’t this a song?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Carina said. “Look at the bottom.”

Lizzie and Hudson both glanced down at the words scrawled in huge letters at the bottom of the page.

I WANT YOU.

“I don’t get it,” Hudson said.

“I’m gonna make him think he has a secret admirer!” Carina cried.

“That’s revenge?” Lizzie asked.

“Come on, he’s the saddest, grossest, unsexiest guy on the face of the earth, and he’s probably never had a girl be into him, *ever*,” Carina said. She tossed the letter back into her bag. “When he realizes it’s a joke, he’ll be totally humiliated. It’s the least I can do.”

“Well, good luck with that,” Lizzie said, patting Carina’s shoulder.

They were just about to walk into homeroom when Carina heard the unmistakable *clip-clop* of kitten heels coming down the hall behind her. She instantly knew who it was.

“Oh no,” Lizzie said under her breath. “Incoming.”

“Oh please, God, no,” Hudson whispered. “No.”

“Hey guys!” a familiar voice called out.

The three of them turned around.

Ava Elting was walking straight toward them in short, determined steps, wearing a newly whitened smile and the largest distressed-leather Kooba bag that Carina had ever seen.

“Hold up!” she called out, waving a perfectly manicured hand. “I need you guys!”

“She *needs* us?” Carina said out of the side of her mouth.

“I’m *sure*,” Hudson griped.

Five days after her notorious breakup with Todd Piedmont, the reigning queen of Chadwick’s social elite looked more perfectly groomed than ever. Her auburn curls were pulled back from her face with the usual jeweled barrette, and the diamond A on her necklace glinted in the hollow of her collarbone. Her oxford—Ava never wore turtlenecks, not even in November—was unbuttoned just low enough to show off a hint of lace-trimmed camisole against her artificially tanned skin. There was no indication that she’d been a crying, lying wreck just a few days ago, when Todd Piedmont had finally come to his senses and broken up with her. Afterward, to save face, Ava spread a ridiculous story about him cheating on her. *Only Ava Elting can do that*, Carina thought, *and waltz into school a few days later like it never happened*.

“So hey, you guys,” Ava said in an overly friendly tone. “I just wanted to ask you all a really quick question.”

“Go ahead,” Carina mumbled, speaking for the group. Lizzie, Todd’s new girlfriend, was respectfully silent, and Hudson was just being shy, as usual.

“So I think I told you guys that I’m the chair of the Silver Snowflake Ball this year?” Ava said excitedly, letting her voice turn up into a question. “I’m soooo psyched. The charity we’re raising

money for is amazing. It's the Make New York Beautiful Foundation."

"The what?" Carina asked.

"It gives free cosmetic surgery to the underprivileged. And the dance is shaping up to be an *amaaaazing* event. So amazing I'm pretty sure it's gonna make it into the *New York Times*."

"Really?" Lizzie asked, trying not to laugh.

"Well, the style section," Ava clarified, wrinkling her nose. "You know how they mention all the great parties of the week on Sunday? That's sort of my goal with this."

"Oh," Carina said. *Reach for the skies*, she thought.

"Which *reminds* me," Ava went on, flashing another blindingly white smile at Lizzie and Hudson. "I think I asked you guys a few weeks ago if your moms had anything they could donate? To the raffle? Do you guys remember?"

Lizzie and Hudson studied the shiny wood floor.

"I was thinking tickets to your mom's concert?" Ava said to Hudson. "Or dinner with her after?"

Carina almost laughed out loud. Holla Jones, Hudson's pop star mom, would rather die than eat dinner with two strangers.

"And maybe your mom has some awesome vintage Alaïa dress," Ava said to Lizzie. "Or she could donate some lingerie from her line."

Lizzie turned even paler than usual as she hid behind her massive red curls. Katia had just started her own lingerie line, and Lizzie was still mortified by it. "I can try," Lizzie hedged, eyeing the wood floor.

"And you," Ava said to Carina, narrowing her eyes as she played with her diamond A necklace. "I was going to ask if *you* wanted to be on the Executive Planning Committee."

"You were?" Carina asked, too surprised to laugh. "What is that?"

"It's a bunch of people who meet a few times and talk about the event," Ava said. "But it's mostly having your name on the invitation. Anyway, it's an honor. We only ask the most socially viable people to be on it."

Ugh, Carina thought. The only reason Ava thought she was socially viable was because she had money. It didn't matter that Carina had never once gone to the polo matches out in Bridgehampton, or done cotillion in fifth grade, or been to any other fancy, two-hundred-dollar-a-ticket dance, or anything else that Ava would consider "social." It was just the Cha-Ching Effect, plain and simple. She was cool in Ava's opinion simply because her dad was rich.

"No thanks," Carina said. "It's not really my thing."

Ava raised one of her expertly arched brows. "Okay, fine," she said, sounding a little offended. "And you guys can let me know about that other stuff," she said to Lizzie and Hudson, raising her voice a little as if they couldn't hear her. "See ya."

Once Ava had sauntered away down the hall, Lizzie clapped her hand over her nose. "Oh my God. Is it me or does she *shower* in Marc Jacobs Daisy?"

"Executive Committee?" Carina cried. "More like the Crazy Committee. Even the Lower School knows how she lied about Todd."

"And socially *viable*?" Hudson asked, her green eyes wide with disgust. "What does that even mean?"

"I guess it's just being able to have your name on an invitation," Lizzie said, rolling her eyes.

"At least she's being honest about how lame it is," Hudson pointed out. "I guess it was nice of her to ask you."

"Yeah, well, I'd rather have my eyeballs poked out than be involved with her stupid dance," Carina

said as they walked into homeroom.

Carina realized that Lizzie was making a beeline to the back of the room, and then she saw why: Todd sat in the back row next to three empty desks that he'd claimed for them. He looked adorable as usual, with his floppy brown hair and baby-deer-like blue eyes.

"So are you guys officially going out now?" Carina whispered to Lizzie as they approached him. She'd heard about their epic makeout session in Washington Square Park.

"I think so," Lizzie whispered into her curls. "But don't say anything."

"No problem." Inside, Carina felt a small twinge of something. Not jealousy. Nobody deserved an adoring boyfriend more than Lizzie. But as long as the three of them had been friends (which had been since they were drinking juice boxes and having naptime), none of them had ever had a serious boyfriend. Now, it seemed, Todd would be joining their trio. And as much as she liked him, Carina wasn't sure if she loved that idea.

Carina pushed the thought out of her mind as she sat down next to Lizzie and waved to Todd. After all, Todd's dad was going to be charged with some pretty heavy stuff after he was caught stealing from his company. The least she could do was let him sit next to them in homeroom.

"Hey, Todd," she said as she slid into a desk. "What's up?"

Todd returned Carina's high five. "Not much. Good to have you back."

"Thanks," Carina said.

"How are you?" he asked Lizzie, turning to her.

He reached out and grabbed her hand under their desks. Carina turned away. Of course she was happy for her friend, but PDA this early in the morning wasn't her thing, either.

chapter 4

“So I have to say, I’ve never really appreciated New York so much as I have today,” Carina announced, just before she bit into her favorite meal at the diner: a turkey burger topped with Swiss cheese and cranberry sauce. “I bet they don’t have burgers like this in California.”

“If they do, you wouldn’t be allowed to eat the fries,” Lizzie said, stealing some of Carina’s from across the table.

Next to her, Hudson put down her fork and let out a long, noisy yawn. “Sorry, guys,” she said. “This album’s kicking my butt.”

“You’re still not done recording?” Carina asked.

“We had to start all over, remember?” Hudson said, trying to spear a cherry tomato in her salad. “We had to move to another studio, redo all the songs, change musicians. All because my mom thinks I need to be less Starbucks easy listening and more Christina Aguilera,” she said wryly.

“But the song we saw you doing that day in the studio was so beautiful,” Lizzie said. “What happened?”

“My mom thought it was boring,” Hudson replied. “Welcome to my world.”

Pop icon Holla Jones had very definite opinions about turning her only child into a star. With her soulful voice, incredible songwriting skills, and intense presence, Hudson had everything it took to be a cross between Fiona Apple and Nina Simone. But Holla wanted Hudson to be a frothy pop star with top forty hits, just like herself. Lizzie and Carina were starting to wonder if that was something that Hudson actually wanted.

“Is your producer at least on your side?” Lizzie said.

“Not anymore,” she said, sipping her iced tea. “We started out on the same page. You know, no samples, no fake beats, no synthesizers. Just something low-fi and rootsy. Now it’s like that never happened. He does everything my mom says. It’s really annoying.”

“Sounds like he and Creepy Manservant should go on a mandate,” Carina said, taking another bite of burger. “The way that he kisses my dad’s butt is shocking.”

“Maybe your producer’s just afraid of your mom,” Lizzie offered.

“Speaking of being afraid of people, what’s the latest with Martin Meloy?” Carina asked Lizzie.

Lizzie made a face as she slurped some of her chicken noodle soup. “After I walked out of the shoot he told *Women’s Wear Daily* that he had another ‘vision’ for his new line,” she said, using finger quotes. “But at least I got to keep his new bag.” She picked up the bag he’d dubbed “The Lizzie,” made of white leather covered with silver buckles. “I’m wondering how much I could get for it on eBay.”

“Oh, don’t sell it, keep it as a souvenir,” Hudson said. “And you’re always going to be a model. Who cares about Martin Meloy?”

“Andrea’s so much cooler anyway, and I’m doing those portraits for her show at the Gagosian,” Lizzie said. “But right now I’m just trying to get back into my writing. And my relationship.”

“I can’t believe you just said *relationship*,” Carina teased.

Lizzie blushed.

“I think it’s cute,” Hudson said. “I swear to God, Todd just gets hotter every day. I’m really happy

for you, Lizbutt.”

“Yeah, me too,” Carina said, a little less enthusiastically.

“Thanks, you guys,” Lizzie said, letting out a nervous giggle. “And Hudson, don’t look now, but I think your stalker is on her way over.”

Carina looked up from her turkey burger to see Hillary Crumple, Hudson’s biggest eighth-grade fan, maneuvering her way through the room. Her thin brown hair had mostly escaped her ponytail, but her square pink-and-blue backpack was firmly strapped to both shoulders. Today she wore a magenta sweater embroidered with one giant heart edged with sequins and an enormous kilt that hit the middle of her shins. Carina almost respected Hillary for being such an unapologetic dork, but she didn’t like the way Hillary followed Hudson around school trying desperately to be her friend. Last week Hudson had gotten a call on her cell from a celebrity tabloid, just days after Hillary had practically forced Hudson to give up her number at the Chadwick dance. As she watched Hillary trudge over to their table, Carina got another prickly feeling along her skin. Hillary Crumple was bad news.

“Are you still getting those calls from the tabloids?” Carina asked Hudson.

Hudson nodded but put her hand on Carina’s arm. “*Don’t* say anything, okay? I really don’t think Hillary Crumple is selling my number.”

“No, she just has a shrine to you in her bedroom,” Carina joked.

Hudson gave her a look. “I’m serious, C. *Don’t* say anything. I can hold her off.”

Carina nodded, but she shot Hillary a suspicious glare as she reached their table, just in case.

“Hi, Hudson,” Hillary chirped, her yellow-green eyes fixed on her idol. “Those are really cool earrings.”

“Thanks,” Hudson said, touching her gold leaf drops.

“I need to find earrings like that,” Hillary said in her rapid-fire voice. “Maybe in silver. My mom says silver looks better on me than gold. Maybe we could go shopping for earrings this weekend? Are you around? Maybe down in SoHo? Or NoLiTa?”

Lizzie and Carina nudged Hudson’s shin under the table.

“I would love to, Hillary, but I’m gonna be in the studio this weekend,” Hudson said sweetly.

“That’s okay,” Hillary said, still in rapid-fire mode. “I can come down there and hang out with you if you need company. Or just someone to play Xbox with. I heard that recording studios have Xbox. Does yours have Xbox?”

Hudson looked pained. Carina and Lizzie nudged her under the table again.

“You didn’t give Hudson’s number out to anyone, did you?” Carina asked, unable to help herself. Under the table, she felt Hudson give her a swift kick right back.

“*Me?*” Hillary turned to look at Carina for the first time. “No way. Who would I have given it to?”

The three friends exchanged a look. “No one, just forget it,” Hudson said quickly.

“Then I’ll give you a call this weekend,” Hillary said brightly, stepping away from the table. “That cool?”

“Great,” Hudson said, forcing a smile. “See you this weekend.”

“Oh, and I’m awesome at *Rock Band*,” Hillary added just as she turned around and almost bodychecked a waiter with her boxy backpack.

“Are you *crazy?*” Carina yelled as soon as Hillary was gone. “Now she’s never gonna leave you alone.”

“What was I supposed to do? Tell her she can’t call me?”

“*Yes!*” Lizzie and Carina both said at once. “Or at least change your number,” Carina added.

“I’m not going to change my number because of a couple of weird calls,” said Hudson.

“Remember that when you end up in the *National Enquirer*,” Carina said, taking another bite of her burger. “You are way, way too nice. If you don’t start channeling your inner bee-yatch sometime soon you’re gonna regret it.”

Hudson shrugged and went back to her salad. Carina sipped her Diet Coke. She knew that she could be bossy sometimes, but someone had to toughen Hudson up. If only to help her deal with Holla.

Just as she was about to take another delicious bite, Carina looked out the window at the street and froze. There, only a few feet away, was Carter McLean. He was standing on the sidewalk, talking to his friends as he ate a slice of take-out pizza from the place on Ninety-first Street. The edges of his brown curly hair lifted in the wind. As he laughed at something someone said, his green eyes glistened in the sun. Carina felt her heart do a bungee jump right into her stomach. Thank God she hadn’t been sent to boarding school. *Thank God.*

Carter was a sophomore, a track star, and one of the hottest guys in the city. She’d worshipped him from afar ever since he’d smiled at her in line for popcorn at the East Hampton movie theater. She’d realized that it was purely an accident, but then last week at Ilona’s party, Carina had caught him staring at her. Now she couldn’t get him out of her mind. He hung out with the coolest crowd at Chadwick—a group of superrich, superindependent kids who traveled in a pack to each other’s houses all over the world. Nobody seemed to have parents, or if they did, nobody seemed to bother running plans past them. Crazy rumors flew about their adventures clubbing in South Beach and chilling at celebrity parties in Malibu. Carter was the unquestioned leader of the group, as famous for being a daredevil as he was for breaking girls’ hearts. She knew that of all the guys at Chadwick he was her boyfriend, just waiting to happen.

Now, almost as if he could read her mind, Carter turned and looked through the window, right at her. Her heart stopped. His green eyes locked on hers, a playful smile curled around the edges of his mouth, and Carina gulped. She had to look away before she threw up her burger.

“C, what’s wrong with you?” Lizzie asked, squinting at her. “Are you sick?”

“Carter McLean just looked at me again,” she whispered, nodding toward the window. “Don’t look.”

Lizzie and Hudson both craned their necks to take a quick look, but Carter was back to talking to his supercool friends, Laetitia and Anton. Laetitia Dunn was a tall, rangy blond sophomore whose chilly, bored look said she’d done it all, seen it all, and had nothing to say about any of it. She was supposedly dating a twenty-five-year-old male model who lived in Paris. Anton West had dark hair and piercing brown eyes and never smiled. Carina found them both pretty intimidating.

“That’s the second time in a week,” Hudson said, impressed. “He’s really checking you out, C.”

“Okay,” Carina said, wiping her hands on a napkin. “I’m gonna go talk to him.” She stood up.

“Now?” Hudson asked.

“Yeah, why not? I mean, he obviously wants me to.”

“I don’t know,” Lizzie said. “I get a weird vibe from him. And his friends.”

“I’m not gonna talk to his friends,” Carina argued.

“He seems kind of full of himself,” Lizzie added.

“He’s *confident*,” Carina corrected.

“He’d have to be,” Hudson added. “Didn’t he just climb Denali or something?”

“I heard it was hang gliding over the Sahara,” Carina put in, wrapping her scarf around her neck.

“Well, go work your Carina magic,” Lizzie said, with a patient smile. “We’ll just sit here and watch.”

As she set off past the tables toward the door, Carina felt the adrenaline start to kick in. She loved

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