

Chapter One

“Run!” I shouted. “Full speed, Maya. Go, go, go!”

My best friend sprinted across the schoolyard as she looked back at the empty track field. Suddenly she tripped and fell to the grass, barely breaking her fall with her hands. Maya scrambled across the ground, panting.

"This way," I yelled. "Come on!"

She swept her long black hair out of her face and looked my way, her eyes wide with fear. She struggled to climb to her knees, then tried to stand up.

"Ow!" she yelped as she took a step. She hopped on one leg. "My ankle. I think it's sprained."

"Ignore the pain," I cried. "Run!"

Maya limped ahead, looking over her shoulder. "Someone help me."

Before she could take another step, the world went dark. I looked up from my camera. Denise had blocked my shot and ruined my take. She was the monster queen of our middle school and could destroy a student's life with just one rumor.

"Excuse me, Denise," I said. "Can you step out of the way?"

"Oh?" Denise said, dusting off her denim jacket. She didn't move an inch. "I didn't know that you were in charge of where I'm supposed to stand."

"*Piggy* bothering you?" a voice called from behind me.

I turned. If Denise was the monster queen, her boyfriend was the beast jerk king. Cole cracked his knuckles and grinned. His braces gave him an evil silver smile.

"The name's Mason," I said.

"Right, *Piggy*." Cole threw his arm around Denise and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "This loser bothering you?" he asked.

“Yeah, he’s telling me where to stand,” Denise said.

“Seriously?” Cole said. “You think you can tell her where she can go? You know it’s the twenty-first century, right? My girl can do what she wants. What are you doing anyway?”

“It’s none of your business,” I said. “You have the whole field you can use. I just need this spot for another five minutes.”

Cole let go of Denise and took a step toward me. “Want to move me, *Piggy*?” He had called me Piggy ever since we started playing rugby together. We were the same size, but he didn’t like that I could run faster. He was captain and decided to make me his punching bag for the rest of the season.

He’d given me the nickname when he learned my dad was a cop. Cole was the main reason I quit the team.

“Leave Mason alone,” Maya shouted as she ran toward us, her limp gone.

Denise laughed. “*Weeve him awone*. Speak English much? Why don’t you go back to China?”

“I’m from Vietnam,” Maya said.

“Wherever,” Denise said. “Go back to where you came from. Don’t stink up our school.”

I gritted my teeth. I could take these jerks teasing me, but I couldn’t let them make fun of my friend.

“Maya was born here,” I said. “If you bothered to get to know her, you wouldn’t be so ignorant.”

Denise narrowed her gaze at me. “What did you call me?”

“You heard me,” I said.

“Take it back,” Cole said.

“I can handle this, Cole,” Denise said as she walked toward me.

“You know I’m livestreaming all of this right now?” I said, moving closer to the camera on the tripod. “Everyone probably heard everything. Maybe even the principal.”

Denise glared at me. Her short red hair made it look like her head was on fire. She stared right into the camera.

“Some people can’t take a joke.”

Cole rolled up beside her on his longboard. “Yeah, Denise. Snowflakes are

so sensitive these days. Hello, butt sniffers. Hope you’re enjoying the show.”

Denise laughed. “Sniff away.”

He sniffed the air. “Ah, fresh butt hurt from all poor little snowflakes.” He kicked his board up into his hand. “Come on, Denise. Let’s go back to where we came from.”

As he turned, his longboard smacked into my tripod and sent the camera flying. I lunged to catch it. Too slow.

“Oops. Sorry about that,” Denise said.

They laughed as they walked away. I rushed to check my camera. Nothing looked broken.

“Is it okay?” Maya asked as she knelt beside me.

“Yeah. Don’t let those jerks get to you,” I said.

“Not the first time I’ve heard that insult. Mason, I can’t believe they thought you were livestreaming,” Maya said.

“Hey, what they don’t know can’t hurt us,” I said.

“True. Want to do another take?”

“No, I think I got enough from you before they showed up.”

“Come on. I think I have another take in me,” Maya said. “I can make my limp look more real this time.”

I shook my head and started to unscrew the camera from the tripod. “No, we’re losing the light.” I pointed up at the clouds

blocking the sun. “I can finish shooting our movie tomorrow.”

I handed Maya the camera and turned to watch Denise and Cole halfway across the field.

“I wish they could get a taste of what they dish out,” Maya said as she put the camera into its carrying case.

“Ha. They wouldn’t be able to handle it,” I said. “I’m so glad I’m getting out of this city.”

“You looking forward to going to Toronto?” she asked.

“Anywhere is better than here,” I said. “I get to escape from these jerks.”

“Take me with you?”

“Of course. I need my leading lady for all my horror movies,” I said.

She smiled. “When do you leave?”

I folded up my tripod. “Dad’s already there. Mom’s dealing with the movers. We drive out Monday, so tomorrow’s my last day.”

“I’m going to miss you, Mason. Who’s going to turn me into a movie star?”

“Well, maybe this will be your big break. Just one more scene, and I should have all I need,” I said.

“And if it’s a hit, I get to be in the sequel, right?” she joked.

“Of course. I’ll fly back, pick you up in a limo. We can jet off to Hollywood,” I said.

“Well, I’d better get my own trailer and assistant.”

“Nothing but the best for you. I should make Denise and Cole the monsters,” I said.

“Too scary.” Maya made a face.

I laughed. “Yeah, we don’t want to freak out the—wait. That just gave me an idea.”

“What?” she asked.

“Maybe they’re not right for our movie, but I can make them stars of their own movie.”

She leaned in. “Ooh, sounds like a horror classic in the making.”

I grabbed the camera case from Maya. “No, I’m thinking of this as more of a comedy.”