

# Chapter One

“Would you stop that?”

Ash jumps off her beach chair, frowning at the freckled boy in khakis and golf shirt sitting in the sand between us. Karl Barrington. He’s been digging a hole with his popsicle stick and flicking sand everywhere since he sat down.

“Sorry,” he grumbles.

“You’re not sorry at all,” snarls Ash, wiping sand off her legs.

I roll my eyes and try to focus on my sketchpad. My drawing of Wraith—a wicked-looking masked super villain of my own creation—is only halfway done. It’s for my graphic novel. My dad convinced me to start one over Spring Break. Said it would be good to try and make a story out of all these characters I’m always coming up with. I want to finish it before the vacation is over so I can show him when I get home. But with Ash and Karl around all the time, it’s hard to focus.

“I said I was sorry,” Karl snaps. “Why would I say it if I didn’t mean it?”

“Because you’re still doing it!” Ash shrieks, pointing at the sand Karl keeps flicking out of his little hole. “Ridge, make him stop it!”

“I don’t know why you think I have that power,” I tell her.

“He listens to you.”

I look over at Karl, sitting in the sand. We’ve been at Juneberry Beach two whole days and the kid still hasn’t put on a bathing suit. Just the same designer khakis and various colors of identical golf shirts. I didn’t know they were designer, but Ash did. Ash is a label girl. She loves labels. Especially the kind that seem to be plastered all over Karl and his family. She knows what kind of sunglasses Karl’s dad wears, and what kind of purse Karl’s dad’s girlfriend Gina carries around. She’s impressed by their shoes, watches, even their luggage. And she talks to me about it. All. Day. Long. I don’t know why she thinks I care. None of it means much to me. But I do know that labels like those mean Karl’s dad is rich. Filthy rich. How a guy like Karl’s dad became friends with my mom and Ash’s mom, I’ll never understand.

Karl stares at me, as if expecting orders.

“Knock it off, Karl,” I say. “I’m sick of listening to Ash whine.”

With a horrified *guh* noise, Ash kicks the sand, sending it flying into my face. It's in my eyes, my nose, my mouth. I taste the hard, salty grains grinding on my tongue. I spit. Beside me. Karl laughs.

By the time I blink away all the grit, Ash is storming back to the house. Her house. The one she lives in with her mom, Jes. I can see her sitting on the deck with my mom and Karl's dad and his girlfriend. She waves to Ash and Ash's arms flail wildly. I don't know what she's saying, but I know she's not telling them anything good.

All four of them turn and look in my direction. Mom frowns.

"Great," I mutter.

As soon as Mom gets ahold of me, I know she is going to lecture me about being nicer to Ash.

Jes is Mom's friend from university. She invited me and Mom to come visit her for Spring Break. Sounded all right to me—a week in the Florida Keys with lots of time to draw, and maybe even some

time on a jet ski. And I heard that Jes had a teenage daughter. Cool, I thought, *Spring Break with a high-school girl*. But then that high-school girl turned out to be Ash—whiny, boring, mean old Ash.

"She hates me," says Karl.

"Yeah," I nod, spitting out more sand. "She hates me too. At least you get to leave soon."

Karl's face goes kind of funny. His mouth twists to one side, like he isn't so happy about that either.

"What?" I ask. "I'd sure rather be out on your fancy boat than stuck here with Ash."

Karl shrugs and looks down at the sand hole. "You can have my spot."

I laugh. "Don't tease me, Karl. I'd take your place in a second."

I mean it. Like I said, Karl's dad is filthy rich. The only reason he's even in Florida is because the private yacht he chartered for Spring Break launches from here. Then they're off to sail the Caribbean in luxury. *Chartered*. I learned that word recently too.