



## CHAPTER 1

My first hint that the devil was wearing Prada earmuffs and a Burberry scarf should've been when my parents gave in and let me go to the Mountain Shadows Academy of the Arts. After all, they'd sworn up and down it would be a cold day in Hades before they let me go away for high school.

I definitely didn't inherit my Grandma Rose's ESP — she's what she calls 'fey' and my dad calls 'crazy' — or I would have realized my world was about to be turned upside down.

But I guess it's not surprising I'd missed the signs. I mean, there's not exactly much use for earmuffs and a scarf in Arizona. I forgot to mention. That's where I would be for the next four years. I was a freshman dance major at Mountain Shadows Academy in Scottsdale, an arts high school founded by Anna Manning Devereaux.

Yes, *that* Anna Devereaux. You may not remember her movies, but I'm sure you've heard of her many marriages. She was this famous starlet in the '50s who made a bunch of old movie musicals with Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire. Anyway, after Hubby Number Eight passed away, she got nostalgic for the Hollywood she once knew and decided to start an arts school to train the next generation. I guess Katy Perry and Snooki didn't exactly inspire much confidence in her.

But Snooki's a novelist, you say. Yeah, and she's read two whole books, too.

When I first moved in, I thought for sure I'd made a huge mistake. My roommate Bev was a complete waste of space. I thought living with an art student would be great. If nothing else, she'd know how to transform the stark white dorm room into something fun and fabulous. Plus she's a sophomore, so she could show me around. But man, was she ever BOR-ING! I wasn't sure she was even capable of answering questions with anything more than one syllable.

I left my friends back home for this?

I plopped down onto my bed and tried to make small talk with the tall girl in black. "So, this is your second year here?"

Bev didn't even turn away from her computer game. "Yes."

"Do you like it?"

"Yeah." She tucked a chunk of dyed black hair behind her ear, revealing more piercings than should be legal.

A root canal would be easier. "And you're an art student?"

"Yes."

I tried another tactic. "The dining hall opens at five?"

She typed furiously for a minute. “Yeah.”

“Wanna go?”

“No.”

I was stuck with her for the next year. How was I going to make it? I sneaked a peak over her shoulder at the time in the bottom corner of her screen. 4:55. Suddenly, my tummy was growling worse than Chewbacca in a firefight with a couple dozen Imperial Stormtroopers chasing him down.

“Okay, well, see ya later!” I said, grabbing my sunglasses and slipping my feet into my new sparkly black flip-flops. A few seconds later, I was out the door.

I’d wanted to shower and change first — what if I met a really hot guy while standing in the salad bar line? — but I didn’t think I’d last much longer in that room without some fresh air. Fortunately I wasn’t too sweaty from moving in, and anyway, what were the chances of meeting my soul mate on my first night?

I got my food as quickly as possible, which really wasn’t all that quick. The buffet was a thousand times better than the one at Golden Corral, and I’d thought that one was huge! Station after station overflowing with food options tempted me, and I found myself barely able to make a decision.

Yummalicious!

Not that it mattered. I had leotards to fit into, so I had to watch my weight. I placed a salad, bottled water, and a small dish of sugar-free raspberry Jell-O onto my tray, although I eyed the tiramisu.

As I made my way through the crowded room, I noticed all the other kids seemed to be hunched over a flyer. Their whispering permeated the air like my mom’s Eternity. Was it an invitation to a super secret party or something? My older sister Whitney told me all about the secret societies at her college. Did we even have that kind of stuff here?

Seeing all the kids huddled together suddenly made me homesick for my old middle school. I never had to worry about where to sit at lunch back at home. We were supposed to eat three meals a day in the caf, but I didn’t know anyone, so where was I going to sit?

Deep breath.

Three girls sat at the table in front of me, whispering. Every now and then they looked up from the flyer and scanned the room. Then they laughed and huddled up again. Finally one girl caught my gaze. She had shiny long blonde hair straight out of a shampoo commercial and was wearing a dress suspiciously similar to the one Leighton Meester wore on last night’s *Gossip Girl*.

I had to ask where she got it. Not that I could afford it if it was real.

I walked over and placed my tray on the table. “Hi, I’m Dani. Can I sit—”

The blonde sneered. “You’re kidding me, right?”

As if on cue, Queen Bee’s friends started laughing. All three gathered up their trays and moved to sit with a group of guys at the next table over, occasionally turning back to look at me and laugh.

Did I have something on my shirt? (I was wearing a shirt at least.) Maybe I

wasn't wearing the right one. Or even worse, maybe a huge zit erupted on my nose?

I was surrounded by a sea of people, bobbing along on the waves and forced to sink or swim. What would it be? I clutched my tray just like a life raft. I'd never felt so alone. So small.

So ... nothing.

I considered bringing dinner back to Ames Hall to eat in my room — even spending time with Bev had to be better than letting everyone think I was a loser who ate alone — when I saw a tall girl wearing a pink tank top with rhinestones across the chest waving in my direction.

For a second there I thought she meant someone else, but apparently not, because she strode over to me. “Don't let them bother you. They just think they're too cool for school. Whatev. You're the new freshman in Bev's room, right?” When I nodded, she stuck her hand out for me to shake. “I'm Maya.”

My hands were full holding my tray, so I did an elaborate balancing act with one hand and my hip and stuck out my right hand. “Dani.”

Maya motioned for me to follow her to where she was sitting with a group of guys and girls. “What program are you in?”

“Dance.” Wow. I was about as talkative as my goth-girl roommate. What was wrong with me?

“Me too.” Maya's cocoa-colored eyes shone. “So, what do you think of Bev?”

“Uh—” I stammered.

She held up a finger to silence me. “Don't worry. I don't like her either. She hates dancers. Total freak show.”

We finally approached Maya's friends' table. They, too, were huddled over a colorful flyer.

“Hey,” Maya said and caught their attention. “This is Dani. She lives with Bev Marcus.” The kids shot me a sympathetic look. “Dani, everyone.” Maya plopped herself down in between a short Hispanic girl and a guy who quite frankly put the Sparta boys to shame. Whoa.

Hmm ... looked like I was gonna like it here!

I placed my tray down at the empty spot next to a cute guy with spiky blond hair, dressed in a black T-shirt and ripped jeans. “What's that?” I pointed at the flyer.

The Hispanic girl pushed the piece of paper over to me. “They chose our school for the next season of *Teen Celebrity Dance-off!*”

“It's not fair that the auditions are only open to dance students,” Blond Spiky Boy said. “And let me guess, Analisa won't be auditioning anyway because it'll take away from your serious dance career?”

“Well, yes, it's not ballet. That's true,” the Hispanic girl said. “But as long as we still make our regular classes and rehearsals, it could only help.”

“So you are gonna try out?”

“Whatever, Kyle. You know you can’t dance anyway,” Maya said, dismissing him with her hand.

“Ladies, aren’t you going to introduce me to your friend?” A tall guy with dark brown hair and piercing blue eyes the color of the Caribbean extended his hand and let it linger. Contacts? Had to be. Nobody had eyes that blue naturally. “Hi, I’m Craig,” he said, smiling and revealing the most adorable set of dimples I’d ever seen. He looked like he walked straight out of the pages of the Abercrombie catalog. Since Mountain Shadows didn’t teach modeling, I guessed ‘actor.’

“Dani,” I squeaked.

I was forced to rethink my decision not to shower. I mentally cursed myself for being anxious to get away from Bev.

Maya smacked Craig’s hand away as if he were a mosquito. “Don’t let him bother you.”

“He’s not bothering me.”

Maya sighed. “Whatever. I wanna hear more about the show.”

What were the chances I’d get on, especially against the senior girls? But still, I had a shot. Maybe not a good one, since my training was mostly limited to the classics, but I could still try. Man, this school was so cool. Much better than Sparta High.

“Who’s on the show?” I asked.

Analisa consulted the flyer. “So far, they’ve confirmed Daronn Williams, and John Michael Cooper, but rumor has it Prince Harry and Daniel Radcliffe are in negotiations.”

I giggled. “Prince Harry and Harry Potter?”

Analisa cleared her throat before continuing. “Well, I seriously doubt the prince will do it. Isn’t he in the Royal Marines or something? Personally, I’m hoping for Robert Pattinson.”

“Yeah, right.” Maya’s laughter sounded more like a snort. “Like he’d really do this. I think that’s illegal anyway. He’d have to dance with underage girls.”

Wow, all those stars were totally hot. Daronn’s debut hip-hop CD landed him at the top of the Billboards at just sixteen, and who wasn’t in love with JMC?

“Just guys?” I asked.

Analisa tossed back her curls. “Looks that way. I recognize most of them, but not Michael Cooper.”

I laughed. “You mean John Michael Cooper, right?”

Analisa blushed. “Oops, right.”

“You don’t know who JMC is?”

Analisa shrugged, twirling a strand of fettuccine with her fork. She wasn’t worried about carbs?

“Um, Great Expectations? Hello?” I asked.

“The book?”

Kyle rolled his eyes. “The band. They’re all over MTV.”

“Sorry, but I was never really allowed to listen to popular music,” Analisa explained. “My mom’s a ballet teacher. I only listened to music by dead white guys growing up.”

Maya shook her head slowly and whistled. “Girl, that’s some warped life you led.”

I felt my forehead scrunch up as I thought. “Why aren’t there any girls?”

“They were hoping to get Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift, but there was this whole controversy about whether Miley was a good role model and Taylor was too expensive,” Kyle explained.

“Anyway, their target demographic is teenage girls, so it just makes sense to only have guy stars,” Analisa said.

“Taylor Swift, now that’s a chick I could get behind.” A smirk graced Craig’s well-chiseled face.

Maya turned towards him, exasperation darkening her expression. “Was anyone talking to you? I didn’t think so.”

“So, how’s it work?” I asked.

A third guy, a tall, skinny Asian kid who, up to now, had been quietly doodling anime figures in his sketch pad, said, “They’re gonna choose five dance students to be partners for the stars. But I really don’t think it’s fair that only dance students can audition.”

“What do you care whether it’s just dancers?” Maya asked.

“Because,” Craig answered slowly, dragging out his syllables, spelling it out as if for a bunch of infants. “It’s national TV. My big break.” His already incredible eyes flashed a bright, piercing blue, making me go weak in the knees. It was a good thing I was sitting.

Definitely an aspiring actor.

Analisa laughed. “They’re only choosing girls.”

“That’s just it,” Ryan said. “It’s discrimination. We should sue.”

“Big words.” Maya smirked. “Someone’s been reading his Constitution, huh?”

I cleared my throat. “Actually, I think it’s only discrimination if the government does it. So you can’t sue.” Everyone stared at me like I’d grown a second head. “My mom’s a lawyer.”

Craig smiled in my direction. “Guess we better listen to the new girl.”

Kyle fixed a hard stare on me. “I’m sure we could still sue.”

Maya shook her head and rolled her eyes. “Whatev. You trying out for *Law & Order: Special High School Unit*? Cut the act.” She stood up, lifting her tray with the regal air of a queen dismissing her subjects. “Gentlemen, it’s been real, but my girls and I gotta finish eating and get practicing.”

She marched away, and we followed her to a nearby table. I kept sneaking looks back at Craig and his friends, though.

“Why did we leave?” I asked. “They seemed really fun.”

“Tim’s pretty cool. Kyle has his moments,” Analisa admitted. “But Craig is

a total jerk.”

I looked over my shoulder at the guys we’d just left sitting a few tables away. Craig definitely looked like the leader of the pack. “He seems pretty nice.”

Actually, he seemed really hot, but I wasn’t going to admit that to the girls just yet. Not when I barely even knew them. I’d start with nice. Nice was neutral. Nice was safe.

I could deal with nice.

“Girl, everyone in school thinks that, and it goes straight to his head,” Maya told me, a conspiratorial tone coloring her words. “Really arrogant. I don’t fall for that shit.”

“Yeah, don’t get any ideas. Everyone wants to date him,” Analisa said. “Anyway, I think he’s still with Hadley Taylor.”

“Who’s Hadley Taylor?”

Maya gestured over her shoulder. “You just met her.”

Great.

“He probably only likes her because she’s totally rich. One of the upper class girls’ dorms is named after her dad,” Maya continued. “Plus, she’s a junior and danced Sugar Plum her sophomore year.”

Shoot. Hadley Taylor was serious competition. Nobody ever got the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy that young. I was way out of my league. Better write Craig off.

I knew I wouldn’t meet the guy of my dreams tonight.

“What grade are they in?” I asked, motioning towards the table of guys.

“Seniors,” Maya and Analisa answered at the same time.

“Craig has an audition for the Yale Drama Program in two weeks, but it’s just a formality,” Analisa said. “Everyone knows he’s going there.”

“And if not there, then either UCLA or Northwestern.” Maya shrugged.

“He’s a cocky jerk, but damn, the boy can act.”

I looked back at the other table. “So how do we try out?”