

Chapter One

I turn my lucky coin over in my fingers, slipping the cool metal from one knuckle to another. I flip it and wonder, Will it be heads? Or tails? I'm amazed by the odds. Not just the odds of my own coin flips, but the odds of everything. Of the weird connections between people and events. Of winning or losing my favorite game, poker. Or the odds I'm thinking of right now as

I sit in a third-year English class watching a movie about *Hamlet*.

I'm only in this class because I need it for my early entrance scholarship. Most people don't go to college when they're fifteen, like I did. They most certainly don't take advanced courses like I do now at the ripe old age of eighteen. This class so boring (I'm pre-med, and I prefer math), but the movie we're watching has some redeeming qualities. *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is about a couple of nobodies whose job it is to watch over the nutcase Hamlet.

It's kind of blowing my mind right now, because the characters are talking about the odds of coin flips, and Guildenstern's coin is coming up heads every time. Right when I just happen to be fiddling with my own lucky coin. It's a 1970 American quarter. My grandpa gave it to me before he died. He was really into coin collecting. The cool thing is that it's a special sample of a coin, called a proof. It was cast on top of a 1941 Canadian quarter by accident. Grandpa told me that

no one knows how the Canadian coin got mixed up in the US mint, but it's pretty neat. Apparently there are a lot of them in circulation.

I'm supposed to be thinking about the themes in this movie, but as usual I'm thinking a thousand things at once. I'm thinking about the coin combinations on the screen. I'm thinking about probability theory. I'm thinking about the odds of my coin matching the flips the characters make. I'm thinking about Hamlet and the sucky life he's living. To be or not to be, dude. Yeah, that is the question.

I'm thinking about how I will pass this course. I'm thinking about my twin sister, Aggie. She's also a genius and is sitting next to me. She is enjoying this movie in a way I never could. This is the only class we share together, and that's a good thing. I hate having Aggie always checking up on me.

But mostly I'm thinking about my cell phone. The prof made me turn it off when I got to class. But I had several windows open. Online gambling and

stock-trading apps. Every second that goes by, I'm losing money.

Aggie thinks we're not rooming together this year because I need space to figure out who I am besides a twin. But really it's so that I can gamble in privacy. I count cards, analyze stats, make bets. Flip coins. Normal teen-genius-gambling-addict stuff.

Our English prof, a hairy, young Mark Ruffalo-type named Dr. Dave Murray, stops the movie.

"We'll watch the rest tomorrow," he says. "In the meantime I want you to think about tragic flaws..."

I start tuning him out and gathering my stuff together. "Whatever, Dr. Dave," I mutter.

Aggie gives me a side-eye. "Shh."

"Think about Hamlet's tragic flaw in particular," Dr. Dave continues. "Anyone care to tell us what it is?" He scans the room, waiting. "Come on, you've all read the play."

His gaze lands on me. "Ester Tomasi," he says. "You seem ready to share." He challenges me with a look.

I sigh. "He's unlucky," I say, and Dr. Dave looks surprised.

"Care to elaborate?" he asks.

"Well, look what happens to him. His dad dies, probably murdered by his own mother and uncle, then his dead dad haunts him and asks him to seek revenge. He can't trust anyone. His girlfriend kills herself. He pretty much loses his mind. And then he dies in the end! I mean, the odds of all these things happening, not to mention all the cases of mistaken identity and double-crossings, are astronomical. I'd call that pretty unlucky."

Dr. Dave nods slowly. "Anyone have a different take?" he asks. "Agatha?"

He looks at my sister, who shifts uncomfortably in the seat next to me. I know she hates this as much as I do. Not the class, but the constant competition people force us into. It's like we can't exist without being compared to the other. It's Twin Torture™.

I stare at her, and she falters a bit as she speaks.