

Chapter One

The math book flew across the room and hit the wall before landing facedown on the floor. I rubbed my eyes and shook my head in frustration. I loathed math. I could never remember formulas or equations. And, to be honest, I had never actually bothered to memorize the multiplication tables.

My mom poked her head in the door.

“What was that?” she asked.

I gestured wordlessly at the textbook.

She smiled. “Ah. Math again?”

I nodded. “I just don’t get it! My brain doesn’t work that way.” I pushed the hair off my forehead and sighed deeply.

“Mine never did either, nikosis,” my mom told me, walking across the room to pick up my math book and putting it back on my desk. “Which is why our resident engineer, also known as your father, does our taxes. Maybe he can go over your homework with you in the morning.” She stood behind me and ruffled my hair. She always loved playing with my hair, so different from her own jet-black mane. Auburn, she called it. Like a pahkisimon. A sunset. Really, it was just red.

“Yeah, maybe.” I shrugged. I had to maintain decent grades to stay on the soccer team, so, much as I hated to admit it, I couldn’t let my math homework slide.

“All right, I’m off to bed.” My mom kissed me on the cheek and headed out the door. She stopped suddenly. “Oh, I almost forgot!”

“What?” I asked, stretching and standing up to get ready for bed.

“I have a meeting with clients tomorrow afternoon. You don’t have soccer tomorrow, do you?”

“Nope,” I answered. “What do you need? And if you want me to go grocery shopping again, I reserve the right to add whatever I want to the shopping list.”

“Not a chance!” My mom threw her head back and laughed loudly. “You cost me \$50 the last time you went shopping, nikosis.”

I smiled wryly. “Sorry about that. So what did you want me to do?”

“Can you take your sister to her art class after school tomorrow?” she asked.

“Yeah, I guess.” I shrugged. “At the community center?”

“Yes. Thanks, sweetie. I really appreciate it. Get some sleep, okay?” She blew a kiss and grabbed my laundry hamper before heading out of my room, closing the door behind her.

I sighed and pulled my T-shirt off, tossing it absentmindedly into the corner where my hamper usually sat. My dad better be able to work his magic before my math test on Thursday, or I’d be benched.

Chapter Two

The next morning at the kitchen table I was right back where I’d started, staring blankly at my math book, when my dad walked in and poured himself a cup of coffee.

“Need some help?” he asked, falling heavily into the chair beside me.

“Yeah.” I tilted the page toward him so he could see what I was working on.

He ran a hand through his hair—red like mine—and frowned down at it. “Here.” He tapped the paper in front of me. “This is where you went wrong.” He circled what looked like a random bunch of numbers. “You used the wrong formula,” he said.

For the next forty minutes, my dad patiently explained the finer points of quadratic equations. He made it look easy. It wasn’t. But I kind of understood it by the time we were done.

“Thanks, Dad. I think I’ve got it. I don’t know how you keep all those equations straight.”

“I’m Irish! It’s in my blood.” He winked at me.

“Yeah, well...I’m half Irish, and it doesn’t appear to be in mine.”

“Sometimes I suspect you’ve got more of your mother’s Cree blood in you than my Irish.” He laughed.

“Not to look at us,” I said. I looked exactly like my dad and absolutely nothing like my mom. It was a little awkward sometimes. The people on the

rez where my mom grew up had known me all my life, but it wasn’t always that easy. Back in fifth or sixth grade, we were learning about Indigenous history, and the teacher asked if any of us knew any Indigenous people. I raised my hand to tell the class that my mom was Indigenous. The teacher, not having met my mother, told me to stop lying. In front of the entire class. When I told my mother about it later, she was furious and threatened to come to school with me the next day to confront him. I was mortified, but she had a point. The fact that I looked like my Irish father and not her didn’t make me any less Indigenous than my sister, who was a carbon copy of my mom.

“You may look like me, John, but you’re so much like your mom,” my dad said.

I wasn’t sure whether this was true—but my mom was artistic and fiery and sweet and proud, and I was happy to be compared to her. Even if people couldn’t often tell that she was my mother.

Chapter Three

“It’s in here!” Jen pulled on my arm, practically dragging me down the hall and into a bright room filled with easels, pottery wheels and desks covered in pencils and markers. “The class is an hour, so come back and get me at five, okay?” She darted into the room and grabbed a smock from a hook on the wall before I could answer.

“Okay. So, five o’clock. Right here,” I called to no one in particular. Jen was already out of earshot. Or just ignoring me. It was hard to tell which. I turned to leave.

“Five thirty!” Jen yelled at my back.

“Fine.” I waved a hand in the air as I left. Great. An hour and a half. No homework. No book. How was I supposed to kill ninety minutes? I pulled my phone out of my back pocket and scrolled through my apps. None appealed to me. Not Mega Jump. Not Mad Coaster. Not even Temple Run. Or Cut the Rope. Nothing. And my battery was down to 15 percent, so I couldn’t listen to music. Sighing, I put my phone away and looked around. The Community Center halls were quiet. All of the classes had already started. I leaned back against the wall. My watch now read 4:05. Great. Five minutes down and only eighty-five to go. I clicked my tongue. I rolled my eyes. I snapped my fingers and drummed on the

wall. Finally I stuck my hands in my pockets and started wandering aimlessly down the hall.

I bounced around a little, poking my head into the door of a prenatal yoga class and stood in the back of an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting before realizing what was happening and slinking out, my mouth full of the chocolate-chip cookies that had been on the table in the back. I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand, swallowed the last bite... and heard the sound of drums and what sounded like chanting coming from somewhere to my left.

I followed the drumbeat down the hall to an unmarked door. I looked around and, seeing no one, pulled it open and slipped inside. The drum was much louder here. It was punctuated by the sound of feet stomping and a woman's voice calling out instructions. I edged forward, finding myself at the back of a stage overlooking a gymnasium.

"Lighter feet, Julie. That's great. Okay, ladies, twirl and twirl and twirl!" Multiple voices chanted

in time with the drumbeat, and I walked forward until I reached the edge of the stage and ducked behind the curtain. Taking a deep breath, I peered around the curtain at a group of girls dancing. I had been to powwows back on the rez with my mom, but I had never paid much attention to the people there shuffling along to the music. I'd grown up around them, and although I had always liked the music well enough, I had spent my time at the powwows with the other boys, eating fry bread and flirting with the girls. But this was different somehow. The energy was different.

Like the people on the rez, these girls were dressed in every color imaginable. Each had her hair braided and wore a headband sprouting feathers and beads. All were wearing moccasins and elaborate shawls with long fringes that matched their intricately beaded dresses. The girls held their shawls out, twirling and whirling madly, like mini dervishes. Their feet were a