

Chapter One

“The Fun Fair is always so boring,” I say.

“Mac Riley!” Dad warns. “Mind your manners. We’re discussing new business. We’re not bashing the Fun Fair.” He is head of our school’s parent association and chair of this meeting. A few of us students have been invited to provide input for the Fun Fair committee. Which is totally what I’m doing.

I hear Chandra and Jenny snicker. The biggest jerks in our grade. One of them whispers loud enough for me to hear, "Why is Mac always so much drama?"

I roll my eyes. I turn my head a little to give them what I hope is a threatening look. The girls lean into each other and giggle.

Amy elbows me and whispers, "Don't pay any attention to them. Eyes on the prize, Mac."

My best friend is right. I can't forget our plan. We have to do this properly. I'm not exaggerating—the Fun Fair is a total snooze, not at all the big community event it could be. Every year it's the same old thing. There's a sad bouncy castle, a water-gun fight and some face painting. We get some families with little kids in the area, but most of the people who come are students from our school. And they show up to hang out with their friends. But I have an idea that could change everything.

I stand up. "This is new business," I say. "The Fun Fair is not only a community event but also our biggest fundraiser of the year. But I think everyone can agree that it's become pretty boring over the past few years. It's time for something new. Something flashy. A real draw."

"What do you have in mind?" Dad asks, sighing. He takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes.

"Well, since you asked," I say with a grin, "I've got an idea. Something to give the Fun Fair a little glitter. And a whole lot of sparkle." I walk around the room and hand everyone our information package.

I had wanted to use playful fonts and print the handout on flashy paper. Amy said we'd be taken more seriously if we used plain white paper and black ink. More professional, she said. I don't know. I think it looks so boring. Kind of like the Fun Fair. So I made up for it with my outfit. I'm wearing black skinny jeans and an oversized

sweatshirt with sequin roses that change color depending how you stroke them. I totally caught Chandra and Jenny eyeing it with envy when I walked in.

“What is this?” Mrs. Khatri, the treasurer, taps the piece of paper. “A Pride Carnival? I need to know more.”

“It’s a makeover,” I say. “Making the Fun Fair a Pride-themed event not only breathes new life into it but also makes it clear that everyone is welcome and included and wanted.” Amy helped me with that wording. She said being cool wasn’t a strong enough argument and that we should try to sound more adult.

“While I hear what you’re saying, Mac, I’m not sure adding a theme to the Fun Fair is the way to go,” Dad says. “The fair already brings in a good chunk of money every year. We don’t want to mess with what works.”

I nod. I knew he’d say that. “But what worked before isn’t working now. If you compare the reports from the last few years, you’ll see the Fun Fair isn’t doing as well as it used to. That’s not good.” I pause for effect, then pick my next words to sound as grown up as possible. “My partner with the proposal, Amy Chen, will now join me.”

Amy jumps to her feet and rushes over to the easel at the side of the room. She’s wearing skinny jeans and a floral T-shirt under her hoodie. I chose her outfit so we’d match. She places two huge pieces of poster board on the stand.

“This graph,” Amy says as I position my hands like I’m revealing a prize on a game show, “shows a steady drop in profits over the last five years. If the trend continues, this year’s Fun Fair will only make half as much as it did in its top-earning year.”

"All this information is right in the package in front of you," I add.

Amy removes the first piece of poster board from the easel.

"These graphs," she says, as I point theatrically to the second board, "show how much money Pride events around the world make. Of course we're not expecting this type of result from a school fair. But it does prove that people want this type of event. And they're willing to pay for it. Included in your package is a news story about a school in Australia that held a Mardi Gras Pride Fair. They made a lot more money than they had in previous years."

Mrs. Khatri leans forward in her seat. "How much more are we talking?"

"Over 30 percent," I say. "That's a pretty big increase."

The parents turn to one another. They begin to chatter.

Dad hushes everyone. "I can see you've done a lot of work," he says. "Very impressive for two twelve-year-olds. We'll review your ideas and think about it."

"But the fair is coming up soon," I say. "If you don't decide tonight to go ahead with this new idea, it won't happen. At least, not until next year. It's now or never, Dad. Decision time. Avengers assemble!"

"Bit much," Amy whispers. "Take it down a level."

Mrs. Khatri looks up from the handout. She stands and walks over to our chart. She leans back a little as she reads through it. "These numbers are promising. The kids are right. There won't be time to prepare if we don't decide tonight. This could be *just* what we need to raise some more money. We should call a vote."

My dad puts his glasses back on. He flips through our package. Reading more slowly this time.

“Come on, Dad,” I say. “Please? We did this right. We collected all the facts and data. We brought it to the meeting. Amy even made me choose a serious font to print it in. Nothing with swirls.”

“Such a diva,” I hear someone say. I assume it’s Jenny. Whatever. “Diva” isn’t even an insult. Definitely not when you are one. And I so am.

“Okay,” Dad finally says. “Any other thoughts before we go to a vote? Anyone?”

No one speaks at first.

Then Mrs. Khatri says, “Just one worry. Not everyone likes...sparkle. Some people may not support the event.”

“Are you saying you’re not in favor?” Dad asks.

“No, this is a great idea,” she replies. “But I think we should be prepared for some pushback. I hope there isn’t any. But we should be ready.”

“We want to make this a safe and positive event. Is the risk worth it?” Dad asks.

“It’s a gamble. But think of what we could do with the extra money we bring in. For the school. For the students. For our kids. Things we’ve had to say no to because we didn’t have the means, we can reconsider. I vote we turn this year’s Fun Fair into a Pride Carnival.”

“Raise your hands if you agree,” Dad says to the group.

Almost everyone raises their hands. Jenny and Chandra slouch in their seats, arms and legs crossed. No raised hands from them.

“Charles Middle School will hold its first-ever Pride Carnival,” Dad announces. “Thank you, Amy and Mac.”

Amy high-fives me.

I give her a huge hug.

“We did it! Carnival time!” I cheer, lifting her off her feet.

“I told you the professional font was the way to go.”

Chapter Two

“The bouncy castle has to have rainbow stripes,” I say. “And one of those really tall slides. We can get strobe lights. And have a dunk tank. And multicolor cotton candy. And fireworks. Oh, and the talent show! The winner could be declared Grand Marshal of the Fair. No. That’s for a parade. How about Sparkling Crown of the Carnival? Now that’s got a nice ring to it.”

I’m sitting behind my dad in his car. Amy is buckled in across from me.

“And I’m going to be the Sparkling Crown!” I finish.

“If you win,” Amy says.

“When. Not if. Don’t I deserve to win? This was all my idea. Who else would be a better Sparkling Crown? No one.”

“Slow down, Mac,” Dad says as he comes to a stop light. “You’ve got a lot of big ideas. But we do have a budget.”

“A lot of *good* ideas. Plus, the talent show won’t cost anything,” I argue. “We have that portable stage we use for gym assemblies. We can set it up outside. Near the baseball diamond. We can hook up some lights and speakers.”

“The talent show is fine. It’s all the other things you’re talking about. Renting some of those things isn’t going to be cheap,” Dad says.

“Cheap is not the look we’re going for. We want