

# Chapter One

Ava sits on her white sheets. She leans over to fluff her blue pillows. She snaps a selfie. Then deletes it. *Yuck!* She pouts. Snap. Delete. Pout. Snap. *Perfect!* She draws squiggles and hearts around herself in the photo. She types some text on top:

**Good morning! Beautiful day. Time for breakfast with the fam. Lucky me!**

**#homelife #perfect #Sundays**

She posts it to her 542 followers. No! Now there are 543. Excellent! Her post isn't really true. There won't be any family breakfast today. There's never any time for that. Not since Dad left. This morning Mom is busy working in her home office. And Ava's stupid brother, Gregg, is still asleep.

Ava's phone flashes. She has two likes already. So what if her post isn't true? People *like* it. A couple more little hearts appear. Both of her BFFs post comments.

**@journey314 You are soooo pretty Ava girl!!!**

**@purevision Breakfast with your hot brother.**

**#swoon #luckyforsure #perfectfamily**

Ava imagines herself as a famous online celebrity. She flies all over the world. She gets tons of free stuff. She goes to all the best parties and galas.

Ava is still daydreaming about her fantasy life when her mom comes into her room. She is

wearing a gray suit, and her hair is freshly cut and colored. But her eyes are red. She has been crying.

"Honey, I have something to tell you," her mom says, not looking at Ava. She rearranges the one book that is out of place on Ava's white shelf.

"What's wrong?"

Ava's mom sighs. She pushes her hair back, and some of it sticks straight up. Ava notices that one of the buttons on her mom's suit is missing. Which is weird because even though she works at home, Ava's mom likes to look perfect. Right now she looks like a hot mess.

"This came in the mail on Friday. I didn't open it because I've been very busy." Her mom holds out an envelope with a handwritten address on it. "I actually thought it was a charity asking for money. I didn't think..." She wipes her eyes. "Oh, just read it, would you?"

Ava takes the envelope and pulls out a letter. The paper is very thin. It has loopy handwriting on it. There are a few blotches.

*Dear Ava,*

*I remember when you came to visit. You were seven. And so cute! You loved Mervin so much. It is my dying wish that you look after him well.*

*With all my love,*

*Great-Uncle Bertie*

Her mom's phone buzzes. She checks it, sighs and glances at Ava. "I guess it's true. I just got a message from the lawyer. Great-Uncle Bertie is dead."

"Great-Uncle Bertie is dead?" Ava reads the words again. "Wait a minute. Who is Great-Uncle Bertie?"

"Nana's brother. You only met him once. He was very busy sailing all over the world. Huge traveler. No wife or kids. We met him in a hotel in London when we went to Europe. Remember, he had a room in that fancy hotel? That's where he lived when he wasn't at sea."

"I don't remember him at all."

"Well, he clearly remembers you!"

"What does he mean when he writes 'you loved Mervin so much'? *Who is Mervin?*"

"The lawyer says that Mervin is a parrot."

"A parrot?" Ava's face screws up. "Oh my god! I do remember. That old gray bird. Super grouchy, from what I remember. Surely that thing can't still be alive."

"Parrots live for years, Ava." Two tears fall down her mom's cheeks.

"I'm sorry, Mom. You must miss Uncle Bertie so much."

“No, that’s not it. I hardly knew the old man. You don’t understand. His parrot is coming to live with us. In *our* house.”

“There’s no way!”

“Listen, if you hadn’t been so friendly with that bird, none of this would have happened. We can’t have a parrot here.”

She’s totally right. A parrot would not look good on Ava’s online profiles. She has a spotless, white room. The accent color is light blue. The feature image on the main wall is an anchor—Ava loves the sea. Well, she loves the *idea* of the sea. Living in a big city, she doesn’t actually get to the ocean that much.

“We can say no, right?” Ava asks. “I don’t know anything about parrots. I can’t look after a parrot.”

“I don’t see how we can, honey.” Her mom’s eyes narrow. “It was Great-Uncle Bertie’s dying wish.” Her eyes become even more narrow, until they close. This is the face she pulls when she wants to

shut out the world. She releases a slow breath. Ava knows she is counting to ten.

“I guess you’re right, Mom.”

“Great-Uncle Bertie is probably laughing in his grave.”

Ava frowns. “Why?”

“He always said I was too obsessed with being neat and tidy. Too obsessed with image. Now he’s putting a filthy bird in my house.” She opens her eyes.

“There’s nothing wrong with wanting a clean house. Or a good image.”

Ava’s mom smiles. “You are a girl after my own heart. We’ll figure out how to stop that parrot from coming here. Dying wish or not. I’ll message the lawyer.” She taps on her phone.

Her phone buzzes in reply. She reads the screen, then holds it up for Ava to see.

**Mervin already on his way. Express Post. Should arrive this afternoon. He’s an African gray parrot.**

**With a nasty bite!**

“I’m not looking after a parrot, Mom!” Ava yells.  
“You have to stop this!”

There’s a thud in the next room. It’s Ava’s big brother jumping out of bed. He appears at her doorway, scratching his chest. He’s tall, with dark hair and eyes. Her BFFs think he’s hot. Over the last year he has gone from being a skinny, annoying boy into the guy they all want to get to know. Ava can’t understand what they see in him. Right now he’s in worn-out sweats that are stained with coffee. He farts.

“Get out!” Ava yells.

“Not until I find out what’s going on in here,” Gregg says. He always has such a loud voice.

“Quality family time,” says Ava sarcastically.

Their mom closes her eyes and breathes out.

“Seriously, what’s all the yelling about?” Gregg asks. Even more loudly.

Ava holds out the letter. Gregg snatches it. He reads it and then collapses into laughter. “You’re getting a parrot, Ava? Miss Prissy Pants?”

“What? Are you five years old? Don’t call me that.”

“We should put it right here. On your empty desk that looks so perfect because you never use it!” He falls onto Ava’s bed, laughing harder.

Their mom squeezes her eyes more tightly shut.

“See?” Ava says to no one. “A perfect family Sunday.”

## Chapter Two

Ava hears the doorbell but doesn't move. She is never going to move again. She knows some people love animals. They are all about cute, fluffy pets. Their online feeds are full of adorable pet pictures. Ava scrolls through her phone. Maybe she could do adorable pet pictures. Maybe she could make Mervin the parrot into an internet superstar. Cute and adorable. Ava and Mervin.

Ava hears a loud squawk. Her mom yells, "Ava, come here!"

Gregg bursts into laughter. Again. He is such a jerk.

Ava gets off her bed. Opening her bedroom door, she sees a huge, fancy cage in the hall. It comes up to her chest, and it looks like it's made of gold. Inside, a scruffy parrot with beady eyes blinks at Ava.

"Wow. That cage is stunning. It's going to look amazing in my room!" Ava says.

"In your room, Monkey Face?" Gregg says. "I thought you said you were going to die if you had to be anywhere near the parrot."

"Well, I'm making the most of a bad situation." Ava sticks her tongue out at him. "And don't call me Monkey Face!"

The parrot lets out another really loud squawk. And Ava thought *Gregg* was loud. This bird just might burst her eardrums.