

Chapter One

I peel back the lunch container's lid and admire the sandwich inside. Chicken salad with lettuce and tomato on a soft, buttery bun. I'm so glad Dad reminded me to add dill to the mayonnaise. I can smell the herb as soon as the lid is off. The sharp scent makes my taste buds tingle.

I pick up the sandwich. The ice packs in my bag have kept it chilled. Cool chicken salad is the perfect lunch for a surprisingly warm March day. I've been

waiting all morning for a taste of this one. It's my last meal before I'm stuck eating camp food for the next nine days. I spent a long time making sure the sandwich would be perfect.

I lay the container next to me on the fountain's stone ledge. I hold the sandwich with two hands so I can take the biggest bite possible.

"Is that your lunch?"

I pause with the sandwich halfway to my mouth. My shoulders tense as I raise my eyes. I see a girl walking toward me. She's short and has a pixie haircut. She's also got purple braces on teeth too large for her otherwise small face. I lower the still-whole sandwich back to its container and give the girl a cautious smile.

"Yeah, it is," I say, nodding. I don't usually eat out in the open where everyone can see me. It's too easy for people like Austin Parks and his friends to make mean comments with every bite I take. But for the entire week of March break, I'll be part of the Granite

County Young Leaders Retreat. Which means I've got no choice but to eat with others nearby.

I thought I could enjoy one final meal in peace though. The other kids are waiting across the park at the spot where the bus will pick us up. I thought I would be safe eating my sandwich in private before joining them.

I study the girl as she approaches. It doesn't seem as if she's about to call me names.

"That looks like a good sandwich," she says, plopping herself down on the ledge beside me. "My sister drove me out here. She wanted coffee, which meant my lunch consisted of hot chocolate and a stale muffin." She laughs.

"That sucks," I say, picking up the sandwich again. "I never eat fast food unless it comes from a truck."

"Those don't sound like very high standards," she says.

I smile. "A food truck, I mean. You know those trucks that have full kitchens installed in them? My dad's the chef of one called The Hungry Pup."

“I’m jealous,” the girl says. “My dad can’t cook anything if it doesn’t come from the freezer. My mom’s not much better. Did he make that for you?”

I can feel my cheeks warming. “No,” I say, staring down at the bun. “He taught me the recipe, but I made this myself.”

The girl laughs again. When I look up, she’s leaning as far back as she can without falling into the fountain. She closes her eyes and turns her face toward the bright sun. “Now I’m even more jealous. I’d love to be able to cook,” she says.

“Cooking’s not hard,” I say. I wonder how old the girl is. This retreat is for eighth and ninth graders from around the region. I wonder if she is fourteen like me or younger. I wonder if this is her first time too.

“I guess I wouldn’t know,” she says. “I’ve never bothered to try.” She opens her eyes again and gives me a smile. “I’m Sarah, by the way.”

“I’m Jenny,” I tell her. It feels almost like a lie. I’m so used to my nickname, it’s weird to hear my real

name spoken aloud. Even if I’m the one saying it.

Sarah eyes my chicken salad again and then goes back to sunbathing.

“I hope you enjoy your sandwich,” she says. “One of us should get a good meal today.”

While Sarah’s distracted by the sun, I bring the sandwich to my mouth. My teeth bite through the soft bun and the still-crunchy lettuce. When I taste the dilly chicken, my eyes flutter closed with delight.

Even with my eyes closed, I notice the shadow cutting across the sun as someone walks around the fountain.

“Well, look who it is,” a familiar, awful voice says. I swallow quickly. My delicious bite of sandwich slides down my throat like a stone.

I open my eyes to see the person I like least in the world standing before me. Austin Parks. He smirks, his cold blue eyes staring out from under his messy brown hair. I notice he’s wearing a yellow Young Leaders T-shirt. My stomach churns.