

# Chapter One



The thing is, when you're a good kid—you know, the mostly straight-A, listen-to-your-parents type of person, and you follow the rules pretty much all the time—you don't expect that one day, at the age of 12, you might be lying on your nice bed with its nice purple and blue sheets, thinking about doing something that could get you arrested. It never even occurs to you that this could be a part of your life. Alex Kings with a police record? Yeah, right. "She was always such a nice girl," the neighbors would say on the evening news. And my parents? Forget it. I cannot even imagine the level of punishment they would have to create for me. It is beyond my realm of experience. So I will not think about the parents for now. Just move on.

Say we do it. I say yes, and we do it. Getting arrested, how would that be? Would the handcuffs be too big? You imagine them digging into your skin as you struggle and yell out, but really, they'd probably be all loose and jangly, like very unattractive bracelets. And it's not for sure that we would even get arrested. Maybe we're taking ourselves a little too seriously here. Probably nothing would come of it at all. I hear the ink they use when they take your prints doesn't come off for a couple of days. Now that would be something to show at school. "That's the girl," younger kids would whisper, pointing at me in the hallway as they scuttle by with big saucer eyes. "Just look at her fingers. You'll see."

These are not good thoughts. Some kids, I know they would love this kind of attention. Take Josh, for example. I think half the reason he came up with this idea was so he could say he did it. He loves being in the spotlight. I, on the other hand, prefer to be low profile.

But that's not completely fair to Josh. He cares about Luna, too. I think about Luna, her branches reaching up to the sky like huge arms in prayer, begging, "Please don't cut me down." You can say this is corny, and I don't care. That's what I see when I look at her. She shouldn't have to die. It's crazy. This whole situation is crazy.

Sometimes when you think you have a choice, really you don't at all. I pick up the phone and listen to the dial tone. A dead sound. Flat. Like a tree stump.

As I dial I think, *Of course Josh knew I would agree to do this. This is all his stupid fault.* But it's not, and I know it. When he picks up the phone, all I say is, "It's me."

There is this second of quiet, and then I swear I can hear him smiling over the phone. "I knew you'd say yes!"

"I didn't say yes."

"Oh, come on, Alex, we both know you're going to. Don't waste time pretending you're not. We have planning to do." He sounds like a little kid about to go into a candy store. It is not natural, the way he isn't remotely scared.

I sigh. He's right. If you're going to do something, then do it, right? "Okay, then. Let's plan."

# Chapter Two



I stop by my usual table in the lunch room and tell my friends, “I have to eat with Josh today.” I try to say it casual-like, but this is not a small deal. Somewhere around fifth grade, we all got sorted out into these different groups. And now that we’re in seventh grade, it all feels pretty well set, like everybody’s been put into specified places with that permanent glue your parents tell you not to touch or your fingers will stick together forever. Josh is in the cool group. I am not. I am in that safe middle place, the one where nobody makes fun of you, but no one ever notices you either. I’m not sure how it happened. I think I was busy reading a book when it was all decided.

Kathy is munching on her standard, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Kathy’s dad makes the best peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in the whole world. Smooth peanut butter. Grape jelly. Diagonal cut. She raises one eyebrow at me. She can only do this on the right side, but she is practicing with the left. It is a very effective look, the kind a parent could give. She asks, “Tree stuff?”

“Uh-huh.”

“So now we’re up to eating lunch with him. This is an interesting development,” Zoe says from her seat across the table. And she giggles. She actually giggles.

“It’s no big deal. We just have a few things to talk about.”

Kathy asks, “You want me to come with you?” This is true friendship. She knows I am scared. I am entering a potentially dangerous situation. And she will go into the enemy lines with me. All I have to do is say the word.

“Thanks. No. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Here.” She smiles and tosses me something. A Hershey bar. Ahh, chocolate. Always good for the nerves. No almonds. Kathy is very picky about her nuts.

“Thanks. I’ll see you at math.”

The cool table is the longest one in the cafeteria. It is a loud place with a lot of laughing and bumping and self-important hair flips. Josh is towards the end, and he waves when he sees me approaching. He has dark curly hair and big, chocolate-brown eyes. A nice person to have waving you over for lunch. He is in the middle of one of his magic tricks, so I sit myself down next to him as quietly as I can and watch as he pulls a pint of milk from behind his back with a flourish.

I take out my peanut butter and jelly sandwich, which, by the way, is disgusting. My mother doesn’t like to get up in the mornings, so what she does is she makes ten peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on Sunday night, five for me and five for Rebecca, to last us through the week. Mom puts them all in the freezer. Every morning we take out a sandwich and pack it along with some nutritious piece of fruit Mom’s left out. No cookies, no chips. By lunchtime the sandwich has pretty much thawed out. Except that my mom thinks the only part of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich that is good for you is the peanut butter, on account of its having protein in the nuts. So she piles on the chunky peanut butter, and she puts this thin, microscopic layer of jelly on it. By the time it unfreezes for lunch, it’s this wet clump of sticky peanut butter with soggy pieces of bread clinging to the sides. Good luck finding any jelly. I eat my clump in silence as Josh continues in a deep voice.

“And now, watch and be amazed. The milk is completely... GONE!” As he says this, he opens the container and milk goes flying out across the table. It splatters all over Hailey Preston and one of the Sabrinas.

“Josh!” they screech in unison.

“That was classic!” some guy I don’t know yells out and starts to clap. Practically the whole table is applauding and

laughing. I do not laugh. I am sitting, eating my clump. That is all. Never mind that I can't stand Sabrina, and she has milk dripping off of her ratty bangs, and she is fuming, and she looks hilarious. This is not the time to be making enemies.

"Oh, man. I am sorry. I don't know what went wrong." Josh is sorry, but you can tell he also knows they will forgive him. "I promise. No more milk tricks till I have it figured out."

"What are you laughing at?" Sabrina asks in a nasty voice. And this is when I realize she is talking to me. Her last name is Light, which is really ironic because she is one big girl. My mom says that is why Sabrina is so mean to everyone, on account of her personal insecurities.

"Hey. Leave Alex out of this. She wasn't even laughing. Here," Josh hands Sabrina a napkin and smiles at her. "You got some in your hair."

There is a permanent scowl on Sabrina's big face, as if the whole world annoys her. She grunts in my general direction and gets up from the table. "Sabrina," she says to the other Sabrina, Sabrina Richter, "come with me to the bathroom?"

The Sabrinas leave. That thing that muscles do, where they relax after you have been through a stressful incident, I hope other people can't see it happening to me. Josh says, "Okay. So are you going to help with signatures today after school?"

I put my clump down. I am not hungry anyway. "Yeah. I might have to bring Rebecca, but she likes to come."

Becca is eight, and she's pretty cool for a little sister. I really don't mind bringing her along. She likes asking people to sign our petition to save the trees. So do I, for that matter.

"Oh. I was thinking we could go to the store afterwards to get the, you know, the stuff."

*The stuff.* Translation: a lock and chains. Not exactly a bring-your-kid-sister-along kind of trip to the local store.