

HOW **WE** ROLL

# PROLOGUE

**ON THE FIRST DAY OF SEVENTH GRADE,** Quinn, Paige, and Tara wore matching outfits. Oxford shirts, capri jeans, Keds. They took turns sitting on a stool in Paige's kitchen while Paige's mom did their hair. Three matching French braids, three matching bows. None of this had been Quinn's call. Truthfully, she thought the triplets idea was stupid, but she didn't feel strongly enough to protest. She just rolled with it, the same way she'd rolled with playing Barbies and building fairy houses and watching *Disney on Ice*—all the things Paige and Tara had liked when they were little.

"Let's go to the skate park," Quinn had suggested once. She'd gotten a skateboard for her eleventh birthday, the same birthday Julius had ruined by smashing Quinn's cake.

"The skate park?" Paige repeated.

"Yeah," Quinn said. "It'll be fun."

"You're the only one with a skateboard," Tara said.

"We can take turns," Quinn said.

But Paige wrinkled her nose, and Tara said, "I don't think my mom wants to drive us to the skate park. Let's do pedicures."

Well, what was Quinn supposed to do? It was Tara's house, Tara's rules. Just like when they went to Paige's house, it was Paige's rules. It never worked that way at Quinn's house. At Quinn's house, it was Julius's rules. Everyone knew that, which was why they never went there.

From the time Julius had had his first meltdown, Quinn's mother called one of two people: Paige's mom or Tara's mom. "Can Quinn come over for a while?" And they always said of course. Paige's house and Tara's house became Quinn's houses, too. If Quinn had to estimate, she would say that she'd spent at least 38 percent of seventh grade sleeping over in the Braskys' basement or the Patlases' guest room.

Eighth grade was a different story. There were no matching outfits. For one thing, Quinn had no hair left to French braid. But also, Paige and Tara started wearing crazy clothes. Like push-up bras. And tube tops, these stretchy pieces of fabric that barely covered their belly buttons.

Quinn didn't know how it had happened. Sometime over the summer, while she'd been dribbling her basketball, Paige and Tara had been taking secret trips to the Pearl Street Mall, double piercing their ears and stockpiling spandex.

On the first day of eighth grade, Quinn showed up on

Paige's doorstep wearing her favorite basketball shorts and her Colorado Rockies baseball cap. When the door opened, Quinn laughed. Paige and Tara looked like two of Beyoncé's backup singers about to take the stage.

"What are you *wearing*?" Quinn said.

"What are *you* wearing?" Paige said.

Tara looked Quinn up and down. She shook her head. "Seriously, Quinn?"

"What?" Quinn said.

"We're in eighth grade now."

"So?"

"So," Paige said, "you're dressed like a fifth-grade boy."

"Would you rather I go to school like this?" Quinn took off her Colorado Rockies baseball cap. There was only one tiny scraggle of hair left by then, holding on for dear life.

She remembered the looks on their faces.

*No. God, no. Don't go to school like that.*

"I didn't think so," Quinn said. She put her hat back on.

# CHAPTER 1

**ON THE FIRST MORNING OF HER NEW LIFE**, Quinn was debating. Guinevere or Sasha? Guinevere was long, strawberry blond, and wavy. Sasha was short and black, glossy as a patent-leather shoe. They were Estetica human hair wigs, \$2,000 a pop, no joke. They lived on two Styrofoam heads on Quinn's dresser. They were supposed to make her feel normal. Right.

*G. I. Jane.*

*Hare Krishna.*

*Professor X.*

Quinn looked at her reflection. Most of the time she tried not to, but today she looked. You would think that after 408 days she'd be used to it. She wasn't. She was a cue ball. A plucked chicken. Her mirror hadn't been hung up yet. It was propped on three cardboard boxes that she had yet to unpack.

Maybe she would do it later, put her new room together. Or maybe she would live out of cardboard boxes like a nomad until her parents came to their senses—until they realized that loading all their earthly possessions into a U-Haul and driving two thousand miles wasn't going to change anything. What was that expression? *Wherever you go, there you are?*

It had been a week, and so far they were still here. Gulls Head, Massachusetts, which was a weird name for a town. Even weirder was the accent everyone seemed to have. The real estate agent, the cashier at 7-Eleven, the secretary from Gulls Head High School who'd given Quinn a tour. Everyone in this town talked like the letter *R* didn't exist. *Far* was "fah." *Locker* was "lockah." *How are you?* sounded like "hawa-hya?" Quinn felt like she'd landed on another planet.

Her family hadn't moved to Gulls Head, Massachusetts, for her, although the suckfest that was eighth grade would have been reason enough. They'd moved because of Quinn's nine-year-old brother, Julius. Because the Boulder public schools hadn't been "equipped" to meet his "special needs." (This was code for Julius had a lot of tantrums, banged his face against a few walls, bit the lunch lady.) Sometimes Quinn's brother did things and you had no idea why. Were the lights too bright in the cafeteria? Were the kids too loud? Did the lunch lady say something that made him want to bite her?

Julius's new school, the Cove, was supposed to be different. According to Quinn's mom, who had done all the research

and filled out the paperwork, the Cove was internationally renowned. It called itself a therapeutic day school for exceptional children, which was Julius, no doubt. Exceptional.

You could tell just by looking at his breakfast, which he was eating right now at the kitchen table. Wonder bread and cream cheese. Yogurt. Hardboiled egg, no yolk. Because today was Wednesday, and Julius ate only white foods on Wednesdays. Mondays he ate only meat. Fridays he ate only foods that were fried. This was the first thing you learned about Quinn's brother: he did things his own way. Throw off his system and you would witness destruction like you had never seen.

"White Wednesday," Julius said, lining up his utensils like train cars. "Right, Mo?" This was what he called their mom: Mo. Her real name was Maureen. That was another thing about Quinn's brother: he had his own way of speaking. For the first four years of his life, he hadn't spoken at all. Everyone was afraid he never would. Then one day, out of nowhere, he opened his mouth, and *bam!* Their dad was "Phil," Quinn was "Q," and Mom was "Mo." Once Julius started talking, he was a faucet you couldn't turn off. Sometimes it was long streams of words, sometimes it was short spurts.

"Right, Mo? White Wednesday. Right, Mo? Right?"

"That's right, buddy," Mo said, placing a glass of white milk on the table. There was brown under her fingernails. Clay. Quinn's mom was a sculptor. Heads and busts, mostly. When they'd lived in Boulder her pieces had sold in galleries

downtown, but Gulls Head didn't have much of an art scene, so Quinn didn't know how it was going to work out for her mom here. Quinn didn't know how it was going to work out for any of them. Her dad had taken an adjunct professorship. They were only renting this house. Flying by the seat of their pants, that was what they were doing.

While Quinn was standing in the kitchen doorway thinking how crazy it was that her family had just picked up and moved two thousand miles for Julius to try a new school, her mom looked up from the box she was unpacking. "Morning, Q," she said. She was wearing an old flannel shirt of Quinn's dad's, ripped jeans, clogs. Her hair was in a messy bun, held in place with a pencil.

"Morning," Quinn said.

Her mom's eyes hovered on Guinevere. Quinn waited for her to comment, but she didn't. Even though this was the first time Mo had seen Quinn in a wig since she'd tried on about fifty of them at Belle's Wig Botik in Denver. Even though Quinn had been wearing the same ratty Colorado Rockies baseball cap every day for a year. Mo smiled, and her eyes crinkled at the corners. "Hungry?" she said.

Quinn's poor mom. She was trying so hard to act normal, like her daughter wasn't wearing a costume.

"A little," Quinn said.

"Hardboiled egg?" Mo gestured to a bowl on the table.

"Okay."



“The most hardboiled eggs to be peeled and eaten in a minute is six.” Quinn’s brother said this without looking up. His hair was a mess. Spiky all over like a blond stegosaurus.

“Morning, Julius.” Quinn pulled out a chair.

“Ashrita Furman of the USA.” He added a fork to his utensil train. “At the offices of the Songs of the Soul, in New York, New York, USA, on twenty-three March two thousand and twelve. Each egg was weighed and was more than fifty-eight grams. All eggs were peeled and consumed within one minute.”

That was another thing Julius did. He repeated things. Not just stuff he’d heard, like lines from commercials or TV shows or movies, but whole passages from books he’d read. He didn’t care if you were interested or not. He’d say it anyway.

“All eggs were peeled and consumed within one minute.”

“Wow,” Quinn said, taking an egg from the bowl.

“*Wow* is a palindrome.”

“Yes, it is.”

“A palindrome reads the same forward and backward.”

“Yes, it does.” Quinn cracked the egg on the table.

“The longest known palindromic word is *saippuakivikauppias*, which is Finnish for a dealer in lye.”

“Cool,” she said.

“*Cool* is not a palindrome.”

“I know.”

“*Cool* does not read the same forward and backward.”

*Shut up*, Quinn sometimes wanted to whisper. But she never did.

. . . . .

"You don't have to drive me," Quinn said as she strapped herself into the front seat. "I can walk."

"I don't mind driving you," her mom said.

"I don't mind walking."

"It's your first day," Mo said. "I want to see you off."

Quinn shrugged, holding the basketball in her lap. It was a new one, barely scuffed. Her dad had bought it for her before they left Colorado. This basketball was her *tabula rasa*, her blank slate.

As the car backed out of the driveway, Julius began muttering to himself from the backseat, *Guinness World Records 2017* propped in his lap, bright yellow headphones clamped to his ears.

"So," Mo said, glancing over at Quinn. "Are you nervous?" They had the same eyes, hazel, that shifted from brown to gold to green depending on the light. Mood eyes, her mom called them.

"I'm okay," Quinn said. It wasn't exactly a lie. Even though her scalp itched and she worried that the five pieces of wig tape she'd used might not be enough. What if they didn't stick? What if Guinevere came flying off in the middle of PE?

“That skirt looks nice,” her mom said.

It was denim with red stitching. Quinn felt stupid wearing it. She never wore skirts.

“Thanks,” Quinn said. She should have worn shorts and her Colorado Rockies baseball cap. But no. *No*. That was the whole problem back in Boulder. Just thinking about eighth grade—her bald head, her mesh basketball shorts, long and loose around her knees—Quinn felt a small, sharp twinge of shame. *Mr. Clean. Vin Diesel*. “You’re bringing this on yourself,” Paige had said once. “Why don’t you make an effort?”

Well, Quinn was making an effort now, wasn’t she? The wig. The skirt. If she looked like all the other girls at Gulls Head High School, maybe she would blend in. She’d be one of those leaf-tailed geckos, mimicking the foliage of its habitat so no predators would eat it. This was Quinn’s plan: avoid being eaten.

*Snap, snap, snap.*

She heard Julius start to snap his fingers. Slowly at first, then picking up speed. Her mom heard, too, and she glanced in the rearview mirror.

“Bud?” Mo said quietly. “You okay?” She always stayed calm, even when Quinn’s brother began to lose it. They were like equal and opposite forces. The more he amped up, the mellower she became.

Julius mumbled something, still snapping away.

“What’s that?” Mo said.

“Tea and cakes,” Julius blurted out.

“Ah,” Mo said.

Quinn didn’t ask, as if not asking would defuse the situation.

“T and Cakes,” her mom said anyway. “It’s the bakery in Boulder. We used to stop on the way to his school.”

“Tea and cakes, Mo. Tea and cakes.”

“That’s right, buddy. You miss those white-chocolate scones, don’t you? They were part of our old Wednesday routine.”

Quinn squeezed her basketball. She listened to her mom try to soothe Julius, but there was no soothing him. Now they were going to have to drive all over Gulls Head, Massachusetts, looking for white-chocolate scones. Quinn wished they didn’t have to. She wished, just once, that a ride in the car could be just a ride and not an episode of *My Strange Addiction*. She wished so many things. She wished that her brother’s brain could be rewired. She wished that their entire lives did not revolve around his food. She wished that her dad didn’t have to get up at five a.m. to take the commuter rail to work instead of riding his bike the way he had in Boulder. She wished that she still had hair. Even though she had never been one of those girly girls like Paige and Tara, who worried about clothes and nail polish and bad hair days, now that it was gone she missed it. She really did.

It had started last summer, a week before Quinn’s thirteenth birthday. They’d been in the pool in their backyard when Julius had said, “Hair, Q. Hair.” Before Quinn could

ask what he was talking about, her brother had launched into one of his monologues. “Xie Qiuping from China has been growing her hair since nineteen seventy-three. She now holds the record for the longest female hair with a length of five-point-six-two-seven meters when last measured. That’s nearly as long as the height of a giraffe. Susa Forster from Breitenfelde, Germany, has two thousand four hundred and seventy-three giraffe items that she has collected . . .”

Julius had droned on until Quinn tuned him out and continued practicing her back dive. But that night, when she was getting ready for bed, she’d looked in the mirror and seen what her brother had been talking about: a bald patch about the size of a quarter, right near her part. It was probably nothing, she thought. Maybe she’d been wearing her ponytail too tight. Then she showed her mom, and Mo found two more spots—one at the back of Quinn’s head, the other above her left ear. Mo told her not to worry. Maybe Quinn had a vitamin deficiency. Maybe it was hormones. Still, Mo called Dr. Steiner first thing the next morning. Dr. Steiner sent them to another doctor, a dermatologist named Dr. Hersh, who stuck Quinn’s head under a light and peered at her scalp through magnifying glasses. He took off his glasses and spoke: “Alopecia areata.” The words sounded like some food Quinn had never tasted but already knew she would hate. Baba ghanoush. Ratatouille.

“It’s an autoimmune disorder,” he said. “Your white blood cells are attacking your hair follicles.”

“The hair could grow back,” he said, “or it could fall out completely. We’ll just have to wait and see.”

Quinn’s mom had squeezed Quinn’s hand. She’d said they would go get ice cream. Chocolate chip and butter pecan. Hot fudge. Whipped cream. Nuts, sprinkles, the works. They had eaten like goddesses. Then they had driven home and watched Quinn’s hair fall out.

Paige and Tara had watched, too. Every few days that summer, another spot would appear, until finally, by the second week of eighth grade, there was nothing left. Paige and Tara pretended not to care. They knew it wasn’t Quinn’s fault. They knew she wasn’t contagious. But still, Quinn felt a distance growing between them. She felt a gaping hole of loss.

Wasn’t it weird to miss something you’d never thought twice about? And here was another weird but true thing: Quinn was glad her family had moved, even if they’d done it for Julius. Because no one in Gulls Head, Massachusetts, knew that Guinevere wasn’t her real hair. No one knew about her brother, either.

“Tea and cakes!”

She could be anyone.

“Tea and cakes! Tea and cakes!”

Anyone at all.

“Eee, eee, eee!”

Julius was starting to shriek and smack his head with the flat of his palm. Next would come the book.

“Buddy,” Mo said quietly. “Gentle hands.”

“Mom,” Quinn said.

“Gentle, Julius. We will find you a scone as soon as we drop off your sister.”

“Eee, eee, eee!”

You never knew what would set Julius off. It could be a hundred different things. Transitions. Noise. Hunger. Fatigue. Whatever the reason, when he got like this, it took forever to calm him down.

“*Mom*,” Quinn said louder. “Pull over. I’ll walk.”

Mo sighed. “Q, please . . . It’s your first day. I want to bring you.”

“You can bring me tomorrow.” The thought of arriving at Gulls Head High School with her brother hitting himself and screaming “tea and cakes” from the backseat was more than Quinn could bear. She reached down and grabbed her backpack. “Just let me out here, okay? I know where I’m going.”

Quinn did know. All week she had been riding around on her skateboard, exploring, looking for a decent court.

“Eee, eee, eee!”

Here came the book.

“Julius,” Mo said, dead calm. “Stop.” She was pulling over, not to let Quinn out, but to remove *Guinness World Records 2017* from her brother’s hands before he broke his own nose. He’d done that before. Twice.

“Honey, wait,” Mo said, climbing into the backseat. “Just give us a minute.”

But Quinn was already opening the door. Outside, the air

smelled briny and sharp. She took a good, deep swallow, filling her lungs. "I'll see you later, Mom."

"Are you sure?" Mo was wrestling the book from Julius's grip.

"I'm sure," Quinn said.

Even though she wished she were wearing sneakers instead of these stupid wedge sandals that she'd only worn once to her cousin Nadine's wedding, and even though she would probably get blisters, it felt good to walk away.



# CHAPTER

# 2

**QUINN WAS TRYING TO BLEND** in with her new habitat, but Mr. Kellar's homeroom had assigned seats, and her desk was dead center. All through attendance she could feel the eyeballs on her. It was mostly sideways glances, no outright stares, but still. The feeling of so many eyeballs made the skin on Quinn's neck prickle. It made her want to reach up and pat Guinevere, just to be sure. Were five pieces of wig tape enough? What if she started to sweat? Quinn willed her hands to stay down. She focused her attention on the #2 pencil in front of her. Its smooth yellow coating. Its perfectly pink, never-before-used eraser.

*Tabula rasa*, Quinn thought. *Blank slate*.

Back in Colorado, there had been a dry-erase board on the wall in Quinn's kitchen. Every morning, before her dad left

for work, he would write some random Latin phrase on the board for Quinn to contemplate. *Carpe diem. Ex nihilo nihil fit. Vincit qui se vincit.*

When Mr. Kellar began walking around the room, handing out schedules, Quinn slipped her phone out of her pocket and texted her dad:

Never got my quote this AM.

Fortes fortuna adiuvat, her dad texted back. Fortune favors the brave.

It was his first day of school, too. He was the adjunct professor of classics at some college Quinn had never heard of. She wondered if he missed UC Boulder. She wondered if he was nervous. She pictured her sweet, dorky dad, standing alone at the front of some lecture hall, holding a stub of chalk, clearing his throat.

“McAvoy?”

Quinn looked up. Mr. Kellar’s face was as round and white as the moon.

“Yuh schedule. Put it in yuh bindah.”

He might as well be speaking Latin.

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First-period PE. Ten laps around the gym. If this were 408 days ago, Quinn would not have minded. She was born to run.

Quinn's mom loved to tell this story, about the first day she brought Quinn to diaper dance class at the parks and recreation center. Quinn was two years old. Paige and Tara were two years old, too. That was how they all met, in the multi-purpose room at parks and rec, the three moms with their Starbucks cups, the three girls in their tutus and ballet slippers. Except Quinn had wanted nothing to do with ballet. As soon as she walked in the door, she spotted one of those rubber playground balls, stripped off her leotard, and began tearing around the room, bouncing the ball. Paige and Tara had thought Quinn was hilarious. They'd stripped off their leotards, too, and started running after her.

In first-period PE at Gulls Head High School, Quinn was the opposite of her two-year-old self. She was trying *not* to stand out. She was trying to keep everything *on*. Nice and easy. Slow jog. No sudden movements.

So far, the wig tape was holding. So far, no one had called Quinn a freak, or an alien, or, her personal favorite, "penis head."

The girls running laps behind her were talking rapid fire. "Oh my gawd, did you see Nick at Ivy's lockah? He was totally waiting for her."

"That is, like, so sad. Is he still texting her twenty times a day?"

"More like fifty."

"My cousin Angela? When she broke up with her

boyfriend? He wouldn't take no for an answer and he kept, like, texting and calling and showing up at her house? She had to get a restraining ordah."

"Oh my gawd, are you serious? Do you think he'll, like—Ivy! Ivy, oh my gawd, did you see your stawkah? He's back."

Apparently, Ivy had arrived.

"Don't call him a stawkah," Quinn heard her say. Then, "I feel bad. I've been avoiding him."

Immediately they jumped to her defense. "Don't feel bad. You broke up forever ago."

"You don't owe him anything. You brought him, like, fifty care packages this summah."

"It's not your fault he can't move on."

"I heard he could totally be walking by now but it's, like, all mental."

"Wait—*walk* walk? On his hands?"

"No, dummy, on fake legs. They're called prosthetics."

"Like that surfah who got shark attacked?"

"That was her arm, not her legs. Bethany Hamilton."

"Wasn't she in that movie?"

*Soul Surfer*, Quinn thought but did not say. She knew better than to join the conversation. She knew, without even turning around, what kind of girls they were. She could tell by their *oh my gawds*. In the hallway, she could tell by the way they tossed their hair over their bare, tanned shoulders, by the way their lip gloss shimmered in the light. Even though Quinn

had never cared about being popular—had always found Paige and Tara’s obsession with coolness seriously weird—when one of the girls jogged up beside her, Quinn’s chin automatically lifted, her stride lengthened.

“Hawahya?” the girl said. She was wearing a blue tank top. She was small and golden skinned with brown, curly hair gathered on top of her head in a big bouquet.

“Fine,” Quinn said.

“You’re new, right?” She was at least five inches shorter than Quinn, but she matched Quinn’s pace.

“Yeah,” Quinn said.

“Ivy D’Arcy.” She held out one tanned hand with fuchsia fingernails and a bunch of silver rings.

“Quinn McAvoy,” Quinn said, taking it, even though shaking hands sideways felt like they were running a relay and she was receiving the baton.

“Quinn,” Ivy repeated.

“It’s my mom’s maiden name. Weird, I know, but it could be worse. My brother was named after the drink she craved the whole time she was pregnant.”

“Really?”

“Yup. Orange Julius.”

“Your brothah’s name is *Orange Julius*?”

“Thankfully, no. Just Julius.”

“Oh.” Ivy snort-laughed. “I was gonna say.”

“Yeah.”

“Youngah or oldah?”

“Younger. He just turned nine.”

Quinn passed under one of the basketball hoops, wishing she could stop and shoot a hundred free throws. She didn't want to talk about her brother. Trying to explain Julius was like trying to describe color to a blind person. Paige and Tara understood. They'd known Julius since he was born. But Quinn had seen enough strangers stare at her brother in public. Most people had heard of autism spectrum disorder, but very few had seen a kid like Julius in action. Quinn could already picture Ivy's face closing up, her polite nod taking over.

“Hey.” Another girl appeared on Ivy's left. Long black hair, red lips, crop top and short-shorts. “I'm Cahmen.”

*Cahmen? Carmen. Right.*

“I'm Lissa.” A third girl materialized. Stick thin with silver leggings and corn-silk hair.

“This is Quinn,” Ivy said. “The one all the boys are talking about.”

Quinn squared her shoulders, waiting for the punch line. In Boulder, the boys had been even worse than the girls. *Quinn's so bald you can rub her head and see the future. Quinn's so bald Mr. Clean is jealous.* After a while, Quinn had learned to ignore them. She'd learned to make her face completely blank, like a Botoxed celebrity, as though nothing they said could penetrate. This was a skill Quinn called upon now. Her face was prepared for anything.

“You're pretty,” Ivy said, squinting up at Quinn. “Isn't she, girls?”

“For real,” Carmen said. “You have the nicest hair.”

Quinn almost tripped over her own feet.

Lissa said, “Is it natural?”

The spit in Quinn’s mouth had formed a paste so thick she wasn’t sure she could answer. But somehow she did. “Yes,” she said, which was not exactly a lie. Estetica human hair wigs came from real, natural, human heads.

“Couldn’t you just kill her?” Ivy said, but she was smiling, touching Quinn’s arm like they’d been friends forever.

Across the gym, a whistle blasted. The gym teacher, a huge, mustached man in shorts so tight they looked painted on, hollered, “All right, people, circle up!”

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Between first-period PE and fifth-period lunch, Quinn met three Emmas, two Avas, a Kacey, a Kylie, a Kelsie, and a Chelsey. She met a Jack, a Zach, a Mason, a Carson, a Tyler, and a Darius. She met a Mr. Fenner, a Ms. Chin, a Mrs. Wengender, and a Mrs. Winternitz. Every time someone told Quinn their name, she forgot it. There were so many faces. Everyone talked so fast. “Nice to meet you,” she said, over and over. And “Boulder, Colorado.” And “Yeah, it’s really nice here.”

In fourth-period art, over a tin of shared watercolors, one of the Emmas said to Quinn, “You must feel like a movie stah.”

“A movie star?” Quinn shook her head, embarrassed.  
“Why?”

“Because you’re new. And nothing new evah happens in Gulls Head. It’s, like, the most boring town on the planet.”

. . . . .

As soon as Quinn walked into freshman lunch, there were the girls from PE: Ivy, Carmen, and Lissa.

“Come on,” Ivy said. She literally grabbed Quinn by the arm and pulled her across the room. “You’re sitting with us.”

So now, here she was, sitting at a table with Ivy, Carmen, and Lissa, unwrapping her peanut butter and honey sandwich and answering more questions. Where did she live in Gulls Head? What kind of music did she like? Did she cheer-lead? Did she play field hockey? Was that the new iPhone? It was wicked cool.

*Wicked.* They liked that word a lot.

They also liked lip gloss.

“Balmy Weathah,” Carmen said when Lissa asked what kind she was wearing.

“Bikini or Sangria?”

“Bikini,” Carmen said, slicking some onto her lips with her little wand.

“Balmy is the bomb,” Ivy said.

“Balmy is the bomb,” they all agreed.



Quinn took a bite of her sandwich and said nothing. Because she had nothing to add. The glossiest thing she had ever put on her lips was ChapStick. If Julius were here, he would launch right in with one of his records. *The most lip-stick applications in one hour is five hundred and thirty-five.* Thankfully, Julius was not here. Thankfully, no one at the table seemed to notice Quinn's makeup deficiency. They were more interested in where she'd bought her skirt (Buffalo Exchange) and whether or not she had a boyfriend back in Colorado (not). Which brought them full circle to the conversation Quinn had overheard while running laps.

"You see that boy ovah by the window?" Ivy whispered. "In the wheelchair?"

Quinn turned around.

"Don't *look*," Lissa said.

Quinn turned back to her sandwich.

"That's my ex-boyfriend," Ivy said.

His name, Quinn was told in hushed tones, was Nick Strout. Brother of Tommy Strout, junior, quarterback of the varsity football team. There were two more Strout brothers who'd graduated. Football royalty, all of them. Tommy Strout was the most gorgeous specimen of all. Nick Strout, on the other hand, was a real-life tragedy.

"Why?" Quinn said.

"Because," Ivy said solemnly, "he was the best football playah Gulls Head has evah seen. Even in eighth grade."

"And now he has no legs," Lissa whispered.

“Gone.” Carmen snapped her fingers. “Just like that.”

Sitting there in the cafeteria, Quinn felt every cell in her body standing at attention. She remembered Dr. Hersh’s words: *The hair could grow back, or it could fall out completely. We’ll just have to wait and see.* She turned to Ivy and said, “What happened?”

“Snowmobile accident. Rollovah. He got crushed.”

“Crushed,” Lissa repeated.

“He almost died,” Ivy said.

Carmen pointed her finger at the ceiling and held it there.

“Don’t mind her,” Ivy said.

“What is she doing?” Quinn said.

“Pointing up at God,” Lissa said. “Like Big Papi.”

“Who’s Big Papi?”

Everyone stared at Quinn.

“You’ve nevah heard of Big Papi?” Carmen said.

Quinn shook her head, feeling stupider by the second.

“He’s only the best baseball playah evah.”

“Evah.”

“You *have* heard of the Red Sox, haven’t you?” Lissa said.

“Yes,” Quinn said. “I’ve heard of the Red Sox.” Did they think she was born under a rock?

“Anyway,” Ivy said. “Nick was my boyfriend. But now he’s not.”

“Now he’s her stawkah,” Lissa said.

“He is not my *stawkah*,” Ivy said. “He’s just having trouble moving on.”

By the time the bell rang, Quinn had learned two things about Nick Strout and Ivy D'Arcy:

- 1) They'd gone out for four months, three months before and one month after the snowmobile accident that crushed his legs.
- 2) Ivy dumped Nick not because an infection forced doctors to amputate Nick's legs, but because Nick (who used to be fun and cute and crazy talented) seemed to have undergone a personality amputation. Which was way worse than losing his legs. Now he was bitter and needy and, well, not the Nick Strout that Ivy had once loved. Like, at all.

This was what Quinn was contemplating on her way to sixth-period study hall: Nick Strout's chopped-off personality. You could probably call it ironic that the first person Quinn saw when she got to room 203 was Nick Strout. Unless this was some other boy in a wheelchair stuck on the door-jamb.

Quinn didn't *decide* to help him. It was instinct. She just bent down and tried to unwedge his wheel.

"What are you doing?"

Dark hair, dark eyes, ticked-off expression.

"Sorry," Quinn said when she realized she was staring. He had no legs. Well, he had legs. They just stopped at mid thigh, poking out of his khaki shorts and covered in these white stocking things. "I didn't mean . . . I was just trying to . . ."

“What?” he snapped.

“I . . .”

“Do you have a staring problem?”

Quinn shook her head. She knew what it felt like to be stared at. She knew better than anyone. It started with a warm tingle in your cheeks that spread like gangrene down your neck and chest, and into your belly, where it took up residence, growing hotter and hotter, until your whole body was smoldering. She’d felt it all the time last year. At restaurants. At the grocery store. In line for the movies. *What’s wrong with that girl? Why doesn’t she have hair?*

Quinn wanted to tell Nick that she understood. But she couldn’t. He was looking at her like . . . if he were holding a pencil he would stab her in the stomach. But he wasn’t holding a pencil. Neither of them was. Because Quinn’s pencil had dropped out of her hand and rolled under the wheelchair, and all she could do was stand there, stammering like an idiot. “Sorry . . . I didn’t mean . . . I guess I’ll just . . .” Her voice trailed off and she bent down to retrieve her pencil.

“Yo, Nicky!”

From her crouched position, Quinn turned her head. There was another boy down the hall. He had the same dark hair as Nick, but he was older and thicker looking, wearing a football jersey and holding up a cell phone.

“What?” Nick said.

“Mom’s been texting you. Did you forget your phone again?”

*Tommy Strout, Quinn thought. Junior.*

Nick said nothing.

“You have a PT appointment at twelve thirty. She says she’ll meet you out front.”

*Tommy Strout, Quinn thought. Quarterback of the football team.*

The bell rang. She had no choice but to scramble up from her awkward position, clutching her pencil.

“Hey there,” Tommy Strout said.

“Hey,” Quinn said.

He smiled, slow and sweet and lopsided. It was the kind of smile that weakened knees and stopped hearts. And it would not be happening to Quinn McAvoy of Boulder, Colorado, she could promise you that. Despite the fact that she had fairly nice legs, which she was pretty sure he had noticed. In Boulder, all anyone had noticed was her head.

*Gleam-o.*

*Baldilocks.*

*Shaquille O’Neal.*

Quinn had half a mind to rip Guinevere off, kick her wedge sandals into the air, and yell, *April Fools!* But she didn’t. She was Quinn McAvoy of Gulls Head, Massachusetts, and she was going to make a dignified exit into study hall. As dignified an exit as a girl could make in platform heels and a wig that might or might not be sliding off.

Quinn considered apologizing again, but Nick Strout wouldn’t even look at her. He was shooting his death stare at

the floor. And anyway, she had already apologized twice. Quinn McAvoy of Boulder, Colorado, would apologize three times. She would chastise herself and feel like crap for the rest of the day.

But Quinn was not that girl.

Not anymore.

# CHAPTER

# 3

**QUINN WAS HAPPY TO SEE HER MOM'S** car pulling into the pickup line because it meant that she was just seconds away from taking off her shoes. Quinn's feet were dying. Her scalp was itching like mad, too. She would give it a good, long scratch if Ivy, Carmen, and Lissa weren't clumped around her in front of the school, firing questions. What did she think of her first day? Was she glad she'd moved here? Did she think any of the boys were cute?

It was exhausting. Not that Quinn was complaining about the attention. She wasn't. It was just that all this smiling and head bobbing was new to her. Not to mention being on high alert in case her skirt rose up or Guinevere decided to melt off her head in the heat of the day.

"Hi, honey," Quinn's mom said when Quinn finally got in the car.

“Hi.” Quinn yanked off both sandals and sighed. Relief.

“How was it?”

“Good,” Quinn said. Because she couldn’t risk scratching her scalp yet, she examined her feet. One, two, three . . . five blisters.

“Good.” Mo squeezed Quinn’s arm as they pulled away from the curb. She looked tired. More tired than she had that morning, which was saying something. It probably meant she’d been fielding calls from Julius’s school all day. But Quinn didn’t ask. Having Mo to herself was a rare thing.

“Looks like you made some friends.”

Quinn glanced in the side-view mirror at Ivy, Carmen, and Lissa shrinking into the distance, attending to their tiny phones.

“Yeah,” she said, sounding surer than she felt. After the suckfest that was eighth grade, Quinn was not as trusting as she used to be. She could count on three fingers the number of people she actually trusted now: 1) her mom, 2) her dad, 3) her grandma Gigi in Arizona. And Quinn had never told any of them about Paige and Tara drifting away, or about the names she’d been called, or about that One Stupid Night.

That One Stupid Night had taken place the Saturday before Valentine’s Day, in Paige’s basement. Paige, Tara, and Quinn had been planning the party together for weeks. They’d decorated Paige’s basement (white Chinese lanterns, heart-shaped balloons, confetti on the tables). They’d baked (red velvet cupcakes, heart-shaped cookies). They’d made a



Valentine's playlist. They'd even worn matching outfits: hot-pink tights that they had bought at Target and oversized white T-shirts that they had graffitied with fabric markers. Candy heart messages like *Be Mine* and *Text Me* and *Crazy 4 U*. At Paige and Tara's request, Quinn hadn't worn the Colorado Rockies cap that night. She'd found a red-and-white-striped beanie with earflaps in the bargain bin at Anthropologie. It made her feel like a fighter pilot.

Paige's parents had been cool about the party. They'd greeted each guest at the door, but after that, they'd promised to stay upstairs and let the kids have fun.

For a while, fun had been the girls sitting on couches and the boys cramming mini cupcakes into one another's mouths. Then fun had been the girls dancing and the boys sucking helium out of the balloons and squeaking to one another like chipmunks. Finally, fun was Seven Minutes in Heaven.

Until that night, Quinn had never heard of Seven Minutes in Heaven, let alone played it. The idea had come from Sammy Albee, who was the youngest of six and seemed to know everything there was to know about boy-girl parties.

Quinn remembered Sammy Albee grinning as she held up a stack of paper strips in her fist. "Everyone write your name on one of these. Boys' names in the silver bucket. Girls' names in the white bucket."

Quinn had done as Sammy asked, just as everyone had done as Sammy asked. Sammy had that kind of personality. And even though there were very few eighth-grade boys

Quinn would have considered making out with for seven minutes in Paige's basement bathroom, she'd figured that whoever she got matched with, a girl's first kiss was a rite of passage. Quinn was almost fourteen. And this was, after all, a Valentine's party.

She'd stood there, drinking Hi-C, as names were called and couples filed in and out of the bathroom. Adrienne and Tyler. Kelly and Ben. Paige and Henry. There was giggling and hooting and blushing and a few dramatic gagging noises. And then, all of a sudden, the coolest thing happened.

"Quinn," Sammy said, reading a slip of paper from the silver bucket. "And"—Sammy stuck her hand into the white bucket—"Ethan."

*Quinn and Ethan.*

Actually, this was the worst possible thing that could have happened, but Quinn hadn't known it then. All she'd known was that Ethan Hess was the cutest boy in eighth grade, and if she had been able to pick anyone to play Seven Minutes in Heaven with, it would have been him.

It might have been Quinn's imagination, but when she and Ethan walked into the bathroom, the hooting and hollering was louder for them than it had been for any other couple. Quinn hadn't been thinking about her hair then. She knew she was bald. She knew Ethan knew she was bald. Her baldness had just seemed, in that moment, irrelevant. She felt cute in her fighter pilot beanie. And anyway, the lights were off.

"Hey," Ethan said in the dark.

“Hey,” Quinn said back.

Ethan was taller than most of the eighth-grade boys. He looked older, too. He had real muscles under his T-shirt. Quinn had noticed on their way into the bathroom how his sleeves were tight and she could see the line of his deltoids right through the fabric. Standing in there with the door shut, she could smell his boy scent. Soap and grass and an undercurrent of sweat that wasn't exactly gross. Ethan Hess smelled like a basketball player, and Quinn knew he was good because the boys' team and the girls' team shared a court, and she had watched him scrimmage.

“So,” Ethan said, taking a step closer. He was chewing cinnamon gum, which happened to be Quinn's favorite flavor.

“So,” she said.

They'd both laughed a little, because it was weird to be standing in the dark in Paige's bathroom while everyone waited outside. Even though it was pitch-black, Quinn could picture the seashell wallpaper and the little starfish soaps that she'd washed her hands with a million times.

“Think you'll go all the way?” Ethan said.

“What?”

“Your team. You're in the quarterfinals, right?”

“Oh. Yeah.” She had thought they would be kissing by then, but there they were, talking about basketball. “We'll make it to the semis at least.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Us too. Summit will be tough, but we can beat them.”

Quinn registered every word Ethan was saying: Summit's shooting guard was tall, but he was a one-armed bandit. If they pushed him to the left, he had nothing. Against Casey Middle, they'd have to play the zone. But all she could really think about was the smell of his cinnamon gum and how, if she leaned in just a little, their lips would touch.

"Two minutes!" someone yelled from outside.

Had five minutes passed already? That's what Quinn was wondering when Ethan reached out and grabbed her boob right through her shirt.

"What are you doing?" she said.

She had been surprised more than anything else. Why would he do that? Had it been an accident? She remembered what she did next: she removed his hand from her boob and told him to keep his paws to himself. But then he did something even weirder: he grabbed *her* hand and put it between his legs, where the zipper of his jeans had already been unzipped.

Quinn remembered leaping back the same way she had in the haunted house on Halloween, when she'd stuck her hand in a bowl of eyeballs and intestines. Even though she knew they were really just peeled grapes and cold spaghetti, the feel of them had made her jump.

"Come on," Ethan pleaded. "We've only got two minutes."

"I don't care if we've got two years," Quinn said.

"Finish up, lovebirds!" a voice called from outside.

"No one has to know," Ethan said.

“No one is going to know,” Quinn said, “because nothing is happening.” She reached through the dark for the door-knob, but she wasn’t fast enough. She felt the hat come off her head. “What are you doing? Give me that!” Her hands scrambled through the air, but she felt nothing.

That was when the door flew open. The lights came on. Ethan walked out of the bathroom with Quinn’s hat dangling from his finger, smirking. “Gives new meaning to the word *head*.”

Those were the words that would change everything. *Gives new meaning to the word head*. Quinn hadn’t understood them at the time. She’d had no clue. All she knew when she walked out of Paige’s bathroom was that Ethan Hess had her hat, and everyone was laughing, and she needed it back. She got it no problem. Ethan was so busy being high-fived and fist-bumped and back-slapped, he didn’t care about the hat anymore. She grabbed it straight out of his hand and jammed it back on her head.

“What a jerk,” she said to Paige and Tara when she managed to get them alone in a corner. “You won’t believe what happened in there.”

“We heard,” Paige said. “Ethan’s telling everyone.”

“What?” Quinn said.

Tara’s lip curled up the way it did when she was grossed out. “Please tell me you didn’t *actually* give him head.”

“I don’t know even what that means,” Quinn said.

“Sure you do.”

"No. I don't."

"Oral," Paige said, leaning in and lowering her voice. "You know . . . *down there*. Not your hand, but your mouth."

"What?" Quinn remembered laughing at the thought. "That's disgusting. I would never do something like that."

"Ethan said you did."

"Well, I didn't."

"Well," Paige said finally, "good."

"Because that would be revolting," Tara said.

"I *know*," Quinn said.

"And really, really bad for your reputation," Paige said.

"Seriously," Tara said. "We're almost in high school, Quinn. You need to think about these things."

Quinn didn't like the way her friends were talking to her, like she was a little kid and they were her parents. But that wasn't even the worst part. The worst part was Sammy Albee walking over, grinning like a wolf. "Ethan's fly was down. Everyone saw."

"So?" Quinn said.

"So. Everyone knows what you did."

"I didn't do anything. We never even kissed."

The basement, Quinn suddenly realized, was silent. Someone had turned off the music. Everyone was looking at her.

She remembered exactly what happened next. She turned and looked straight at Ethan, who was standing over by the snack table, eating a heart-shaped cookie. A heart-shaped cookie that Quinn herself had baked.

"Tell them," she said. Her voice was loud and clear, but her chest was tight. "Tell them nothing happened in the bathroom." She wondered how Ethan could be eating a cookie right now. If she had tried to put anything in her mouth, she would have barfed.

"Ha," Ethan said, spraying crumbs through the air when he spoke. "Good one, Gandhi."

"My name," she said, still loud, but now her voice was shaking, "is *Quinn*. And *nothing* happened in that bathroom."

But it hadn't mattered that she was telling the truth. It hadn't mattered that Paige and Tara believed her. Because no one else at the party did. Neither did any of the eighth-grade girls on Quinn's basketball team, who hadn't even been at Paige's house, but who, before practice on Monday, confronted Quinn in the locker room to let her know that they'd heard about her "slutty behavior" on Saturday night and that it "didn't reflect well on the team."

Nothing was the same after that. Nothing.

Paige and Tara hadn't stopped being her friends, exactly. They were too nice for that. The changes were subtle. Like Quinn would text them and they would take a little longer to text back. Or they would start "running late" for school so they had to get rides, and Quinn would walk to school on her own. Then there were the comments. *You're bringing this on yourself, Quinn. If you don't want people to call you names, why don't you make an effort? Wear a pretty scarf. Stop coming to school all sweaty.*

Once or twice, Mo mentioned something. “I haven’t seen Paige or Tara in a while. Is everything okay?”

“Sure,” Quinn would say. “Everything’s fine.”

Because here was the thing: unless you had a brother like Julius, you wouldn’t understand. If Quinn were to come home from school and say, “Hey, Mom and Dad, can I talk to you?” they would say, “Of course. Just let us get Julius settled.” That was another thing that sounded simple but wasn’t. Julius needed his snack arranged on a tray. He required three different foods, all of which had to meet the day-of-the-week criteria, and none of which could touch. The seams of his socks had to be straight at all times. He needed three blankets when he was watching TV, and they could not be wrinkled. Not only was the process of settling Quinn’s brother torturously slow, but if anyone deviated from the plan, the meltdown that followed could be epic. Julius didn’t care who saw. He didn’t care who got hurt. When he lost it, he lost it completely. Lamps flew. Bystanders got kicked, punched, scratched. One time, he melted down in the grocery store, and afterward, the cereal aisle looked like a war zone. Quinn felt so bad that her mom and dad had to deal with Julius that the last thing she wanted was to unload on them.

“Preternaturally self-sufficient.” Those were the words Quinn’s mom had used to describe her once, on the phone with Grandma Gigi. Quinn remembered because she’d had to look up the word *preternatural*. Grandma Gigi was a retired social worker and a great listener, but she had been



diagnosed with Alzheimer's last year, so it wasn't like Quinn was going to call her up and say, *Hey, Geege, let me tell you about all the bad stuff that's been happening to me.*

"Q," her mom said.

"Huh?" Quinn was staring out the window as they passed by the Gulls Head High School athletic fields.

"I asked if you were itchy today."

"A little," Quinn said. Now that she was out of eyesight, she could finally lift Guinevere and scratch. And scratch. And scratch some more.

"Did you try the witch hazel?"

This was one of the tips they had received from the perky blond wig technician at Belle's Wig Botik in Denver: *If you're going to wear a wig all day, put a few drops of witch hazel on a damp cloth and wipe it over your scalp once every two to three hours.*

Right. Like Quinn would ever ask for a bathroom pass in the middle of geometry. *Pardon me while I zip to the girls' room and witch-hazel my head.*

"I'll try it when we get home," Quinn said.

Mo glanced at her watch. "I need to pick Julius up at four. We have a meeting with his therapy team at four fifteen."

"Can you just drop me at the house?" Quinn said, because the last place she wanted to go was her brother's therapy team meeting.

"It takes twenty minutes to get to the Cove. I don't want to be late."

"Please?"

Mo glanced at her watch again, then at Quinn.

"I've got homework," Quinn said.

"Already?"

"Yes." It was easier than saying how much she did not want to go to Julius's school or how badly she needed to take off this wig. She knew Mo meant well, but Quinn really didn't need any more itchy-scalp advice from someone with hair. "I need the computer," she added, in case her mom was about to tell her that she could do her homework in the car.

It worked.

The minute Mo dropped her off at the house, Quinn unlocked the front door, ripped Guinevere off, and flung her into the living room. She gave her scalp a good, long scratch. Then she remembered that this one stupid wig had cost her parents two thousand bucks. God, what a racket—but Quinn felt bad, so she put Guinevere upstairs, back on the Styrofoam head where she belonged, so she wouldn't lose her shape.

Now Quinn was bald and barefoot in front of the iMac in her dad's makeshift office, free to log in to her chat room. Quinn's username was FuzzyWuzzy. As in "Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear, Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair, Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn't fuzzy, was he?" There was a certain amount of sick humor on alopeciasucks.com.

She began to type.

Day one with a wig. Reason: new school. Outcome: mixed. Pros: 1) "hair" was a big hit, even got

complimented, 2) not being called Gandhi. Cons:  
1) worried all day that wig tape wouldn't hold, 2) so  
freaking hot and itchy, like fire ants eating my scalp.  
Does this mean I will go qball tomorrow? Highly  
doubtful. Just need to dunk my head in witch hazel  
tonight, I guess (???). Verdict: fraudulence can be fun.

It didn't take long for the responses to roll in.

**TheNewNormal:** Way to go, Fuzz! Didn't u feel so  
much better in public? I will never go back to  
qballing.

**T'sallGood:** U r not a fraud, Fuzzy. U r just trying to  
feel good about yourself. No harm in that.

**BaldFacedTruth:** Have u tried Oregon grape root?  
It's a plant extract. There's this spritz u can use before  
u put on your wig. "Oregon Conditioning Spray."  
Highly recommend.

**WigginOut:** Or u can wear a wig liner . . .

**HairlessWonder:** Best wig tape for sensitive skin is  
Walker brand 3M. They sell scalp protector too.

**TheEyebrowsHavelt:** Are u AAU? If so I recommend  
Cardani Human Hair Eyebrow Wigs #15. No itch,  
and u can sleep with them on!

AAU stood for *alopecia areata universalis*. This was the  
rarest type of alopecia areata, resulting in 100 percent

full-body hair loss, which meant eyebrows, eyelashes, pits, pubes, leg hair, everything. Not to be confused with AAP (alopecia areata patchy), where the hair on your head fell out in random spots, or AAT (alopecia areata totalis), which was what Quinn had. Even though she'd started out patchy, she had since lost every hair on her scalp but nowhere else. All things considered, Quinn was lucky. She couldn't imagine wearing eyebrow wigs.

Thanks, guys, she wrote. I'll let u know how it goes.

# CHAPTER

## 4

**QUINN'S MOM CAME BACK FROM HER MEETING** at the Cove with homework. Not for Julius, who was parked in front of the TV with his three blankets, but for Quinn and her dad, who were parked at the kitchen table with their ice cream.

“Here’s what we need to determine,” Mo said. She held up a sheet of paper and began reading. “‘What are Julius’s strengths? Which of his behaviors are causing the most problems? How does he learn best? What does he enjoy and how can those activities be used at home and school?’”

“Hmmm,” Quinn said, pretending to contemplate these questions while she helped herself to another scoop of Chunky Monkey. “Guinness World Records. Guinness World Records. Guinness World Records. And . . . uhhh . . . Guinness World Records.”

“Q,” Mo said.

“Am I wrong?”

Quinn gestured with her spoon toward the living room, where Julius was watching an old DVD of *Guinness World Records Primetime* that he’d seen so many times the whole family had it memorized.

“*Does this man have the world’s biggest mouth?*” Quinn spoke into her spoon, making her voice deep and booming like the announcer’s. “*It’s Jim Purol versus one hundred fifty straws in a Guinness Record attempt that will make you gag!*”

“She has a point,” Quinn’s dad said, taking a bite of Chunky Monkey. “*Puer obsessi.*”

“He is not *a boy obsessed*,” Mo said. “He is a boy for whom routine is critically important. Guinness World Records are a part of his routine.”

“Fair enough,” Quinn’s dad said. “But when does *routine*”—he paused to scratch quote marks in the air with his fingers—“become so limiting that a person can’t enter the real world?”

Mo shook her head. “We’ve talked about this, Phil. The real world for Julius and the real world for us are two different things. The real world for Julius is a confusing mess of sounds and sights and people and places. He needs structure. Order. Predictability. When he opens up the same book every morning, he knows exactly what to expect. When he turns on the same DVD every night after dinner, he knows exactly what to expect.”

“I understand,” Quinn’s dad said, “but are we doing him

a disservice by not teaching him other ways to cope? By not expanding his horizons?”

“Not expanding his horizons?” Mo’s eyebrows shot up. “We just moved our son all the way across the country. We’ve altered his physical environment, his social environment, everything he has ever known. We’ve thrown him into chaos.”

“Whose idea was that?” Quinn’s dad said. Not unkindly. Quinn’s dad was always kind.

“Believe me,” Mo said, “if a school like the Cove existed in Boulder, we would still be in Boulder. But it doesn’t. So we aren’t. We are in Gulls Head, Massachusetts. And I would like for us to take advantage of the exceptional resources we now have at our disposal to help Julius.”

“Fair enough,” Quinn’s dad said.

“Q?” Mo said. “Are you with us?”

“I’m with you.”

Quinn’s dad reached out, ruffled the top of Quinn’s head. There was nothing there to ruffle, but his hand was warm.

“Okay,” Mo said. “Let’s try this again.”

She held up the sheet of paper. “How can we provide a predictable routine for Julius that will incorporate his new house, new town, and new school?”

. . . . .

At night, Quinn had her own routine. She would never tell anyone, not in a million years, but here it was:

First, she would turn out all the lights in her room. Next, she would sit on her bed in the dark, running her fingers over every square inch of her scalp, like a newly blind person trying to read braille. Were there any raised dots yet?

The next thing Quinn would do was sing. She knew it was stupid, which was why she would never tell anyone, but thinking about her bald head always made her think about the Frog and Toad story she'd loved when she was little, where Toad wants to grow a garden. He plants a bunch of flower seeds in his backyard. When they don't grow right away, he starts shouting at them. Frog tells Toad to leave the seeds alone, to let the sun and rain do their work, but Toad refuses to listen to logic. He tries everything he can think of to make the garden grow. He reads stories to his seeds. He plays music to his seeds. He sings to his seeds.

The song Quinn sang to her bald head was even stupider than the fact that she was singing at all. "Livin' on a Prayer" by Bon Jovi. Her dad would appreciate the song choice. Phil was a huge Bon Jovi fan. He was, in fact, the reason Quinn knew all the lyrics, not just to "Livin' on a Prayer," but to every song on the *Slippery When Wet* album. But her dad still wouldn't get why Quinn was singing to her bald head. No one would get it.

So she sang very softly. So softly she could barely hear herself.

*"Tommy used to work on the docks."*