CHAPTER 1

Last Days of Summer

28 August, 7.23 p.m.

Sara

"So."

"Yeah?" I say. But I already know what she's going to say. She's asked me the same exact question every day this summer. And the answer is always no.

Maggie's like, "Did he call?"

"You need to get over yourself," I say, "because it's not happening."

The prospect of starting senior year next week without a real boyfriend is the worst. Not some maths dork or physics geek I end up liking just because he's there. I mean a boyfriend who's everything I want. The whole package.

"Sara," Maggie says. "Do you realize what this means?"

I decide to ignore her. Maggie has this idealistic image of romance that I don't think exists in real life. I

mean, I've been trying to believe it does all summer. But Dave never called.

"This can only mean that he's planning something huge," Maggie says.

"Colossal," Laila says.

"So huge it's gonna blow your mind," Maggie says.

Dave's this new guy who transferred to our school from Colorado at the end of last year. This gorgeous Greek-god type on the basketball team. Ever since he sat next to me at the junior meeting – out of all the prettier, more popular girls he could have sat next to – I've been waiting for him to make a move. We talked a few times after that, but nothing major happened. So when he asked for my number on the last day of school, of course I wrote it in his yearbook, thinking he was going to call me the next day. But then ... nothing. Maggie keeps insisting that he likes me, but if he's so interested, why didn't he call?

I hate that a boy is making me feel this way. And I hate that I'm letting it happen.

I go, "Next topic!"

Maggie turns to Laila. "How long do you think it'll take him to ask her out?"

"He'll do it on the first day," Laila says. "Second, tops."

"Can we get back to the game?" I say. "Can't Fight This Feeling" plays through the Putt-Putt Mini Golf speaker system.

Laila goes, "Fine. Favourite scary-movie scene."

"Oooh!" Maggie says. "That's a good one!"

"I try," Laila says.

I smack my hot-pink golf ball way too hard.

"I know mine," Maggie says. "It's from that one Freddy movie where he's under the girl's bed? And he slices through it and . . . like, she falls underground or something. I forget how it went. But I woke up with scratches all down my neck."

"Hey!" Laila says. "I remember that! Wasn't that in eighth grade?"

"I think so."

"Wild," I say.

My golf ball bounces off a plastic pink flamingo and, confused, rolls back to me.

Even though we're all best friends, we basically only know each other about eighty-five per cent. That's why we made up the Game of Favourites. Once we got past our standard favourites, we moved on to asking the most random questions. Where you find out the meat-and-potatoes stuff you usually never get to know about another person.

I would go next, except the only scary-movie scene I can think of is the one where Dave dies of laughter over my even considering the remote possibility that he might like me. So I tap Laila's golf club with mine and say, "I pass. Your turn."

Laila has to think about this one. Her golf ball glides past the flamingo and stops right next to the hole. She plays mini golf perfectly. Just like she does

everything else perfectly. She even had the perfect summer, interning at Overlook Hospital. She's going to be a paediatrician. Every single person in her family is a doctor. Except her brother. But that would be because he's eight.

"OK," Laila says. "Remember how we rented *An American Werewolf in London* last Halloween?"

"Yeah?"

"And remember when they realize they're walking on the moors when they're not supposed to?"

"Um. . ." I glance at Maggie. She makes a face like, *I have no idea what this girl is talking about.*

"So scary," Laila says.

Maggie looks me over. "So how much weight did you lose?" she asks.

"Five pounds."

"And what did you eat again?" Laila says.

"Just . . . you know. Less." All I wanted to do was fit into my jeans from tenth grade. And now I'm there.

"Don't do that again."

"Why not?"

"If you had any idea how much starving yourself damages your metabolism—"

"Hey, Laila?"

"Yeah?"

"But I look good, right?"

"Yeah."

"So there you go," I say. "And I didn't starve myself. I ate stuff."

"Like what?" Maggie says. "Two rice cakes and a carrot?"

"For your information I also had some lettuce." The truth is, I imposed a personal embargo against my daily Dunkin' Donuts fix. But Laila and Maggie don't know how bad my addiction to icing was, and I'm embarrassed to admit it. It's shocking what cutting out junk food can do for you.

We walk over to the next course that has this impossible windmill.

"OK," Maggie says. "Goals for senior year."

"Simple," Laila says. "I'm going to be valedictorian."

"Oh, what, salutatorian isn't good enough?"

"No. It's not."

Laila's always had this problem with being second at anything. Her dad is this total control freak. Laila can't do anything after school and she's only allowed to go out on weekends and she can't even date anyone. I don't know how she survives.

"Actually?" I say. "You're supposed to state your affirmations in the present tense. As in, I am valedictorian." I've been reading this book called *Creative Visualization*. It's all about creating the life you want by imagining that it already exists. Since my second goal this year is to achieve inner peace, I'm focusing on what I want my life to be.

Laila's like, "Wait. Is that more of your Zen enlightenment hoo-ha?"

"Yeah," I tell her. "It is. And it works."

"Well, good luck overcoming the legacy of Michelle," Maggie tells Laila.

"Seriously, it's like she has this special-order brain that comes preprogrammed with every piece of useless information you need to ace high school." I rub my golf club on the plastic grass. "But if anyone can beat her, it's you. You go."

"Thank you, I think I will. Next?"

"I'll go," Maggie says. "I want to be smart."

"You're already smart!" I insist.

"No, I'm not. Not like you guys."

I concentrate on examining the waterfall at the end of the course. Because what she's saying is kind of true. Not that we would ever tell her. It doesn't even matter, though. I'd trade my brain for Maggie's body in a second. Not only is she a drop-dead gorgeous blonde, but she's had a string of drop-dead gorgeous boyfriends since seventh grade. Maggie also has more clothes than anyone I know, including the popular crowd. She was even friends with them until junior high. As long as you meet their two requirements of being beautiful and rich, you're considered privileged enough to hang out with the inner circle. But Maggie's also sweet and loyal and will fiercely defend me to anyone who looks at me the way they did. They even told her to stop being friends with me because it was damaging her reputation. Good thing Maggie iced them. And I'm embarrassed to admit it, but their rejection still hurts.

"I'll prove it," Maggie says. "Who'd you get for history?"

"Mr Sumner," I say.

"See? I got Mr Martin. They even have smart and stupid history!"

"You're not stupid!" we both yell together.

"Whatever."

"So," I say. "How – not that you aren't already smart because you are – but how are you going to do that?"

"You'll see," Maggie says. "OK, Sara. What's your goal?"

Here's the thing: I want to reinvent myself this year. I've been a nerd since for ever. My life for the past three years has been the same tired routine. Same honours classes with the same set of ten kids, same endless piles of homework, same waking up the next day to do it all over again. I'm tired of waiting for my life to begin. Something has to happen. Like an amazing boy. I know he's out there. I just have to find him. And it would be awesome if that boy was Dave.

"I'm going to find a real boyfriend," I say. "Someone who's the whole package."

They both look at me.

I'm like, "What?"

"Nothing," Laila says.

"What?"

"Nothing. It's just. . ."

"*What?*"

"I'm just wondering where you intend to find this perfect male specimen. Haven't you already gone out with all the halfway acceptable guys we know?"

"She's only had two boyfriends," Maggie says.

"Exactly. She's exhausted the supply."

"Yeah, well . . . that's why I'm thinking about getting to know guys in other classes," I say. "How random was it that Dave sat next to me at the meeting? It just proves that I could sit with anyone I want. Like in assemblies and pep rallies and stuff."

"You don't go to pep rallies," Laila says.

"But I could! That's the point!"

"Those guys aren't smart enough for you," Laila says.

"Love isn't based on intelligence," Maggie huffs. "It can happen with anyone."

"Like who?" Laila demands.

"Hello!" Maggie yells. "Like Dave!"

I go, "Whose turn is it?" Because I don't want to jinx the Dave thing.

"It's yours," Maggie says.

For this one, you have to time your swing so your ball goes in between the windmill slats. If you don't, it's all over. Suddenly it feels really important for me to get this. Like it's a sign. If my ball gets past the windmill, it means that Dave likes me. If it doesn't. . .

I position my golf ball.

I examine the windmill.

I think to the universe, *Please make it real. Please make it happen.*

I move my golf ball to the right. And I swing.

It's a hole in one.