

Chapter One



HANNAH

THE FIRST THOUGHT I have when I wake up on Saturday is that school is almost over. And that means bare feet, a part-time job at the Salish Sea Studio, no more homework, and—and drum roll, please—actual high school in September. Finally!

I lie in bed waiting to feel different, but all I really feel is hungry. Poos and Chuck are fast asleep in their usual furry feline heap on my comforter so I shove them a little with my foot.

“Guys! School is practically done! Grade nine in September!”

Poos opens one sleepy eye but doesn't understand the significance of my statement and goes right back to sleep.

"Thanks for your enthusiasm." I shrug, and throw off my duvet. I walk over to my full-length mirror on the wall near the window and take a good look. Same old Hannah Rae Anderson. Same nutso hair. Same freckles. Same bony knees. I guess I'm taller than I was at the beginning of the year, but other than the new zit on my chin, there haven't been any miraculous transformations during the night.

There is a sudden commotion at my window. Both cats spring into the air and take off down my spiral staircase at warp speed. I smile. There's only one thing that would make them react that way first thing in the morning. Jack.

Sure enough, Jack is perched on the corner of the planter box outside my window, his legs hidden in a tangle of pink and white sweet pea blooms. He looks at me quizzically and moves his head up and down repeatedly like one of those hokey bobble-head animals people put on the dashboards of their cars.

"What are you so fired up about?" I ask him. The last few times he's visited he's been like this, kind of jumpy and hyper. When he tries unsuccessfully to squawk, I notice that he's carrying something in his beak.

"Oh, I get it. You've brought me another present?" I hesitate, because the last "gift" he brought me was half an old cigar. Totally disgusting.

Jack hops straight into the centre of the planter box and drops something into the flowers. I roll my eyes, stretch out

my hand and feel around in the dirt for his present. I find it almost immediately, and hold it up between my face and Jack's beady black eyes.

"A beer cap? You've brought me a beer cap?" I turn it over in my hand. Big Mountain Lager. It's a popular beer on Vancouver Island but not exactly a collector's item. "You're losing your touch, buddy. I thought ravens were supposed to like jewelry and coins and stuff!" I reach up to touch the sliver of abalone that hangs around my neck. It's been there for two years now—the first thing Jack ever brought me. I've never taken it off. Not even once.

But Jack just caws in my face, flaps his blue-black wings, and takes off for the bay before I can say another word. I crane my head out the window and push aside the sweet peas but by the time I have a clear view, he's nothing but a black speck perched on the mast of the *Orca I*—an old abandoned tuna boat that's been rusting in the bay for years. Why Jack wants to hang out on that heap is a mystery to me, but he's been out there a lot lately. Jack isn't your average run-of-the-mill raven. Not by a long shot.

I put the Big Mountain beer cap up on the shelf next to the cigar butt. I should probably just throw them both away, but disgusting or not, a gift is a gift.

My cell phone buzzes from my nightstand and makes me jump. I'm still not used to having one. It was a middle-school graduation present from Aunt Maddie, much to my dad's despair.

"A cell phone, Madds?" he'd argued.

“She’s a teenager, David!” Aunt Maddie had explained. “She’ll be in high school soon. She needs a phone.”

(Did I mention how much I love Aunt Maddie?)

Crossing to the phone now, I slide it open to reveal a text from Max: Hey! Want to meet me @ the Dog? I work at 10.

My stomach does a somersault, which I find surprising, and irritating as well. *Calm down. It’s only Max.* But my stomach doesn’t calm down. In fact, lately it performs complex gastric gymnastics whenever Max is around. I text him back: Sounds good. C U in 20.

I can’t decide what to wear. It’s June, so shorts and a t-shirt make sense but I’m just not in a shorts and t-shirt kind of mood. I mean, it’s only breakfast, and it’s only Max, and it isn’t like it’s a date or anything, but still, a regular old t-shirt just doesn’t feel right. So I put on my light green cotton skirt, a lilac tank top and my neon green flip flops, and then stand back to check myself out. I decide I look nice, but not in a stupid, dressed-up sort of way. My hair, however, is never easy, but because I only have ten minutes, I just twist it into submission and secure it in a lopsided messy bun with a barrette. It’s just a temporary fix. I know it will look decent for about a minute at the most, and then half of my hair will find a way to escape for good. Story of my life.

“Well, well, well,” Dad says when I come down the stairs. He’s wearing his yellow “Marmite” shirt—it’s one of his favourite foods, if you can believe it. Every sane person knows

that Marmite is not fit for human consumption. The left side of his face is a roadmap of creases. “Look who’s officially on summer vacation, and wearing a dress, no less!”

“It’s not a dress!” I say defensively. “It’s a skirt.” And then to get my father’s mind off my clothes, I say, “And school isn’t over until Monday, so it’s not officially summer vacay yet, Dad.” It’s true, although next week will be nothing but movies, junk food, and teachers checking their watches. “I’m just going to meet Max for a while.”

Dad raises an eyebrow.

“I’ll be back a little later. Okay?” I catch myself tapping my fingers on the side of the kitchen counter, and I consciously make myself stop. Still, I can’t help noticing the clock. The minutes are ticking by at hyper-speed. I’m going to be late.

“Sure, honey,” Dad says finally, reaching for his mug by the sink. He rinses it out and then places it beside the French press that he claims is the only way to make a decent cup of coffee. “Have fun.”

“It’s just breakfast,” I say casually, but my voice gets drowned out by Dad’s morning bean-grinding ritual. He presses the button in short bursts, instead of one long one, shaking the canister of beans between each grind. My dad is strange about coffee.

I raise my hand in a wave and he gives me a sleepy thumbs-up, then shuts off the grinder and shuffles over to give me one of his bone-crushing bear hugs.

“Your last summer, Hannah Banana, before real high

school!” he says, smelling like Italian dark roast.

“I know,” I say, cringing. *Hannah Banana*. At fourteen, it’s clearly time to retire that nickname.

“Grade nine in September.” He shakes his head and stands back, crossing his arms across his chest. “Just quit growing up, will you? You make me feel decrepit.”

“You *are* decrepit.”

“Get outa here.”

“I’m already gone.” *And I’m already late*.

I know Max won’t care. In fact, he probably won’t even notice, but even so I decide to shave off a couple minutes by riding Mathilda. I lift my bike over the side rail of our houseboat and pedal up Dock 5, then hang a left until I reach the government wharf.

“Whoa, Hannah! Where’s the fire?” Over on Dock 9, Riley Waters looks up from the *Tzinquaw*—his fish boat he anchors next to his houseboat—and wipes his forehead with his cap before placing it back on his head. His long white braid almost reaches to his waist. People say he looks like Willie Nelson.

“Hey, Riley.” I wave. “No fire! It’s just Mathilda. She’s built for speed!”

Riley laughs, because this is *so* not true. My bike is ancient, older than me even, but it’s still the best thing on two wheels in Cowichan Bay. Mom bought it when I was little, for twenty-five dollars from an Australian woman at a garage sale. Sure, it’s clunky and only has five speeds, but it’s a total work of art:

sky blue and white, with crazy cool aboriginal designs painted all over it. When Mom first brought it home, Dad built a contraption that attached over the front tire, a place for me to sit when Mom rode. He said I looked like a baby kangaroo up there, which was fitting, given the history of the bike. After Mom died, I kept the bike, as well as the carrier because it's good for hauling stuff around. Now that I'm fourteen, I guess I look a little strange cruising around on it, but there are lots of things about Dad and me and our life on our houseboat that people think are weird. Whatever. I'm okay with weird.