

## CHAPTER

# 1

**D**arla, my twelve-year-old sister, has shoved me halfway off the computer chair. “Brett, move!” she yells.

“Cool it!” I yell back. “I have to finish this essay.”

“I have to do my book report.” She stops shoving. “Dad! It’s my turn at the computer.”

Behind me, I hear the clink of cereal bowls landing on the kitchen table. “Why didn’t you do your book report last night?” Dad asks.

“Because I was doing other stuff,” Darla says.

“Same here,” I say. “We need our own computers.”

He sighs. Loudly. Opens the fridge. Looks in. Closes it.

I type the last sentence of my essay. Click Print. “Dad, you’re too paranoid.”

“There *are* online predators,” he says. “I want the computer where I can see what you’re doing.”

I get to my feet and grab the printout. Darla scoots into my place. “Ew, the seat is sweaty.”

“It is not.” I shove the essay in my notebook. Sit across from Dad at the table. “I wish you’d trust us more.”

“I trust you. It’s other people I don’t trust.”

“Yeah, whatever,” I mutter, grabbing the cereal box.

“Yeah, whatever,” Darla parrots. This is the only subject in the world my sister and I agree on.

I quickly go through a bowl of cereal. Banana. Big glass of orange juice. Football season is over, but I feel like I'm still in training. I pour another bowl of cereal. Grab another banana.

Dad frowns and shakes his head.

"What?" I ask.

"Nothing," he says, staring into his coffee cup.

I return the banana to the fruit bowl.

He grunts. Grabs the banana and tosses it at me. "Eat. You're sixteen."

Man, make up your mind. I shrug and start peeling it. "Not going out today?"

He shakes his head. "Water's too rough."

I look at him. He's still not making eye contact. His shoulders are slumped. Most of the time Dad's able to fish. But when he doesn't, there's no income. He's too proud to talk about money. Doesn't want to worry us. Which just makes me worry.

Money ... everything ... was so much easier before Mom died.

“Burger King is hiring,” I say. “I saw a sign—”

“No,” Dad interrupts me. “Your job is school.”

I take a deep breath and finish the banana. “It’s okay about the computer. We can get by with one.”

“No we can’t,” Darla pipes up.

“Darla, shut up.”

Dad’s so preoccupied he doesn’t even scold me. I know the whole computer thing is more about money than cyber stalkers. Why can’t he just say that? *Guys, we can’t afford another computer.* Why does he have to be such a super parent?

I get up from the table. Clean my dishes and grab my backpack. “Well, see ya later.”

“Yeah. Have a good one.” Dad’s voice