

CHAPTER

1

My parents are lame. I mean, really lame. Right now they're in the living room talking about me. Dad likes to rant in Spanish. I hear him flick something with his finger. Probably my C-average report card.

I'm sitting on my bed with my knees drawn up to my chest. I pick at a loose thread on the hem of my LA Sparks T-shirt. I have to wait for my parents to finish talking. That's the rule. I don't get a say. After they decide my fate, they'll let me know. I'm guessing it will be no TV and no dating Tony for a month. That's my usual punishment. Tony will understand if

we can't go out. He's as loyal as a puppy dog. I don't care, as long as I can play basketball.

I push a deep breath out of my chest. I really should get some homework done. I lean over and yank my backpack off the floor. I'm not even sure what homework I have. A literature essay, I think. Except I haven't read the book we're supposed to write about. A research paper for my government class. There's a test in geometry tomorrow. Or is it Friday?

I unzip my backpack. The inside looks like my locker threw up in it. My stomach twists with stress. I lean my head against the wall and think about texting Tony. Maybe let him know what's up. But my hands feel like lead and fall onto my lap. I stretch my legs out.

Across the room, my *quinceañera* portrait stares back at me. I look like the queen of unicorns in my white ball gown

and sparkly crown. Talk about lame. I can't believe I agreed to that big church service when I turned fifteen. Or the huge party. It cost my parents a bundle, as much as Celia's party. Dad has never said so, but I know he's pissed he had four daughters.

From the living room I hear him bark, "*Y no mas baloncesto!*"

What? My face gets hot. The leaden feeling vanishes. I jump off my bed and run into the living room. Mom and Dad are facing each other, their arms crossed. I see Rosie and Marta at the kitchen table. Their school books are open, but I can tell they're listening.

I glare at Dad. "What do you mean 'no more basketball'?"

He glares back at me. I expect him to order me to my room. But he says, "When Celia was seventeen, she had a job and got straight As."

"So?" I cross my arms, copying them.

“So there’s an opening in the warehouse,” Mom says. “Two hours after school and all day Saturday.”

“I don’t spend that much time playing basketball!” I shout.

“No TV or dates for a month.” It’s as if Dad didn’t hear me. “And no cell phone.”

“What? No!” My phone is a cheap piece of crap. But it’s my lifeline. I scramble for an excuse. “What if I have an emergency?”

“If you’re not home, you’ll be at school or work. Those places have phones,” Dad says. He pauses. “We expect you to raise every one of your grades. By the end of the semester. Or no cell phone until you graduate.”

I stare at him with my mouth open. “There’s no way! I’m not as smart as Celia. I can’t raise all of my grades. Especially geometry.”

“You can. You’re choosing not to.”