



Chapter 1

The Swansons

Emma Swanson was always trying to find her place in Texsun City. It wasn't her fault that she'd been shunned by her peers. She wasn't sure who to blame. She just knew she didn't measure up somehow.

Her family had money and beachfront property. Emma had every luxury a girl could want. But it wasn't enough. She'd tried out for cheerleading twice. She didn't

make the cut either time. Then she gave up trying to be popular. She was over trying to fit in.

Instead, she tried to find things that interested her. Like art or horseback riding. She wasn't seeking anyone's approval. It didn't matter.

She heard the rumors about her grandfather's fortune. How other families had not been as successful. It was easy to blame him. Nobody complained when the rice industry was booming. Money grew on trees. Then taxes took their toll. Some found it hard to stay afloat. But not Emma's grandfather.

Thomas Swanson had been a smart man. He was able to spread his money around. In other words, he hid it. Then he bought out his partners. He passed his fortune down to his children.

Many resented his quick thinking. Some moved on to different businesses. Others just

went under. Emma didn't know how much of the story was true. She believed some of it had to be. She loved her grandfather. He was shrewd. He knew how to handle money. One thing was for sure, he loved his family. That was what mattered to Emma.

Unfortunately, his dealings with his former rivals made Texsun City a difficult place to live for Emma. And made Summit Middle School especially tough. Emma could ask him to donate money to build a better library. Or ask him to make some grand gesture that would create goodwill. Grease the path for her. But she didn't want to. She wanted to be accepted for who she was. If the other girls wanted to hate her because of family rivalry, then so be it. She knew one day she would figure it out on her own.

When Carson Roberts showed up at Summit Middle School, Emma found "her tribe." The girls instantly hit it off. Who

knew opening Summit to so many new faces would be Emma's salvation? It was just what she needed. And at the perfect time.

Carson was a breath of fresh air. They had a common enemy. And they found a kindred spirit in Mai Pham. Emma had known Mai for many years. But they had never really opened up to each other. Each was dealing with her own walls, built to protect them from the SMS mean-girl cliques.

"Emma! Come downstairs, darling," Miss Arina called.

Miss Arina was Emma's rock. She had been her nanny since infancy. She was the constant in her world. Her nanny got Emma through the hard times. Her parents had a lot on their plate. Her father ran Swanson Rice. Her mother worked tirelessly with Texsun City nonprofits.

Emma ran down the staircase to her