

Chapter 1

Rita Murray's stomach was growling. She dug around in her backpack for a candy bar. But all she found was an empty wrapper. Then she remembered. She'd gotten rid of all her candy. That was two days ago. It was the start of her diet.

Ugh. Rita was hungry enough to eat the book she was reading. Then she thought about the two pounds she'd lost. The diet seemed to be working. But was it worth it? She was always hungry. "I'm starving," Rita said.

"Quiet!"

Rita looked up and glanced around the library. She expected to see one or more angry faces glaring at her. But all she saw were students. Some were at tables, reading.

Others worked at computers or looked for books on the shelves. No one seemed to have noticed that Rita was talking to herself. Had she imagined hearing the angry voice?

Lately, Rita thought she was hearing sounds that weren't there. "Next thing you know, I'll be seeing things too," Rita said. She looked around again. This time a couple of students were looking in her direction. They'd heard her. She really had to stop talking out loud to herself. But by now it had become a habit.

Rita explained it by telling herself she was her own best friend. She had no one else to talk to. And it wasn't far from the truth. Rita didn't have a lot of friends. She'd met a few girls she could relate to when she first started college. They also had an issue with weight. But that was all they had in common.

As Rita continued to look around, she saw Cara. The redhead was sitting a few

tables away. Rita thought she looked perfect in her stylish workout clothes. The guy sitting next to her looked perfect too. Talk about not having anything in common.

Cara and Rita lived in the same dorm. They were both on the third floor. Cara acted like she hated Rita. Although Rita didn't know what she'd done to deserve it. Unless Cara just didn't like her because she wasn't cool.

I need to change my image, Rita thought. The words often ran through her mind. She'd repeat them to herself over and over. But it was easier said than done. Sure, she could go to the campus fitness center and exercise. She'd even tried it a few times. But she'd get there and give up before she started. Or she wouldn't even make it out of her dorm room. It was easier to stay home.

Sometimes Rita looked for something to inspire her. She liked to read fashion magazines. The models were so beautiful.

They all had perfect makeup, hair, and clothes. Their bodies were in great shape. But rather than feeling inspired, Rita always ended up feeling worse about herself. Did models ever eat junk food?

As Rita tried to focus on the book she was reading, the words on the page seemed to blur. Could a person go blind from hunger? At the very least, it was making it hard to concentrate on the topic. The book was about Tibet. Rita was writing a paper on native costumes. It seemed like a great idea. She really enjoyed reading about the people of that country. But now because of this stupid diet, she was distracted by hunger.

Rita flipped through the pages. The photos of the women jumped out at her. It was as if the women were looking at her. Their faces were beautiful. But they also looked intelligent. Like they had more important things to think about than beauty and fitness.

She started doodling on her tablet. *I need to change my image.* As she sketched, she thought about how she would change herself. *If I could make myself over ...* Rita drew a girl with long legs. She added flowing dark hair. Then she gave the character a strong upper body with sleek, sculpted arms.

“Nice!”

Rita jumped in her seat. She looked up and saw Gavin King. He was the one good friend Rita had. She liked him a lot. They seemed to be getting close lately. Rita liked his sense of humor and how smart he was.

“Quiet!” The voice sounded angry.

Rita looked around. This time she knew she’d really heard someone. She saw the frowning faces of several students looking at her.

“You scared me,” she whispered to Gavin. He was still leaning over her shoulder, staring at the drawing.

Gavin smiled and sat down across the table from her. “Hey, Murray. I thought you were supposed to be writing a paper.”

“I am. But I’m taking a break.” Rita hated it when Gavin called her by her last name. But he always did that when he wanted to tease her. She started to delete the drawing.

“Don’t delete it. It’s good,” Gavin said. “But isn’t your paper on Tibet? The woman in the drawing looks like a gothic warrior. How does she fit in?”

“I’m ready to get something to eat,” Rita said, changing the subject. “Do you want to go?”

“Yeah. But first tell me who you were drawing. Was it you?”

“Ha-ha,” Rita said. “Does she look like me?”

“Actually, she does,” Gavin said. “Let me see it again.” He picked up the tablet

and looked at the drawing. “See? You drew yourself.”

Rita looked more closely at the drawing. Gavin was half-right. She’d drawn her own face. But that was all. The body wasn’t anything like hers. *I need to change my image.*

“You know what I want?” Rita said as she put the tablet into her backpack and zipped it shut. “A bacon cheeseburger and fries.”

“I thought you were on a diet,” Gavin said.

“I didn’t say I was going to eat it,” Rita said. “Only that I *wish* I could. Stop bugging me.”

“This crazy diet is making you grumpy,” Gavin said.

“You are such a loser, Rita Murray!” The words echoed through the room.