



CHAPTER 1

# Not Cool

**Y**ou guys are mean!” Abby McQuade yelled. “So not cool.”

Abby was in the bathroom getting ready. Her parents were in the living room. They were watching TV.

The house was a cozy one-story. The living room was next to the kitchen. A long hall ran the length of the house. All rooms could be entered through the hallway.

“Abby,” her mom called. “Mazey Pines isn’t across the street.”

Abby heard a familiar sound. It was a lightsaber from *Star Wars*. The sound came from her mom’s phone. It was either a text

message or a call. Her parents loved the *Star Wars* films. Abby liked them too.

Abby looked at herself in the mirror. She wore a white T-shirt and jeans. A denim jacket was tied at her waist. Too much? No way. Overall, she thought she looked good.

She walked into the living room. "It's the next neighborhood over," she said. She rolled her eyes.

"Don't be silly," her dad said. He was watching a TV show about sewing machines. It showed how the machines were made. "Let us drive you there."

"You guys," Abby whined.

She normally got along great with her parents. They usually let her do whatever she wanted. Within reason ...

But not tonight. Why?

Abby was going to a party. It was at Allen Caballero's house. Allen was a skater. He

was good. Really good. He'd even been in *Thrasher*. It was a cool skateboard magazine.

Abby didn't go to parties. It wasn't her scene. But kids from school would be there. She'd been talking to Tim Cadena a lot lately. And he was going. Tim had asked her if she would be there too.

Sometimes Abby and Tim didn't get along. Lately he had been really nice to her. Abby liked it. She wasn't into boys. Mostly they just annoyed her.

Abby didn't think her parents were cool. But they weren't strict either. *Quirky* was a good word for them. Abby's dad had his own solar power business. He felt his job was important. Mr. McQuade wanted to make the world a better place.

Abby's mom worked at a bank. She loved math. In fact, she did math puzzles for fun. Her mom also liked hiking and going on trips.

“I’m not walking by myself,” Abby said.  
“I’m going with Clara.”

Clara Erickson was Abby’s best friend. She was into swimming. Clara wanted to compete in the Olympics. She was focused. Training with her team was her life.

“You’re two young girls,” her mom said.  
“Walking alone at night is not safe.”

“We’re not going to Gato Villa,” Abby said.  
“Or Bloomington. It’s in Mazey Pines.”

Mazey Pines was five minutes away. It was just another neighborhood in the city. The girls would still be in Largo Bay.

Mazey Pines once had many pine trees. That’s how it got its name. Some of the trees were ancient. Up until the 1970s, the neighborhood was all trees. Then the trees were cut down to make way for homes.

There was an urban legend about the pines. People thought the trees were angry. They said the trees planned to come back.

Then they would take over. Could it really happen? Abby didn't think so.

Homes in Largo Bay lined the beach. Behind those homes were schools. Behind the schools was Largo Bay Center, a strip mall. There were other neighborhoods in the city too.

There were two cities next to Largo Bay. Gato Villa and Bloomington. Both were weird. Strange things happened there. Abby and Clara thought the people there were odd. They didn't visit much.

"I've got my phone," Abby said. She held it up and waved it around. "Everything will be fine. Don't worry."

Her parents stared at her.

"Are you wearing makeup?" her father asked. He sat up a little.

"Just some lip gloss," Abby said.

"Will Tim be there?" Her mother smiled.

"Yes." Abby rolled her eyes again.

What was with the questions? They didn't usually ask. But Abby hardly ever went to parties. So that was probably why. Plus, there was a boy involved.

"Tim?" Abby's dad said. He seemed upset. "Who's Tim?" he asked.

"Didn't I tell you about him?" her mom said.

"Tell me later," her dad replied. "Do you know the story about Mazey Pines? Some people believe the trees will come back."

"That's *so* not true," Abby said. "No tree has ever come back. A tree gets chopped down and that's it. Why would people say that?"

"Oh, don't try and scare her," Abby's mom said. "We were teens once."

"Yeah," Abby said, laughing. "A *long* time ago."

"Not that long ago," her father said. He tried to look angry.

"You and Clara can walk there. Promise you'll be home by 10," her mom said.

“10:15,” Abby said. She crossed her fingers.

“No, 10,” her dad said. “And not a minute later.”

The front door opened. It was Clara. She was like a second daughter to the McQuades. Clara never had to knock.

“What’s up?” Clara smiled. She eyed Abby. “You look really good.”

“So do you!” Abby beamed.

Clara wore a black skirt. She paired it with a white sweatshirt. Clara’s long brown hair looked extra shiny.

“Let’s bounce,” Abby said.

“Great seeing you,” Clara said to Abby’s parents.

“Have fun!” Abby’s mom smiled.

“Not a minute later than 10,” her dad said again.

Abby quickly closed the door. The girls were off!





Most of the partyers gathered around the TV. They were Allen's friends. Some were in high school. There were skaters and surfers. Many of the teens were nature geeks. At school those kids always hung out by the trees.

Everyone at the party was a boy. Abby and Clara were the only girls.

"There's nothing on the TV," Abby whispered. "It's just fuzz."

"I know," Clara said. "This is creepy."

The TV was playing static. There was no sound. Nobody seemed to care. Allen's friends were glued to it.

Every so often, the girls heard cheering. It came from the kitchen.

"What's going on in there?" Clara asked.

"Go and find out."

"You go find out!" Clara said sternly. "You're Miss Adventure Lady."

They cracked up. Neither of them had seen Allen yet.

Abby was starting to get upset. She had argued with her parents. Coming here had been her idea. Now she was here. And it was a total bust.

“Where’s your boyfriend?” Clara asked. She was referring to Tim. The girls hadn’t seen him. Maybe he was in the kitchen.

“He’s *not* my boyfriend,” Abby said.

“Sure.”

“He’s not!” Abby eyed the roomful of surfers and skaters. They stared vacantly at the fuzzy TV. Weird. “Why didn’t you invite Will?”

Will Chu was Abby and Clara’s best guy friend. He was really into science. Will also played guitar. He was even in a band. Clara had a crush on him. Will hadn’t noticed.

“I wouldn’t want him to come here,” Clara said, laughing. “This place is too strange. Even for him.”

Abby’s phone buzzed. She took it out of her pocket.