



## CHAPTER ONE

*K*ids hung out in front of the ice rink. They all laughed, sharing a secret. They were the popular clique. I watched them as I waited for my best friend, Jules. She'd kill me if I called her Julianne. Only her dad called her that – and only when she was in trouble.

I couldn't wait for Jules to show up. It was my first night without braces, and I wanted everyone to notice me! I knew I would never have big boobs like Lexy, the class-flirt, or like one of the other popular girls. But couldn't I just be noticed for my straight-teeth smile?

Friday nights in our small Rhode Island town could be so boring for thirteen-year-olds like me. It was either skating at the local ice rink or shopping at the lame mall, with the over-eighty crowd.

Kids hung out on the bleachers, making out in the dark corners. The rest of us stared, wondering what it was like to go to first base – doing the “one.” The deejay played all the best music.

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The lights flashed – light, dark, light, dark. The place was always pumping.

I hoped that, one Friday night, I would be one of the kids making out; one of the popular kids, like Lexy.

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I finally saw my friend.

“Hey Jules, over here.” I smiled, flipping my hair behind my ears.

Jules walked up to the front door.

“I thought my stupid dad would never get here. Let me see.” Jules stood on her tiptoes, staring at my mouth.

I beamed proudly and turned my head both ways, showing off my new profile to my best friend. I even wore my new, Passion Punch lip-gloss.

“They’re wicked, Kay. You must be psyched to have them off.”

“It feels so weird, though, Jules.” I swiped my tongue over my teeth to show her.

“Hey, have you seen Lisa, yet?”

“No.” I looked around. “Not yet. I wonder if she’s meeting Brian again. Or if she’ll finally hang with us tonight.”

“Who knows?” Jules twisted her long, wavy, maple syrup-colored hair, shaking her head. Jules always twisted her hair.

Lisa had big boobs like Lexy, and she had a boyfriend. Brian was in high school. His brother drove them around – like a chauffeur – so they always had a ride. Jules and I liked hanging out with Lisa, because she always gave us the four-one-one about what was going

on, who was baggin' who, and where to go if you were "dope" – Jules and I weren't really what you would consider "dope," though.

Lisa went to high school parties with Brian. She said she went just to make out with him, but I wondered what else went on. I wondered if she had done "two" or "three" with Brian? I was dying to have Lisa take me and Jules to a party someday so we could find out exactly what "stuff" happened.

Jules and I headed inside the rink and over to one of benches.

"Hey, guys," Lisa yelled over from the snack bar.

"Fiiiiinnnally," I said, lacing my skates. "Where've you been, Lees?"

"Ohmigod, Kay, you got 'em off!" Lisa shouted.

Yes! She noticed. Another proud smile covered my face. I just couldn't help boasting. I had the stupid braces for two years.

"So, whaddy think. Nice, huh?" I modeled for my friends, walking on my ice skates.

"Looking good, Kay," Lisa nodded.

The deejay called out, "Ladies' Skate." Jules and I looked at each other and motioned Lisa to join us.

"Sorry, gotta wait for Bri."

"Aw, c'mon, Lisa. Just one song," Jules begged.

"He'll be here any minute. I promised him I would wait. You guys go ahead."

Lisa waved us off. She was on her own.

It was time to show off the new me. As Jules glided on, I tiptoed onto the ice and carefully held the edge. The whole world buzzed by me. The strobe lights flashed around the rink. Even the ice felt

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like it was throbbing from the loud music. Jules skated up next to me, belting the words of a rap song, moving her arms around like a deejay twisting a record.

As the song faded and the next one began, the ice exploded with teenagers. The boys had no manners, shoving their way through the crowd. I watched the girl in front of me fall like a crumbling avalanche. Jules and I skated to her rescue, only to be plowed down by a couple of seventh-grade dorks. *Did they even know girls existed?*

“Hey, asshole! Watch it!” I pointed to a geeky looking kid in front of me as he skated away.

“Yeah? Suck me!” said one of the guys with a spotted complexion.

“Nice. Reeeeeal nice,” Jules yelled.

“Sorry, but it’s time to get outta here.” I looked at Jules, motioning to the benches. “Let’s see if we can find Lisa. Poor thing is still probably waiting by herself.”

We headed to the snack bar to find Lisa’s face engulfed in Brian’s. They were making out right there in front of everyone! I stared, wondering what it felt like to kiss a boy. *Were they touching tongues? Did it hurt to kiss with braces? Did he put his tongue on her braces?* At least she got kissed with a metal mouth. I never did.

Jules and I sat on the bleachers and watched as couples skated around the rink. Some were holding hands; others were side-by-side.

“There’s Lexy. Skating with Justin,” I said to Jules. My eyes followed the two around the rink.

Justin was definitely the cutest boy in the eighth grade. I had had my eye on him since I moved to town in the seventh grade. I'd stare at him when Miss Lockwood explained finite numbers – boring – in pre-algebra. Every once in a while, I think Justin looked at me, too. But he probably was just staring at my uneven chest, wondering where my boobs were.

Lexy had known I liked Justin, ever since she heard me telling Jules in gym class one day. And since then, Lexy would strut up to him in the hallway and talk to him, flipping her long, straight, disgustingly shiny hair over her shoulders. I didn't think Justin really liked Lexy, but he skated with her.

"Don't worry, Kay, he's just using her," Jules said, twisting her hair again.

"Do you think he's crushin' her?"

"Are you kidding? Lexy is so stuck up, there's no way Justin would hook up with her."

"Maybe he's just trying to cop a feel," I said. "Do you think she's been to second?"

"Probably," Jules answered. "She is from New York, you know."

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I wasn't going to feel sorry for myself anymore. Jules and I headed to the ice. She was in front of me, skating on first.

"God, jerk," Jules said, looking at some tall guy with dark hair.

The weight of his strong body pushed into both of us. Jules fell – hard. The beaming lights from the disco ball twinkled around his head. His bright eyes sparkled as he gazed down at Jules.

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He turned around, holding out his hand like a prince to rescue Jules. The tall stranger looked stunned. "I am so sorry. Sometimes I have two left feet." His voice was deep.

I don't think Jules even recognized how cute – no, gorgeous – how gorgeous this guy was. She was still too busy brushing the shaved ice from her jeans. The stranger skated away and joined up with a friend.

"Who was that hottie?" Sweat exuded from my hands. My heart felt like it was pounding in my throat.

"He's a jerk," said Jules. "He plowed right into me."

"Yeah, but he was cute!"

"Oh, Kay! Is that all you ever think of?" Jules shook her head, throwing her hands in the air.

"Not always. Well, maybe. But he was sooo cute. Did you see how blue his eyes were?" I twisted around, trying to find him in the crowd.

"Uh, excuse me, but I was trying to like, pick myself up from the ice," Jules said. "Sorry if I missed the whole four-one-one. Besides, he's probably in high school."

Why did Jules do that? Like there was no hope for a boy to like me, a thirteen-year-old loser, destined to be alone, forever, with uneven boobs, but a really nice smile. Maybe that's how she felt about herself. Pathetic, huh?

At intermission, Jules and I headed to the parlor to get a pizza. The parlor was filled with cigarette smoke. I'd never imagined these kids from my school could smoke so much. It so totally grossed me out.

I watched everyone clear from the rink. The Zamboni machine layered the roughed-up ice with water to make a fresh coat. There was hardly anywhere to sit in the parlor. Kids filled the place up, waiting in line to get something to eat. Lisa was nowhere to be found. Lexy and Justin stood near the edge of the rink, talking, while the Zamboni drove around in circles.

“Hey, guys, how long have you been here?” Ashley waved to us, fumbling with her pockets.

“Just a little while. Who are you here with, Ash?” I asked.

“My sister. We have to leave at ten o’clock. We have to go to church in the morning, so my dad wants us home early.” Ashley rolled her eyes.

Ashley was a Jehovah’s Witness. She went to church all the time. Her dad was strict, but every once in a while he’d let her go out with us to the mall or out for a pizza. I was actually surprised Ashley was allowed to go skating on Friday nights. I didn’t think Jehovahs even listened to music.

Ashley sat down with us. As I stared out the window, I saw the cute, tall stranger walk by with his friend.

“Ka-thump,” went my heart.

He walked with his hockey skates and stick draped over his shoulder. He was a jock – a cute jock. As he walked by, he glanced inside the parlor. Our eyes met. *Oh, God, I hope I didn’t look stupid.*

“What’s wrong with you?” Jules said, with her lip turned up.

“I saw that guy again. You know, the one who knocked you down by accident.”

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“Oh, Kay. I told you, he’s probably in high school.”

“So what? I can still look.” I shook my head.

Hmmm. Ashley must have known about this God-like person. Her sister was in high school.

“Hey, Ash, have you ever seen that guy over there before? The one with the skates over his shoulder?” I hoped she would know his name. *Please.*

“No,” Ashley said, “but his friend is Jeff-something. He’s a junior. I think my sister has him in her bio class.”

“Who, Jeff or his friend?”

“Jeff. I don’t know who the other guy is.” Ashley looked out the window.

“Do you think your sister would know?”

“Maybe, I’ll ask,” Ashley said.

I didn’t think Ashley was interested in boys yet. Or maybe she wasn’t supposed to be. I thought they arranged marriages in her church. That’s what Jules told me. Maybe her parents had already chosen her husband.

“He” walked out the front entrance of the rink with his friend, Jeff, following him. Where was he going? It was only nine-thirty. Would he come back? I wondered if he had a car. Maybe he was going to a high school party. Or worse, maybe he was going to see his girlfriend. I was depressed. I sucked in a deep breath.

“Hel-lo?” Jules waved her hand in front of me.

“What?” I shook my head.

“Wanna skate?”

“Sure.” I sat up and stretched my arms.

The ice was jammed with our middle school population. Kids shoved past one another, round and round the ice circle.

“I see my sister, guys,” Ashley said. “I have to go.”

“Hey, don’t forget to ask her about Jeff’s friend,” I spurted out.

“I will.” Ashley strolled out. Her early night had come to an end.

Jules and I headed back onto the ice, mouthing the words to an Outkast song. Lexy skated by and waved.

“Hey, you two,” she said. She skated away and cruised up behind Justin, putting her hands around his waist as if she had lost her balance and needed him for security. She turned around and smiled at me.

“God, I hate her,” I said to Jules. “She is such a little bitch! She knows I like him.”

“I thought you liked the other guy. Mister ‘Oh-he’s-so-cute,’” Jules said sarcastically, wiggling her fingers like a quotation sign.

“I do. But I don’t know him. I know Justin. And he’s not in high school.”

“Don’t worry, Kay. Lexy is always like that. C’mon.”

It didn’t make me feel better, but Jules was right. Lexy was always like that. No matter where she was, she would have her hands on a guy. And that Friday was no different.

The popular kids, like Justin and Lexy, were skating in the middle of the rink. Jules and I skated by and watched as they shared their moment in the spotlight, as if they had no troubles in the world. The rest of us just skated around them, like little planets around a big, bright sun.



## CHAPTER TWO

There was no school on Monday because of the Columbus Day holiday. The weather had gotten cooler. Birds were scarce, and so were the tourists from our little town – known as vacation-haven. Locals had the roads to themselves.

Tuesday's return to school was the usual stuff. I had a quiz in health. Human Anatomy – ugh.

I met Ashley in history class. I was anxious to see if she had asked her sister about Jeff's friend, the God from the skating rink. The bell rang, and Ashley and I sat in our usual seats, far enough away to not get caught passing notes. I ripped a piece of paper from my notebook and began to write. I passed the note to her while Mr. Thompson had his back turned.

*Did you ask about the cute guy at the rink?* I wrote.

Ashley wrote back on the paper. *Good. She knew something about my mystery man.* She carefully handed the note to the girl in front of her, who passed it to me.

I think his name is Jamie. He and Jeff are good friends and play hockey.

Jamie. Jamie. What an adorable name for an adorable guy. I scribbled the word “Jamie” all over my paper. *Jamie and Kay. Kay and Jamie.* I drew a heart around Jamie’s name.

I couldn’t wait until history was over so I could ask Ashley about Jamie’s stats: Where did he live? Did he drive? Did he have a girlfriend? How old was he? Would he like to marry me?

I must be crazy. Jules was right. He was in high school, and I wasn’t. Why on Earth would he like me? My boobs weren’t even the same size.

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The ten o’clock bell finally rang, and I met Ashley at the door.

“So his name is Jamie, huh?”

“That’s what my sister thinks,” Ashley said quietly.

“Does she know him?” My questions weren’t answered quickly enough.

“No, not really. She didn’t really say anything else about him.”

“God, Ashley. She goes to the same high school with him and doesn’t even know if he has a girlfriend?”

“I didn’t ask that. You said to find out his name, and I did.” Ashley shrugged her shoulders.

“Yeah, but you could have at least asked something else about him.”

“I’ll see if she knows anything else. But she’s gonna think I like him now.”

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“So tell her I like him.” This wasn’t going to be easy with a devoted, church-going friend like Ashley as my spy.

The five-minute bell rang, and Ashley and I headed our separate ways. I went to the second floor – English. I didn’t even notice Justin talking to me as I walked to my desk; you know, the cutest guy in eighth grade?

“Did you have fun Friday?” he mumbled while getting a book out of his backpack.

“Oh. Yeah, I guess.”

“I didn’t see you skatin’ with anyone.” Justin started writing something in his notebook.

*Was I supposed to be skating with anyone?*

“No, not this time.” My voice cracked. I was under pressure.

I breathed deep and decided to show some nerve. “I noticed you and Lexy skating together.”

“Who? Oh, yeah. We weren’t really skating together, we were just talking.”

“Oh, right,” I nodded. “You like her?” Hmmm, do guys really kiss and tell?

“Who, Lexy? No, we’re just friends, I guess. I think she’s friends with all the guys. She’s a little, uh, you know...” Justin fumbled with his words.

Come on Justin, say it. I won’t mind. Bitch? Stuck up? Ho? It’ll be our secret.

Justin gave me a half-smile. It was the longest conversation I had ever had with him.

Mrs. Blain began to read a poem to the class – words from a Beatles song. What was it with these teachers and their infatuation with the 1960s and stuff? “I am the eggman, they are the eggmen, I am the walrus.” This was going to be a long day.

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At lunch time, Jules and I greeted each other at the salad bar and sat at our regular table near the window. Lisa joined us, setting her bagged lunch on the table. It took only five seconds, maybe less, to notice a dark brown and purple mark on her neck.

“Oh, my God, you have a hickey,” Jules shouted.

“Ssshhh! Not so loud, Jules!” Lisa covered Jules’s mouth with her hand.

“Brian did that to you?” I winked at Lisa.

“Yup. I told him not to, ‘cuz my parents would kill me, but it was too late.”

“What did your parents say?” asked Jules.

“Well, my mom wasn’t happy about it but she didn’t really say anything. And I don’t think my dad saw it.”

“My dad would have killed me and then killed the guy who did it to me.” I blushed.

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I had gym after lunch. I took tennis as my elective, because I knew Lisa would take it, too. Even though we had to wear uniforms, it was better than playing softball – which I detested.

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Lisa and I walked out to the tennis courts. “You know any of the high school guys, Lees?”

“I’ve met a couple of them at parties and a couple of friends of Brian’s brother. Why?” Lisa was swinging her tennis racket back and forth, like Anna Kournikova.

“Oh, well, I saw this really cute guy Friday at the rink. He knocked down Jules. By accident. But you should have seen him, Lisa. He was gorgeous! Ashley thinks his name is Jamie. He was older. In high school, probably.”

“Oh, Jamie Barnett, you mean.”

“You know him?” I stopped and stared at Lisa. *A-ha! Another connection to the tall stranger!*

“Yeah, Brian’s brother is friends with his older brother. Jamie plays on the hockey team.”

Lisa was just a profusion of information. I guess going out with a high school guy gave you privileges.

“Tell me more,” I practically begged. I was putty in Lisa’s hands. I wanted to know everything she knew about him. And I’d do anything to find out.

“You like this guy, Kay?”

“Well, I didn’t meet him. But when he bumped into Jules he was so...well, polite. He held out his hand to help her, and she ended up calling him a jerk. Talk about embarrassing. But I noticed he had the most beautiful blue eyes.” *I could’ve gone on, you know.*

“Brian and I see him at the rink, too. He practices there a lot, training for hockey season. They had practice on Friday before Dance-On-Ice.”

*This Time, Last Year*

During the mock tennis game, I talked to Lisa about my new mission, Jamie Barnett. It was time for me to learn about hockey. I needed to make my weekend plans – and they had to start at the rink. There was no sense wasting precious time.

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