

What happens when you're out of step with your BFF?

Make a Move, SUNNY PARK!



ADVANCE
READERS
COPY

JESSICA KIM

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SALE



Make a Move, SUNNY PARK!

FROM THE AUTHOR OF *Stand Up, Yumi Chung!*, which received three starred reviews, was an Indies Introduce Winter/Spring 2020 Featured Title, a Spring 2020 Kids' Indie Next List selection, and landed on Best Books lists from Amazon, *Kirkus Reviews*, the Chicago Public Library, and more.

FOR FANS OF Pixar's *Turning Red* and its tween appeal, big feelings, and humor.

Jessica Kim is a **MIDDLE GRADE QUEEN** with her ear for kid dialogue, expert comedic timing, and knack for creating small moments that will make your heart burst or break.

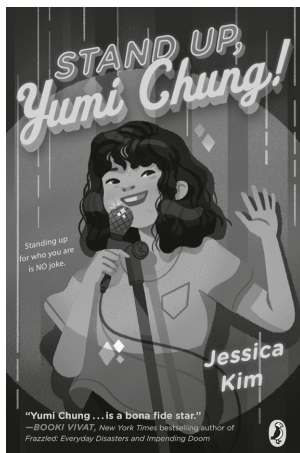
A RESOURCE FOR FRIEND BREAKUPS: There are lots of books that help young people navigate the end of romantic relationships, but there are few that acknowledge the pain of lost friendships and offer a path to healing.

Make a Move, Sunny Park!

Jessica Kim



PRAISE FOR



Winter/Spring 2020 Indies Introduce Featured Title

Spring 2020 Kids' Indie Next List Selection

Amazon Best Books of the Month, March 2020 Selection

Kirkus Reviews Best Children's Books of 2020 Selection

Chicago Public Library Best Fiction for

Older Readers of 2020 Selection

Evanston Public Library Great Books for Kids 2020 Selection

★ “Kim has woven a pop song of immigrant struggle colliding with comedy and Korean barbecue.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “Kim has taught school, and it shows [with] the spot-on dialogue. . . . This will certainly remind readers of Kelly Yang’s *Front Desk* (2018).” —*Booklist*, starred review



★ “A must-read.” —*School Library Connection*, starred review

“Yumi Chung . . . is a bona fide star.”

—Booki Vivat, *New York Times* bestselling author of
Frazzled: Everyday Disasters and Impending Doom

“A funny, tender story about family, friendship, and the courage
to be yourself!”

—Karina Yan Glaser, *New York Times* bestselling author of
the Vanderbeekers series

“Come for the puns, the laughs, and the wacky plot of mistaken
identity, but it’s the bighearted characters that take center stage
in *Stand Up, Yumi Chung!*”

—Carlos Hernandez, author of *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe*

“I adored this book! Like, I seriously hugged it when I was done.”

—Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich, author of
8th Grade Superzero, *Two Naomis*, and *Naomis Too*

“Yumi Chung is a headliner!”

—Remy Lai, author of *Pie in the Sky* and *Fly on the Wall*

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*For anyone who's ever had a hard time
letting go of a friend*

✧ CHAPTER 1 ✧

Three words: Inflatable. Dinosaur. Costume.

That's how I'll stand out from all the other people doing the Supreme Beat Dance Challenge on my social media feed.

It's so genius, I could smack myself. I mean, who wouldn't love seeing a giant T-rex getting down to the hottest K-pop dance track of the year? It's guaranteed to get clicks, maybe go viral, even. There's no way I won't win. Now it's just a matter of filming it, filtering it, captioning it, stickering it, hashtagging it, and posting it. Then it'll be in the bag.

Zippering myself in, I switch on the tiny fan, and the crinkly plastic quickly puffs up until it's as taut as a balloon. The strong chemical odor nearly makes me retch, but then I catch a glimpse of the ferocious six-foot-tall Tyrannosaurus rex looking back at me from the mirror, and I crack a smile. This is going to kill.

Peeking out from the underneath the dinosaur's mouth, I adjust my camera a final time to make sure the angles are all right before hitting play on my computer.

Sweat beads up on my brow as I scuttle to the cleared-out space in the middle of my bedroom. It's hotter than PE armpits in this costume but I can't think about that. To collect myself, I take a deep breath before the song begins.

As soon as the first note of the frenetic trap beat drops, I'm a beast! The thumping cadence pulsates through my body as I sidestep and gyrate—a large lizard letting loose. The fact that no one will be able to see my face must have a freeing effect on me. My movements are so much bolder and more finessed now than in all my hours of practice!

Burning up and nearly out of breath, I'm just hitting my stride as the song launches into the dance break.

I'm busy body-rolling and booty-shaking when, out of nowhere, the door creaks open.

“Sunny?” a voice shouts over the pumping bass line. I stop, whipping my giant dinosaur head around.

My best friend approaches, looking bewildered. “What are you doing in that thing?”

“Bailey?” Flustered, I unzip myself from the costume and emerge glistening with sweat. “Don’t mind me . . . I was just . . .” I slam my laptop closed, shutting off the camera and blaring music. “I wasn’t expecting you until later.”

In her text, she said she’d be coming over to show me something “very important.” She’s not supposed to be here for another fifteen minutes.

She picks up the now-deflated costume from the floor and tosses it on my bed. “Oh right, I came a little early. Your grandma let me in,” she says with a smirk. “So what’s with all this, anyway? Halloween isn’t for two months.”

I let out a sheepish giggle. “It’s nothing. It’s just a video I’m making for this online dance challenge thing,” I reply, scooting my dinosaur costume hastily back into the box.

“Let me guess.” She taps her chin with her fingernail. “Does this have anything to do with your little Korean boy band?” she says with the slightest taunt in her voice.

“Maybe,” I say, giving her arm a playful shove. “How’d you know, anyway?”

“What else could it be for? Look at this place!” Bailey spins in a circle, gesturing at my pale-pink walls, which are plastered with Supreme Beat posters. “You’re obsessed with them, Sunny.”

I straighten the albums that are arranged by release date on my shelf. “You say it like it’s a bad thing.”

She takes her backpack off and nestles into my desk chair, hugging her knees. “So you got dressed up as a dinosaur for a K-pop dance challenge, huh?”

“Well, it’s not just any dance challenge,” I rush to explain. “See, Supreme Beat is going to choose a select number of videos from the hashtag, and the winning picks get barricade tickets!” I point to the date triple-circled on my wall calendar. November 17: SUPREME BEAT CONCERT.

She blinks once, but her face doesn’t move a muscle. “Cool.”

Clearly she’s not understanding the magnitude of what this means. “No, it’s more than cool, it’s amazing. Do you know how hard it is to get barricade tickets?”

They're like five hundred dollars and they sell out as soon as they go on sale," I explain, getting myself worked up at the thought. "I really need to win them. It's my only chance to see Supreme Beat live."

Bailey gets up only to plunk herself onto my bed face-first. "Here I thought your whole K-pop infatuation would die by the time we hit middle school . . ." she says, her voice muffled by my pillow. "But it's only gotten worse."

"You know, if you gave it a chance, you might actually like it, too," I say, twisting a strand of my hair around my finger. "It's a lot of fun!"

"Sorry, but Supreme-whatever sound like they've had one too many Monster Energy drinks. They need to take it down a notch, in my humble opinion." Bailey scrunches her nose like she's diagnosing a foot fungus infection.

"They're not *all* like that. What did you think about the song I sent you last night?" I ask.

"Meh, it wasn't as bad as the others, but I don't know about the lyrics—what is that song even about?"

My eyes widen at her blasphemy. "It's called 'Precious'

and it's about friendship. It's actually pretty deep if you read the translation." I should know. I've learned every lyric of every song, including the Korean ones. Which is saying a lot because, despite the three years of Saturday language school my parents made me attend, I only have the skills of a kindergartener.

"Sorry, Sunny. Don't take this the wrong way. The song is cute, and I can see why you like it, since you're Korean and all." She stretches her arms back and clasps her fingers behind her head. "But I prefer music that's, you know, heavier, more mature."

Ugh. Not this "mature" stuff again. It might as well be a code word for all things boring and depressing. Not long ago, Bailey would have been down to do random stuff like dress up and dance around with me like a big dork, just for the fun of it. Like the time in fifth grade when we reenacted the whole story of *Frozen* using random vegetables from the fridge. Anna was a zucchini with orange yarn hair and Elsa was an eggplant with a Saran Wrap cape. It was hilarious.

But now that we're seventh graders, this would be unthinkable. All Bailey wants to do is talk about art

or her emo poems or her bleak indie rock bands, and everything else is “babyish” in her “humble opinion.”

Sometimes I miss the way things used to be.

“Supreme Beat’s got other songs that are more mellow, too. I can send you links for those if you want,” I offer.

“Eh, maybe.” But she says it in a way that tells me she most definitely won’t listen to them, which sucks but honestly doesn’t surprise me much. That’s Bailey for you. She likes what she likes and doesn’t like what she doesn’t like, and she rarely changes on either front. She’s always been this way.

“So what’s the big urgent news you needed to tell me in person, anyway?” I ask, changing the subject.

“Oh right!” Bailey’s eyes light up as she roots around in her backpack until she finds a packet of papers. “Check it out,” she says, showing me the registration form for the Ranchito Mesa Middle School Dance Team tryouts.

“Huh? Since when have you ever been interested in joining the Dollies?” I ask, scanning the page. For the month that we’ve been at Ranchito Mesa, she’s

never had anything nice to say about them. I remember her going on a rant about how the name “Dollies” itself is exclusionary. Technically, the school officially changed it to the Dolphins to address that, but people have been slow to make the change. Do dolphins even dance?

She shoves my stuffed animals off my bed so she can scoot next to me. “What do you mean? I love to dance,” she says with a pout. “Not that I’d ever admit this in front of my mom, but to be totally honest, I kind of miss dancing. A lot, actually.”

“Me too,” I confess. There’s a sudden ache in my chest. It’s been nine months since Bailey convinced me to quit ballet with her, but for some reason it feels like it’s been so much longer.

“I figured.” She hands me the packet. “Which is why I think trying out would be a really great opportunity. For the both of us!”

“Both of us? Really?” I bite the side of my lip. I don’t know how I feel about that.

“Yes—not only could we dance together again, we could also get more plugged into school stuff.” She

looks at me expectantly. “Maybe it’s time we get out of our comfort zones and start interacting with other people for once.”

“Oh.” I give her a smile that isn’t really a smile. I was under the impression she liked hanging out just the two of us. That’s the way it’s been since the third grade. Not that I’m against making more friends, but I can get really quiet and awkward around people I don’t know. Maybe it’s because I have social anxiety disorder, though my mom prefers to call it *overactive stranger danger*.

“I don’t know, Bales,” I start to say as heat creeps up my neck. “I usually try to avoid situations where people are staring at me, waiting for me to make a mistake.” A sudden image of me jumping into toe-touchers while splitting my pants right down the crotch flashes before my eyes. “Yeah, I don’t think so.” I hand the application back to her.

Her eyes shoot up as she picks up on my escalating anxiety. “Sunny, you used to perform solos all the time in front of a bajillion people at our ballet recitals. This is nothing compared to that.”

“That’s different.” Dancing in front of a dark auditorium full of cheering parents and grandparents is one thing, but dancing in front of a horde of judgy fellow middle schoolers in broad daylight is literally my worst nightmare.

“It’s the same thing,” Bailey says with a casual fling of her wrist. “Besides, it’s not like you’re going to be alone. There will be a bunch of other people dancing on the stage with you. Including me.”

“Good point,” I reply, my muscles relaxing a little bit. The thought of her being with me takes some of the edge off my nerves.

“We’re getting older, and we should try new things.” She clutches my pillow. “So what do you say? Will you try out with me next week, then? I’ll help you get ready.” Her smile is so dazzling, her braces gleam in the lamplight. “Pretty please?”

Words don’t come out of my mouth because my brain is still buffering. On one hand, everything about trying out makes me want to bury my head in the sand like an ostrich. But on the other, Bailey is begging me to do this, and I’d hate to disappoint her.

I wince. She gets so mad when I let her down.

“Hello? Anybody there?” Bailey waves her hand in front of my face, her eyes narrowing with a flicker of irritation. “C’mon, Sunny. Don’t leave me hanging like every other person in my life has . . .” she says with a sharpness in her voice. “Are you in or not?”

The hairs on my arm stand up straight the way they do whenever I’m put on the spot.

“Uh, sure, why not?” I say, quickly relenting. “I’m in.”

To my relief, the corners of Bailey’s eyes crinkle as she grins. “Yay, I knew I could count on you!” she yells, nearly bowling me over in a giant bear hug. “I’m so glad we’re doing this together.”

“Me too,” I say, our cheeks still smooshed together.

She releases me from her grip. “That’s why I love you. You’re so ride-or-die.” Then she sticks her hand out at me. “Put ’er there, partner,” she says in a faux cowboy accent.

I stop. “But didn’t you say that you don’t want to do this any—”

“Just not in public, you big dork!” She bops me in the ribs.

“Oh, got it,” I say, grateful that it hasn’t been totally banned like all the other things she’s deemed “too immature.”

We hold hands and do our secret handshake, bumping our forearms together and then our elbows before ending with an exaggerated shoulder shimmy shake while making a funny face. As usual, we collapse into a fit of giggles. I don’t know what it is, but the scrunched nose and bugged-out eyes crack us up every time. We get up, jumping in circles, howling until we’re clutching our stomachs, gasping for air as my cotton-candy-pink walls spin around us.

It feels so good to joke with her like this. It’s almost like she’s the old Bailey again.

Hope blooms within me.

Maybe if we make the team, it could be like this all the time.

Just like how it used to be.

✧ Chapter 2 ✧

The next day, Bailey is over and we're helping my grandma make dumplings in the kitchen.

"Halmoni, why are yours so perfect and mine look like alien blobs?" I pinch the delicate wrapper into creases, concentrating on not tearing the dough.

"At least yours doesn't look like a turd," Bailey says, showing me hers, which admittedly does look like a little poop, especially the swirly part at the top.

I giggle as my grandma takes my misshapen dumpling, ignoring our shenanigans. "Girls, in Korean, we call it *mandu*," she says, refolding the wrapper so fast her fingers are a blur. "To have the nice shape, you must be patient and practice." She grabs all the finished ones from the bamboo basket with her chopsticks and throws them into the oiled pan with the tiniest flick.

The savory aroma of sesame oil wafting up from the stove makes my stomach rumble.

“In Korea, there is a saying that if you make ugly mandu, you will have ugly children,” she explains, wiping down the granite countertop.

“What? Seriously?” I say with a snort. “Dang, that’s harsh!”

Bailey tosses her mandu into the basket, and it lands with a thump. “Looks like my future offspring are in deep doo-doo, then!”

Halmoni keeps a straight face. “Look at your dad—he is okay now but maybe not so cute when he was a boy. Big head and big nose and big teeth and big glasses. Same as your uncle in San Jose and your aunt in LA. All ugly children!” She makes an unflattering face, scrunching her cheeks and flaring her nostrils. “But I keep practicing making mandu, and now they’re not ugly anymore! Because of me.”

I smack my forehead. My grandma has absolutely no filter whatsoever. Sometimes it’s hard to believe that we’re, in fact, related.

Bailey turns to me and mouths, “I love her.”

Scooping crispy golden mandu onto our plates with her handy slotted spoon, Halmoni continues. “Eat a lot.

You need energy to practice for dance team tryouts.”

I let out a sigh of dread. “Don’t remind me. I’m so nervous I could hurl.”

“You will be great. You are a good dancer like me.” She gives me a whack on my arm. “Stop your negative thinking! Remember what the doctor said? Breathe and replace with positive thoughts.”

To my horror, she closes her eyes and inhales slowly through her nose, demonstrating the calming technique we learned at the Coping with Social Anxiety workshop Mom made me go to a few months ago.

Luckily, when I glance over at Bailey to see her reaction, she’s turned the other way, checking her phone. She doesn’t even notice my grandma’s exaggerated guttural breaths.

“Everything okay?” I ask, noticing the dark look that’s come over her face.

“Ugh, it’s my mom. She’s on her way with Darren,” she says, rolling her eyes at the mention of her mom’s boyfriend.

“Uh-oh.”

Bailey turns to my grandma. “I should get going.

Thanks for feeding me again, Halmoni,” she says, botching the pronunciation so it sounds more like *harmony*. I’ve never bothered to correct her, and if I did now, it’d be too weird.

My grandma hands her a container full of mandu to go. “Take this with you. For later.”

“Don’t mind if I do.” Bailey takes the Tupperware and gets up from the counter.

“Here, I’ll walk you out,” I offer, and we head over to the front door together.

“Can you believe my mom and Darren?” Bailey sits down on the floor to put on her chunky combat boots. “They might as well get their hips fused together!”

From the little I’ve seen, the guy seems normal enough—at worst he tries a little too hard—but Bailey hates his guts. And all his other internal organs, too.

“I wish he’d disappear . . .” But then her grimace transforms into a wide toothy grin. “Who knows, though? Maybe if I get on the Dollies, he will.”

“Huh? What are you talking about?” I’m having trouble keeping up with Bailey’s ever-changing moods.

“Think about it, Sunny.” She pulls her backpack onto

her shoulders and tugs the straps with a sharp jerk. “If I’m on the dance team, my parents will have no choice but to come see me perform. Together.”

“And?” What does this have to do with Darren?

“And who knows? Maybe some forced time together will make them want to work things out. Rekindle the love, maybe?” She makes an explosion gesture with her fingers. “And then poof, no more Darren.”

“Ahhhh, I get it now,” I say, not so much because I think her plan will work, but more because this explains Bailey’s sudden desire to try out for the dance team. I should have known this was never about making new friends or whatever it was she said yesterday. This whole thing is yet another elaborate ploy to get her parents back together.

Though, honestly, I don’t see it happening. From what I remember, Mr. and Mrs. Stern fought like cats and dogs. But what do I know? Maybe it’ll be different this time around. There are actual Disney movies based on this very thing. Plus, if Bailey wants this so badly, then as her best friend, I should support her fully, right? Isn’t that what best friends do for each other?

“Getting on the team will change everything for us,” she says, pointing finger guns at me as she heads out the door.

After Bailey’s gone, I can’t help but feel concerned. Knowing her, she’s going to be crushed if her plan doesn’t work.

I guess I’m not the only one who is worried, because as soon as I’m back in the kitchen, Halmoni asks, “Is Bailey okay?”

I open the fridge and pull out a soda. “Yeah, I think so.”

Halmoni’s mouth straightens into a line. “So many changes in her family.” She wipes down the counter with a small towel. “Must be hard.”

“I’ll say.” It’s dizzying even for me. This time last year, Bailey’s parents were still married, and her mom was still an accountant who drove in our carpool to the ballet studio and sewed our recital costumes. Who would have ever guessed that by now, she’d be busting her butt running a cold-press juice bar up in the boonies with her hipster coworker-turned-boyfriend, Darren? It’s a lot. No wonder all Bailey ever wants to do is hole

up in her room and mope. “I think she misses her mom being around more,” I add.

Halmoni puffs out a small sigh as she puts some more dumplings in the sizzling pan. “Takes time to get used to when someone is gone. You cannot erase pain, only wait for it to lift little by little.”

It pinches when I realize Halmoni is probably speaking from her own experience. If anyone knows about absence, it’s her. Last year, my grandpa lost his battle with cancer after being sick for a long time, leaving my grandma all alone after fifty years of marriage. After she lost a ton of weight, my dad got worried and convinced her to stay with us for a long visit. Lucky for me, she’s liking it so much that she sold her house. Hopefully that means she’ll be staying with us permanently.

When Halmoni first moved in, she kept to herself and slept a lot. The only time she wasn’t sullen was when she saw Supreme Beat come on a variety show on the Korean channel. To cheer her up, I kept finding K-pop content for her and we’d dance together, and in time, she slowly crawled out of her sadness. I’ll always be grateful to Supreme Beat for that.

She's much better now, but I know there are days that are still tough. Sometimes she goes on long walks by herself and comes back with swollen red eyes.

I don't want Halmoni to be reminded of any of that. "Guess what," I say to distract her. "My genius dinosaur costume idea didn't get picked for the Supreme Beat Dance Challenge."

Her mouth forms an O. "Jinjja?" she asks, shocked.

"I know. I thought for sure it'd win," I say, stuffing my mouth with another mandu. "I guess I'm not as original as I thought." When I searched the hashtag, I counted a total of fourteen posts that had inflatable costumes. Three sharks, one hot dog, three Pikachus, and seven dinosaurs.

"That's too bad," Halmoni says, helping herself to a mandu.

"I really wanted us to go to the concert," I whine. "Maybe it wasn't meant to be."

I'd been pinning all my hopes on this challenge ever since my parents refused to buy tickets. I think I could have convinced them if it were closer to home, but when they found out it's all the way in San Francisco,

they were a hard no. Even when Halmoni offered to chaperone and pitch in to help out with the costs, my parents wouldn't hear of it. They said a couple of five-hundred-dollar tickets plus the cost of airfare plus hotel was too much for "someone my age." They told me the only way I could go is if I could find a way to pay for it myself, but I think they just said that knowing it'd be a lost cause. Maybe they were right.

Halmoni turns off the stove and brings the last of the mandu to the counter. "Don't give up so easily, Sunny-ya. If you want to go, you can find a way."

"But how?" I flop an uneaten mandu onto my plate with my chopsticks. "Even if I saved my allowance for a full year, it still wouldn't be enough to buy tickets. Two years, even."

"That's nothing!" Halmoni scoffs. "When I was your age, we were so poor that I used to make money by braiding my classmates' hair so I could go to dance class. And you are like me." She taps her temples. "Very determined. It's in our blood."

My grandma tells the best stories of when she was a kid. Like the time she snuck back and forth across the

border during the Korean War to sell hard-boiled eggs to soldiers on both sides. Or the time she organized a betting ring for arm-wrestling contests to make money. Back in the day, she was a true hustler who played with danger like it was a game. Too bad I didn't inherit any of her fearlessness. The closest I get to living on the edge is when I drink milk on the date it expires.

She dips her dumpling in soy sauce. "There is always a way to make money; you just have to find it. Don't you know anyone who is good at selling things?"

I drum my fingers on the counter, racking my brain. "Now that you mention it, there's this girl who goes by @SUPREMEBeaT on the fan app. She's super popular for selling really cute handmade enamel pins. Maybe I can ask her for tips about how to set up my own business."

"Good start," Halmoni says with a look of approval.

The gears in my brain start whirring as I begin my research.

Looking for inspiration, I scroll through @SUPREME-BeaT's website. She's got it all laid out: nice photos, cute descriptions, and packaging. I bet she makes buckets

of money every week. Hopefully, she can give me some pointers.

As a rule, I don't start conversations with total strangers if I don't have to, but desperate times call for desperate measures. At least this is online and I don't have to interact face-to-face. To her, I'll just be @solarSBluv, another Supreme Beat fan from the app.

I can do this.

I just need to reach out to her.

Inhaling deeply through my nose, I count.

Five, four, three, two, one.

Here goes nothing.

Fingers tingling, I fire off a message to her.

If it'll help me get closer to getting those tickets, it's worth a try.

✧ Chapter 3 ✧

“Here it is, Sunny Bunny!” Dad says the next day as we walk around to where Mom is backing up a giant chassis attached to their truck. When your parents own and operate a parade float design business, you get used to all sorts of things pulling up in your yard. Today they’re showing me the float prototype they’ve been preparing for their upcoming sponsors’ meeting.

Dad whips off the tarp, revealing a fancy ballroom scene with four-foot-tall Styrofoam elephants frozen in mid-prance. “Just imagine it twice as large and covered in crepe paper.”

“Looks awesome, Dad!” I say, genuinely impressed. I’ve seen the mock-ups, but seeing it in 3-D is totally different. “The chubby elephants are adorable. Love the design, Mom.”

“Thanks, honey.” She gives the float a good knock with her gloved hand. “I don’t want to jinx it, but I think

we've got a real chance to land the Kiwanis International contract and beat out C&C once and for all!" Mom says, fluttering her fingers together greedily like a cartoon villain.

Most people don't know that parade float builders are basically a bunch of rival nerd factions that live to one-up each other. There are only a handful of companies that do this, so they all know one another and compete for the same big contracts. Apparently, Kiwanis has the biggest budget of all the other sponsors and is thus the one everyone wants.

My parents' company, the Parade Brigade, lost the bid last year to C&C, and they've been on a mission to overthrow them ever since. It's a whole situation.

Recently, my dad, who used to be a software engineer, has been concentrating on creating cool techy features to edge out the competition. He's developed an augmented-reality app that lets parade-goers view the float in an interactive way from their phones, sort of like how the game Pokémon GO works. It's supposed to be their secret weapon.

"Prepare to experience the parade of the future!" he

says, using his faux news announcer voice as he pulls out his phone.

With great flourish, he taps the activate button on the screen.

We wait for something cool to happen.

But nothing does.

Uh-oh.

“Hmm, that’s disappointing,” Dad mutters, trotting over to check the signal receptor in the float’s control panel. “The elephants are supposed to dance on the screen as merengue music plays.”

“Why isn’t it working?” Mom starts freaking out in typical Mom fashion. “We can’t beat C&C with a dud app,” she says, pacing nervously as Dad tinkers with the computers. “What are we going to do? The meeting is in a month!”

Clearly, I inherited my ability to stay cool under pressure from my mother.

“It might be the Bluetooth.” Dad grunts as he pulls up a ladder and leans it against the device panel. “Sunny, can you go up there and reset the signal?”

“Sure,” I say, climbing the nine-foot ladder.

“Great job, Sunny,” Dad coaches from below, checking the analytics from his phone. “It’s that one right there—careful of the live wires.”

Gingerly, I poke my fingers between the snaking colored cords to tap the red button in the back of the panel.

“That’s the one!” Dad says, giving me a thumbs-up. “Thanks, Sunny!”

I sigh. My parents’ sense of danger is so warped. They’re totally okay with me possibly electrocuting myself, welding steel poles, and manipulating Styrofoam while standing on scaffolding, but going to a concert in San Francisco with my grandma is “too dangerous”?

I don’t understand them at all.

As I climb back down, something buzzes from my back pocket. It’s the alarm I set for myself on my phone.

“Hopefully that’ll fix it,” I say, brushing the dust off my pants. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to go to Bailey’s to practice for dance team tryouts.”

Their heads swivel sharply in my direction, and their conversation comes to a screeching halt.

Dad's eyebrows shoot up into twin arches. "Did you say dance team tryouts?"

"Yeah," I say with a shrug, trying to keep it casual. I hate it when they make everything such a big deal. "Why do you look so surprised?"

Mom, stunned and blinking, replies, "You're not typically keen on doing new things with new people, what with your social anxiety and all."

I flinch. I wish she'd stop bringing it up all the time. Like it's the only thing that defines me or something.

She catches herself. "But I think that's a splendid idea! It'll be such a great opportunity for you to broaden your horizons and challenge yourself. Just like the doctor suggested at the workshop."

I resist the urge to roll my eyes even though I really want to.

"It's great that you're putting yourself out there, Sunny Bunny!" Dad says, giving me a hearty slap on the shoulder. "Atta girl!"

"It's not a huge thing." I shrug. "Bailey just thought it'd be a good way to make more friends."

Mom purses her lips. "Bailey? Is she trying out, too?"

I nod. “Why?”

“No reason.” She shoots Dad a glance with bulging eyes. “I just want to make sure that this is something you want to do.”

“What do you mean?” I scratch the nape of my neck. “Why would you ask that?”

Her lips twitch like she wants to say something. “Well, I know how pushy Bailey can be, and I don’t want you to put yourself in another situation where you’re going along with her just to go along with her.”

I cross my arms. “When have I ever done that?”

Mom adjusts the platform for the Styrofoam elephants. “How about the time she pressured you to do the zombie escape room and you had to sleep in our bedroom with the bathroom light on for a solid week?”

“Oh, come on, that was forever ago.” Six months at least.

Dad throws the blue tarp back over the prototype. “Or the time she gave you that ‘hairstyle makeover,’” he says with air quotes.

My chest caves. In fifth grade, Bailey was inspired by something she saw on TikTok and was convinced that

she could give me really sophisticated blunt bangs. They ended up so short, I looked like I got into a fight with a weed whacker. It took months to grow them back. Thank God for headbands.

Mom clears her throat. “Sunny, I think it’s fantastic that you’re trying out for the team, but you shouldn’t do it just because Bailey is doing it.” The setting sun casts a long shadow on half her face. “You don’t have to say yes to everything she suggests, you know.”

Ha! Clearly, Bailey Stern’s never been mad at her before, but I’d rather not get into all that again. She wouldn’t understand.

I kick pebbles on the concrete. “I’m not doing this for her. I want to do this for me. I think it’ll be fun.” I say it so convincingly, I almost fool myself.

“Well, then we support you one hundred percent.” Dad holds out his open arms for a hug. “Bring it in, bring it in!”

They wrap their arms around me, forming what we used to call a “Sunny Sandwich,” which was a lot cuter when I was little. Now that we are all about the same height, it’s just awkward, at least for me.

“As long as this is what you really want, I’m behind you.” Mom plants a kiss on the top of my head. “I’d hate for you to get steamrolled.”

“Thanks, but you don’t need to worry about me so much,” I say, wiggling free. “I’ll be fine.”

At least I think I will be.

✧ Chapter 4 ✧

Our school is laid out like a fan with all the wings converging in the center of campus, which is not the smartest design because it creates the worst human traffic jam at dismissal. It's easily the most stressful and chaotic part of my day.

Grabbing on to Bailey's backpack handle, I sidestep and weave my way through the throngs of backpacks, trying not to get trampled. Not an easy feat for someone who is only four foot ten.

"Guess what," Bailey asks, oblivious to the pack of soccer players that nearly mows me down. "Yesterday, I went downstairs to get a glass of water late at night, and I caught my dad watching the craziest thing on his laptop."

We make it past the quad, and I breathe a small sigh of relief as we get to the car pickup line in front of the school. "Oh yeah?"

There's a flash of mischief in her eyes. "Guess what it was," she says as she settles on the curb.

"Was he watching Supreme Beat music videos?" I ask, taking a wild stab at it.

"Ew, no! Why would you guess that?"

"I'm just kidding. Was it alien-abduction documentaries?" I try again. "Oh, wait! I know: Was it a true crime show?" Bailey got me hooked on those; it's so disturbing and addicting at the same time. "Remember the one where the guy forgets he's miked and confesses to the murders while he's in the bathroom?" A shiver runs down my spine. "So creepy."

Her cheeks puff up with annoyance. "No, now can you please let me tell the rest of the story?"

"Oh, sorry." Bailey hates when I get carried away. "What were you saying?"

"So, I caught my dad watching, of all things, his own wedding video." She covers her mouth with both hands, waiting for my reaction. "Isn't that so random?"

Just then, this annoying kid from my grade, Brenden, rushes past us, laughing maniacally as he grabs the hat off of this skinny kid with glasses and throws it in the

trash can as everyone watches. I shudder. That easily could have been me! Note to self: Do not, under any circumstances, wear a hat to school.

Bailey waves her hand in front of my face, snatching my attention right back to our conversation. “Hello? Are you even hearing me?”

“Oh, sorry. Yeah. What were you saying?”

Bailey draws closer to me and says in a low voice, “Something is up with my dad, Sunny. He’s not the type to watch old videos, especially not ones with my mom in them.”

“That is pretty weird,” I agree. It’d be an understatement to say that Bailey’s dad cannot stand Bailey’s mom. Not even that long ago, he was doing everything in his power to get full custody of Tic-Tac, their white Samoyed, just to spite her. Even though Mrs. Stern was the only one who ever fed him or walked him! Lucky for Tic-Tac, Mr. Stern got split custody, just like with Bailey.

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” She wiggles her eyebrows up and down.

“What?”

“Is this evidence that he misses her? Why else would he be watching that old video?”

She believes this so wholeheartedly that I start getting swayed myself.

“Maybe . . .” I scratch my chin, pondering. But it feels like a bit of a jump to make that conclusion.

“No, it has to be that!” Bailey shakes her head. “They’ve been separated a year now. Maybe he’s starting to remember all the good times they had. Maybe he wants to get her back.” She squeals, clapping her hands. “Wouldn’t that be so cute, Sunny? It’s a classic rom-com setup!”

Before I get a chance to weigh in, we’re interrupted by a *beep beep* from Mrs. Stern’s yellow Mini Cooper as it pulls up to the curb.

“Let’s talk about this later,” Bailey whispers before we crawl into the back seat together.

“Hi, girls! Sorry I’m late—the juice bar was slammed,” Mrs. Stern says, running her fingers through her newly dyed bleach-blond hair. “Did you have a good day at school?”

I’m still not used to her look. Not just the hair color

but the butterfly tattoo on the back of her neck. This is a big change for someone who used to wear button-up blouses and slacks from Talbots. She's even switched back to her maiden name. Though it still feels strange to call her anything but "Mrs. Stern," so I've been avoiding addressing her altogether.

"Are you two ready for tryouts tomorrow?" she asks from behind her sunglasses in the rearview mirror.

"I think so," Bailey says, fastening her seat belt. "We've been practicing every single day."

"That's great, honey." Mrs. Stern reaches over to the passenger seat and hands Bailey a colorful gift bag filled with fluffy tissue paper. "I got a little something for both of you."

"What's this?" Bailey tears into the bag and pulls out two hair bows, one silver and one navy blue.

Her mom beams. "It's for tryouts. See? I got them in the official Ranchito Mesa colors!"

"Thanks," Bailey says, clearly unimpressed. School spirit isn't really her thing.

I take the silver bow. "That's so nice of you. Thank

you, Mrs. St— uh . . .” My cheeks burn hot with embarrassment. “I mean Ms. Cordova.”

“You’re very welcome, Sunny,” she says, her voice honey sweet. She takes a sip of her green smoothie. “When I heard that you girls are dancing again, I wanted to get you something to commemorate your comebacks.”

Bailey rolls her eyes. “You mean *your* comeback,” she murmurs under her breath.

I stifle a giggle.

Bailey’s mom is one of those over-involved dance-mom types who’s always fundraising, chaperoning, and volunteering to do makeup and hair backstage. Too bad for her, when Bailey quit ballet, she got cut off from that world. I can see why Mrs. Stern is so pumped about our tryouts. It may not be ballet, but this dance team thing would be right up her alley, too. I bet she’s already got a Pinterest page dedicated to team T-shirts and matching swag bags. She is a sucker for matching anything.

As soon as we get to her mom’s condo, I make a beeline for the bathroom, since I can’t bring myself

to use the toilets at school and my bladder is always ready to burst at this hour. "I'll meet you upstairs in a sec," I tell her through the door.

When I'm done, I'm headed upstairs to join Bailey, when her mom, who is preparing a snack for us in the kitchen, stops me.

"Sunny," she calls in a lowered voice, waving me over.

"Yes?" I reply. I'm suddenly nervous.

She glances down the hallway and then draws close to say, "I just want to thank you for being such a good friend to Bailey. I know the divorce has been tough on her, especially since I started seeing Darren, but she's really lucky that you're always there for her," she tells me in a near whisper.

"Oh, it's nothing," I say, brushing off her compliment. I don't know why, but for a second there, I thought I might be in trouble with her, which is ridiculous. I doubt Mrs. Stern has ever disciplined anyone in her whole life, not even Tic-Tac, who is still not completely potty trained.

"No, you don't understand. It's not nothing. The only time I see her laugh these days is when she's with you." Her bracelets clink as she squeezes my arm. "I know she

can be a little demanding and clingy, but just know that it's because you're the only person she trusts."

I nod even though I've never once considered Bailey clingy. If anything, she's loyal. After being a total loner for half of elementary school, I've come to appreciate that she always saves a seat for me and waits for me after class.

"I hope you know how much she needs a friend right now." She covers her eyes with one hand. "Honestly, sometimes I think that if it weren't for you, she'd be completely lost."

"Oh, I doubt that, Mrs. . . . I mean Ms. Cordova, but thank you," I reply.

"Bailey is so lucky to have you." She hands me a plate of banana-oat cookies and veggie straws. "Here, take this up with you."

I climb the stairs with a new sense of responsibility. I always knew that Bailey counts on me for a lot, but now more than ever, I have to be there for her if I want her to go back to being her old self again, just like her mom said.

Even though it's already been a while now since Mrs.

Stern moved into the condo, Bailey's bedroom walls are still bare and her room is cluttered with half-unpacked boxes.

"What took so long?" she asks, putting on the thick reading glasses she's too embarrassed to wear at school. "I was starting to think you fell in the toilet or something."

I grimace, rubbing my stomach. "Sorry, I think it was the tuna salad from lunch," I fib, not wanting to explain my little talk with her mom. "Ready to start homework?"

"Sure," she says, tearing a piece of notebook paper from her binder.

I settle on the shaggy rug with my back against her bed and my binder on my lap. Carefully, I thumb through my student planner for the homework assignment.

"Seriously?" Bailey glances at the crinkled, stained pages of my planner. "You still haven't asked for a new one?"

I smooth out the page with my palm. "What? It's totally still usable!" I try not to draw any more attention to the spot where I spilled a whole glass of orange juice last week. Admittedly, it's been painfully embarrassing

every time I've had to write down my assignments at the beginning of each period. Not only are the crispy pages super noisy, the whole planner is also starting to smell bad. The other day, Brenden Sylvester, who sits behind me in Social Studies, announced to the whole class, "Where's that gross rotten-orange smell coming from?" I wanted to crawl in a hole and stay there until I fossilized.

Bailey laughs, putting down her pen. "You are so stubborn, Sunny. There's literally a huge box full of brand-new planners in the office; all you have to do is ask the secretary and she'll give you one."

"I know," I say, fidgeting with my planner. "But you know I hate asking for stuff." Even now, my parents still order for me at restaurants.

"Well, here, happy birthday," she says, even though my birthday isn't for months. She pulls a brand-new student planner from inside her binder and tosses it to me. "I picked one up for you during my study hall, since I knew you'd keep putting it off and making excuses."

"Bailey!" I say, hugging it to my chest. "You did that for me?"

“Duh, I’m your best friend. Of course I did.” She rolls her eyes, but in an affectionate way.

I’m speechless. “Thanks. I owe you one.”

“Don’t mention it,” she says, already back to working on her algebra problem.

Just then, there’s a ping from my phone.

There’s a new message on my Supreme Beat fansite app. “Oooh!” I tap to open it.

“What is it?” Bailey asks, her back still turned to me.

“It’s just my friend,” I reply as I’m reading the message.

“Friend? Which friend?” Abruptly, she spins in her desk chair, craning her neck to see what I’m looking at.

“She’s not from school. It’s this girl I’ve been chatting with from the Supreme Beat fan message boards,” I explain, slightly offended that having another friend is such earth-shattering news.

Bailey’s long hair tickles my face as she hovers over me. “Who? What’s her name?”

“Actually, I don’t really know,” I say while thumb-typing my reply to her message. “But her handle is @SUPREMEBeaTZ, and she makes really cute enamel pins.”

Bailey grabs me by the sides of my face with both hands. “Sunny, don’t you remember what we learned from the internet safety class at school? This person could be a stalker or a serial murderer for all you know! How can you call this total stranger a friend?”

I laugh, pulling away. She can be so dramatic. It must be all the true crime shows she watches on HBO. “It’s not like that. We only talk about fan stuff.”

That’s the part I’m loving these days about being in the fandom. Since I started chatting on the message boards, I’ve been casually connecting with all kinds of people. Online, I’m not the Sunny Park who can’t make eye contact and mumbles so quietly no one can understand. As @solarSBlove, I’m actually pretty normalfunny, even!

“Don’t worry, it’s super chill,” I tell her.

“That’s what all the victims say. . . .”

I giggle. “Don’t worry, she doesn’t know where I live or what I look like, so she can’t stalk me.”

“Yet you consider her a friend?” She nudges me with her toe.

“Oh, definitely! We’ve been chatting almost every

single day.” Mostly about Kim Taeho, one of the lesser-known members of the seven-person band. He’s shy and not as tall and good-looking as the others, but he’s the lead dancer and also the one who writes all the lyrics, and we are both obsessed with him. “She’s super hilarious and she always has the perfect GIF for every situation. You’d like her.”

Bailey picks up her poetry notebook and pretends to leaf through it. “I have an idea. Maybe you should hang out with *me*, your actual friend, instead of your fake internet friend, who is probably some sketchy middle-aged dude who collects axes and lives in his mom’s basement.”

“She’s not a middle-aged dude; she’s in seventh grade, too.” With a chuckle, I tuck my phone into my pocket. “Do I sense that someone is feeling a little jealous?”

“Ha!” Bailey puts her notebook down. “I’m not jealous, you dingus. I just want to finish this algebra assignment so we can practice dance.” She bops my knee with hers

“Sure.” I bonk her back. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t

enjoy watching her squirm with envy just a little. I guess in a weird way, it makes me feel special knowing that she doesn't want to share me with anyone else.

“Tryouts are tomorrow, if you haven't forgotten,” she says. “Remember—we have to bring our A-game!”

✧ Chapter 5 ✧

At three o'clock on the dot, the final bell rings and it's go-time.

Gulp.

Tryouts, here I come, I guess.

I wipe my sweaty palms on my shorts and pack up my backpack, trying to counteract the fluttery feeling in my stomach with positive thoughts.

My heart races, so I take in a deep breath through my nose and hold it there in my chest before releasing it slowly. As I walk through the crowded halls, I force myself to be Zen, mentally reciting, *I will not fall on my face, I will not split my shorts, I will be fine* as I head over to the gym where I'm supposed to meet Bailey.

Turning into the PE wing, I notice that she's already sitting on the bench in front of the girls' locker room, waiting for me.

“You ready for this?” I call out to her, jumping into toe-touchers as I approach.

But when she looks up at me, I see that something is wrong.

Terribly wrong.

She’s not laughing. Her face looks stricken, and she’s been crying.

She shakes her head.

“Oh no, Bailey. What’s the matter?” I rush over and sit down next to her.

She doesn’t say anything right away, but then she flashes her phone at me to show me a text. It’s from her mom.

Mom: You’ll never believe what just happened! Darren proposed! See you soon!

Below that is a photo of an elated Darren hugging Bailey’s mom around her neck. They’re still wearing their hairnets and aprons from the juice bar. She’s practically glowing, holding up her hand, freshly

bedazzled with a diamond ring on her finger.

“Oh . . .” I’m so shocked, I don’t have any other words.
“Wow.”

Bailey’s eyes get glassy, and her voice cracks. “Sunny, she can’t marry him.” Her face is flushed, and tears stream down her cheeks in sheets. “This is not how it’s supposed to go.”

Quickly, I dig around my backpack until I find some tissues. I haven’t seen her this upset since she first found out her parents were splitting up.

Passersby stare as she takes a big breath and blows her nose loudly into the tissue. “I didn’t think they’d seriously consider getting *married*.” She wipes her runny black eyeliner on her sleeves. “It’s all so sudden. . . .”

I sit beside her quietly, letting her vent, not knowing what else I can do.

She buries her head in her arms. “I guess, deep down, I thought for sure that she’d wake up one day and realize how much she misses us and come back home.” Her entire body heaves as she sobs. “I’m such an idiot for thinking that. Like my life is some kind of corny fairy tale or something.”

I lean my head on her shoulder. “You’re not an idiot, Bailey.”

“How could she do this to me today of all days? She knows I have tryouts. How am I supposed to concentrate on dancing like this?” She laughs bitterly. “That’s so like her. All she cares about is herself. She doesn’t care about me or my dad. She’s only concerned with her new life with Darren.”

“No, don’t say that. Your mom loves you, Bailey.”

But she holds up her phone and shakes it violently. “Then why did she text me this? What did she expect? That I’d be happy for her? Congratulate her with some freaking emojis?” She stifles her sobs, pressing her palms over her eyes. “She didn’t even have the decency to wait to tell me in person, after the tryouts are finished.”

“Listen, Bailey, we can just go home if you’re not up for it.” I give her a hug, and she cries into my shoulder so hard, the wetness soaks through my shirt.

“You’ve got a lot going on right now, and the dance team is not a big deal compared to that,” I offer in all earnestness. “We can always try out next year. Seriously.”

Instantly, my brain kicks into overdrive, planning our next steps.

Halmoni should be finished with her Zumba class by now, and she could probably pick us up. I can take Bailey home and maybe put on one of those old black-and-white movies she likes, and we can drink her favorite Earl Grey tea until her dad comes home from work. Maybe she can write some poems. That might make her feel better.

But Bailey answers with a resolute “No.”

She wipes her nose defiantly. “I want to do this. I have to do this.”

“Are . . . are you sure?”

She doesn’t look like she’s in any kind of state to be dancing, or auditioning, no less. But I know better than to question her, especially when she’s upset. When Bailey Stern sets her mind on something, there isn’t much anyone can do about it.

“I’m positive.” She steadies her breath and swipes her water bottle off the ground. “I’m not going to let my mom’s stupid drama stop me from living my life. She’s done enough of that already, and I’m sick of it.”

She yanks her tote bag from the bench and flings it back onto her shoulder. “I refuse to let her or Darren take away another thing from me.”

I stand up next to her, uncertain. “Okay, if you’re sure that’s what you want . . .”

“It is.” Her face is determined. “Let’s go.”

I flinch when I check the time on my phone. “Oh no, we have to hurry, then. The tryouts started two minutes ago.”