

Ice Dreams

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Chapter One

Rosa!

Miss u already! Tell ur mom to get you a cell so we can txt. Sammie sez lunch isn't the same without those yum cookies ur mom makes. xo, Jessica

“What about this one?” My little sister, Amelia, held up a photograph of a woman with short hair, puffed into spikes.

“She looks like an exotic cactus,” I told her.

“Rosa! That’s the *point!*” Amelia huffed and kicked her legs against her chair. Her toes barely

scraped the salon's pale wood floor. "I want to make a *statement!*"

"A statement like, 'I'm wearing a colorful blowfish on my head'?" I asked her. "Is that really how you want to start school here?"

Amelia huffed again. Grumbling, she turned the page. "Ooooh!" Her eyes lit up.

Our mother appeared and frowned down at the photo Amelia was admiring. Blond hair with pink tips. "Not appropriate for fourth grade," Mom announced.

With a dramatic sigh, Amelia shut the hairstyle book and placed it back on the table, along with the other portfolios.

"You have gorgeous hair, Amelia," Mom told her. "You don't need a crazy cut or wild color."

"I'm sick of my hair!" Amelia wailed dramatically. She tossed her long, jet-black locks over her shoulder and pretended to fuss with them, as if they'd been causing a ruckus on her head.

"Fine, you can tell it to the stylist," Mom said.

"Ms. Hernandez?" The receptionist, Renee, smiled at my mother. She was a pretty woman with gray eyes and short platinum hair, and she gestured over her shoulder. "Angela is ready."

“Rosa, you’re next,” Mom told me as she took Amelia by the hand.

“Is there anything I can get you while you wait?” Renee asked me. “We have juice, tea, seltzer water, and hot cocoa.”

“I’m fine, thanks,” I told her. “I’ve got my glass of water.”

“Just let me know if you need anything,” Renee said before retreating to her desk.

I sat back in the plush leather chair and flipped through a celebrity magazine. Sometimes, the way people treated me in my mom’s salons made me a little uncomfortable. It was bad enough when we lived in Miami, and she was southeast regional director for the Athena brand. But now they’d made her executive vice president and moved us to Chicago. When Amelia and I showed up for our haircuts, Mom let it drop that she was a bigwig from corporate. Now everyone was falling all over themselves for our sake. But I didn’t need cocoa and a chair massage — all I wanted was a trim. I had to start at a new school the next day, and I didn’t want to look raggedy.

I flipped another page, checking out the reviews of a couple of new movies, when I heard someone say, “Ex-cuse me? Are you *kidding*?”

I looked up and saw Renee blushing madly. “I’m sorry. There’s been a mix-up, and someone is scheduled against your appointment.”

A girl with gorgeous strawberry blond curls was standing in front of the reception desk, her arms folded across her chest. She looked like she was about my age. A petite woman with light brown hair placed a hand on the girl’s shoulder. “Look, we made an appointment for my daughter, and we expect you to honor it.” Her voice had an edge. I’d seen her type before — she would pitch a fit if she didn’t get what she wanted.

“What’s the name again?” Renee asked.

“Jacqueline Darcy,” the girl said.

Renee shook her head as she flipped through the calendar. “I don’t see your name . . .”

“Isn’t another stylist available?” her mother demanded.

“I’m sorry, but we’re all booked —”

“Is there a problem here?” my mother asked as she strode up to reception. She had on dark jeans and a T-shirt with a bright red cardigan, but somehow managed to look Very Official. Maybe it’s the way she walks. “How can I help you?”

“There was a mistake in the booking, and this girl’s appointment got bumped,” Renee explained to my mother. She looked like she wished someone would dig a hole for her to hide in. I felt so bad for her, I would’ve grabbed a shovel, if I had one.

But Mom didn’t go ballistic. She just nodded. “Well, luckily, that problem is easily fixed. She can take Rosa’s appointment.” Mom looked over at me, her head slightly cocked. It was an expression I knew well. It meant, “You will back me up on this, or there will be extreme consequences for you later.”

I looked at the girl. Honestly, her hair looked great — she didn’t even need a haircut. Still, I knew my mother’s motto: “Even when the customer is wrong, they’re right.” I just sighed. “No problem.”

Jacqueline smiled gratefully at me. “Thank you so much! I’ve got this really important presentation tomorrow, and I want to look decent.”

Very important presentation? I wondered what that could possibly be, but decided not to ask. “Okay, well, good luck with that,” I told her.

Renee stood up. “Well, if you’d just follow me, Jacqueline . . .”

“Everyone calls me Jacqui.”

“I’ll be back in an hour,” Jacqui’s mother said, giving her daughter a quick peck on the cheek.

“Thanks again!” Jacqui called as she followed Renee to the sinks.

I waved. Mom came over and pulled my long hair over my shoulder. “I’ll give you a trim when we get home,” she promised.

I gave her a dubious look. “You haven’t cut hair in ten years.”

Mom smiled. “Yeah, but I cut it for ten before that. I’ve still got the skills.”

“It’s not as glamorous as an Athena spa,” I told her.

“I’ll give you a few free shampoo samples,” she joked. Our house is *packed* with Athena products, of course. Mom gets this crazy discount.

Renee bustled back. “Ms. Hernandez, I swear to you, that has never happened before —”

Mom nodded. “And we don’t want it to happen again.”

Renee straightened up, nodding seriously. “Never.”

“Happy customers are repeat customers,” Mom told her.

“Absolutely.”

Mom gave Renee a pat on the shoulder. “Great.”

Renee stepped back behind her desk. She looked like someone who had just avoided a prison sentence. I didn’t blame her for being nervous — I know my mom has a reputation as a tough boss. She kind of has that reputation as a mom, too.

“Omigosh, what do you guys think?” Amelia appeared, flipping her hair dramatically from side to side, like a model in a shampoo commercial.

“Did you get it cut yet?” I asked her. Seriously, I couldn’t see a difference.

“Are you *kidding*?” Amelia looked shocked. “I got, like, half an inch lopped off!”

“Looks great, honey,” Mom said.

“Yeah,” I agreed. “Looks great.” But I couldn’t help smiling to myself a little. My best friend, Jessica, always used to refer to my little sister as a “Wannabe Drama Queen.” It was just so Amelia to walk into a salon, threaten to get pink hair, and then get the world’s most insignificant trim.

I’d have to remember to write Jessica an e-mail later. That was one thing about living in a new city — it was hard to have zero friends. We’d been in Chicago for a week, and the phone only rang

twice. One call was business for Mom. The other was someone who wanted us to switch our long-distance service. Pretty pathetic.

I just hoped I could make a few friends at school. Like, soon.

Even without a fabulous haircut.

“Ooh, cool!” Amelia said as she bounced along on the bridge between the two ice-skating rinks.

“I know, *two* rinks!” I agreed warmly.

“No, I’m talking about the frozen yogurt place,” Amelia explained. “Mom, can I get some?”

Mom dug through her purse and pulled out her red wallet. “Sure. Get me some, too. Anything chocolate. Rosa?”

“Vanilla-and-chocolate twist with chocolate sprinkles.”

“I’m getting chocolate with chocolate sprinkles,” Amelia announced.

We’re a family of chocolate fiends — can you tell? Mom handed Amelia a twenty-dollar bill, and she scurried off to get our orders. The ice rinks were at the center of the indoor mall, on the first level. They were surrounded by boutiques and restaurants. People munched and watched the skaters

zip by in an endless circle while pop music played over the loudspeakers. There were two levels overhead, and the ceiling was made of glass. It was a different world from the slightly run-down rink where I used to skate in Miami.

Mom and I went down a short flight of stairs to the large rink's main entrance. A friendly woman with big hair and a big smile greeted us from behind a counter. "Hi — welcome to Wilkinson Rinks! Do you need to rent some skates today?"

"Actually, I'm here to find out about skate classes," Mom said.

"For you?" the woman asked.

"For me," I piped up.

"And you are . . . ?"

"I'm Rosa Hernandez."

"I'm Opal Mission." She smiled, revealing perfectly even teeth. "Have you ever skated before, Rosa?" She pulled out a full-color brochure.

"She's won several awards," Mom announced.

"Mo-om." I rolled my eyes. "They were for the county — where we used to live. In Miami. It wasn't some huge achievement."

"Well, Miami's a big city," Ms. Mission said. "There must have been skaters."

“Yeah, but — skating isn’t huge there,” I told her. “At least, not at the place I went to.” I eyed the racks of new-looking brown rental skates behind her. I didn’t mention that the skates at my old place smelled like wet stink, or that the average age of the skaters was eight. Oh, or that the place had a giant duck mascot that would come out and dance the hokey-pokey every forty-five minutes.

“Don’t listen to her,” Mom cut in. “Rosa’s a very gifted skater. She’ll need an advanced class.”

“Maybe we should start you out in intermediate,” Ms. Mission suggested. She shifted her body against the counter. She was overweight, but in a pretty way that made her soft-looking. She smiled kindly at me. “If you do well, you can move up.”

“She needs an *advanced* class,” Mom insisted, her dark eyes flashing.

Ms. Mission laughed. “You’re a lady who knows what she wants, aren’t you?” she asked.

“She sure is,” I agreed.

Mom’s scowl relaxed into a smile, and she even managed to chuckle at herself.

“Okay, advanced it is,” Ms. Mission said. “That class meets at three thirty.”

Right after school. I turned to Mom. “How will I get here? You’ll be at work, right?”

“Papi will take you.”

Papi is my grandfather, who lives with us. Mom had been afraid that he wouldn’t want to leave Miami, but he insisted that he wanted to keep the family together. Besides, he and my grandmother, Lita, had lived in Chicago for a while when they were in their twenties. “Lita loved Chicago,” Papi had said wistfully. My grandfather was crazy about my grandmother. She died when I was four, though, so I hardly remember her.

“How many days a week?” I asked.

“Every weekday,” Ms. Mission said.

Whoa. My old class met three times a week. Ms. Mission must have noticed my surprise, because she said, “The intermediate class meets three times a week.”

Mom pulled out her checkbook and started writing. “Rosa will be in the advanced class.”

“Great!” Ms. Mission smiled as my mother handed over the check. “We’ll see you here tomorrow afternoon.”

I nodded. “See you.” Just as I turned and started

back up the stairs, I spotted a supercute guy with green eyes bolting down.

“Oh, sorry!” He flashed me a smile as he ducked aside to let me pass.

I wanted to say “No problem!” but all of my blood had rushed to my head and made me dizzy, so it came out more like, “Noprogrh.”

Luckily, Super Cutie wasn’t really paying attention to me.

“You’re late, Anton,” Ms. Mission called.

“Sorry, sorry!”

That brilliant smile shot over my head, and I felt my heart start up again.

“Coach Murphy isn’t going to be happy,” Ms. Mission told him.

Anton groaned. “I *know*.” He hitched his bag higher onto his shoulder and dashed toward the seats to pull on his skates.

“The line was *humongous!*” Amelia announced dramatically as she pulled my cup of frozen yogurt out of the small box the store had given her. She broke my line of vision — otherwise I’m not sure I would’ve been able to tear my eyes away from the Super Cutie in the seats. “And no chocolate sprinkles,” Amelia added. “Just rainbow.”

“Okay,” I said, taking the dish. I spooned up a mouthful, but I barely even tasted it. I shifted so I could watch Anton pull the skates from his bag, then lace them up. *Is it possible to lace up skates gracefully?* Because Anton’s movements seemed elegant — as if he were dancing in his seat.

“All right, girls, let’s head home,” Mom said. “Hopefully Papi has made something for us.”

We started toward the parking garage, but at one point, I cast a look over my shoulder. Anton had disappeared into the crowd of skaters. *But Ms. Mission had said that he was late, I reasoned. That means he comes here a lot.*

At least, that was what I *hoped* it meant.