

CHAPTER ONE

I know that before the timer on the oven goes off, the vase of flowers on the kitchen island will shatter. Water will spill everywhere, ceramic shards will litter the floor, and my adoptive mother, Mrs. B, will cut her hand trying to clean it up.

I see things. Flashes of things that I can't explain. Sometimes, it's things that haven't happened yet. Sometimes, it's years ago.

"Jade, honey, the new school can't be *that* bad," she said, completely oblivious to both my feelings and the fact that her elbow was too close to the vase as she tried to toss the salad without spilling lettuce everywhere. It was a losing battle. "What about the kids? You've been at Pinewood for a month, haven't you made any friends? Benji and I had a great time back when we went to school here."

"You guys went to college here, not high school. It's different," I said, leaning out of the way as she moved to add the cherry tomatoes.

Mrs. B raised an eyebrow. "So I take it that's a no on friends then?"

"Some guy said hi to me the other day, but I'm pretty sure he was forced to. Mr. Goodman is pretty cool, but I don't think teachers count, and he was gone all last week," I rolled my eyes. "Oh! I stopped a ball from hitting someone in the face. They called me a freak, but somehow, *I* am the one who got in trouble for it. Does that count?"

Mrs. B frowned. "Do I need to talk to your teacher?"

"Because that worked out so well the last time," I muttered.

"Jade, the attitude isn't necessary."

She turned to pull out the plates for dinner, and I quickly moved the vase out of the danger zone. "You just need to be a bit more...approachable. This isn't going to be like your last school. Not every kid is going to be another Ashley."

I tried not to wince at the name. Yeah, we were in a new school in a new town, and as much as I wanted to believe I'd get a fresh start here, I'd learned my lesson about making friends at my last school. Couldn't Mrs. B see that it was just better to fly under the radar?

"I liked Ashley. She was cool...unlike you," my little brother, Tommy, said as he walked in the back door. His sandy hair was sweaty, and his new blue soccer uniform was covered in mud. Of course, the little twerp wouldn't miss an opportunity to butt into our private conversation. Our parents knew not to broach the Ashley topic too much, but Tommy seemed to think testing my patience was his purpose in life.

"You stay out of this," I warned as he snatched a gluten-free breadstick from the tray when his mother wasn't looking. "We don't talk about her anymore."

"Whatever," he said, crunching loudly.

"Judging by your clothes, I'd say the first practice went well," Mrs. B said cheerfully. "You're not eating with dirty hands, are you?"

"No!" Tommy said through a mouthful of bread,

distorting his voice to sound like the little goblin he was. Mrs. B waved him toward the sink as the kitchen timer sounded. I let out a sigh of relief, scribbling *broken vase* into my weathered journal.

The Bensons didn't know about my visions. I'd kept them hidden and written them down for as long as I could remember. An old leather journal, with its pages practically about to fall out of its spine, was my only connection to my real family. Wherever I actually came from. It came with me the night I was dropped off at a hospital where my adoptive dad used to work. The inside had a curling signature, faded from all the times I'd traced my finger over it: *Vivian Kastel*. The woman who left me behind. My mother.

That was it. The hospital and social services had found my mother extremely hard to track, minus a few basic records from when I was born. A faded journal, a mysterious name, no message in invisible ink. I'd like to think maybe she gave me the journal to help me sort out my visions as if every word I wrote in it was silently asking for her help. I knew that was wishful thinking.

"Anyway, Jade, the point is still the same," Mrs. B said, smacking Tommy's hand away before he could grab another breadstick. "Once more people get to know you, you'll have friends in no time. *Real* ones. They'll be lining up for miles!"

Tommy started chuckling. I shot him a glare.

"What's so funny, twerp?"

"Stop with the name-calling, Jade," the larger version of Tommy said automatically as he came in, hanging up his car keys.

Mrs. B smiled at him. "How was work today, sweetie?"

My adoptive dad, or Benson as I'd taken to calling him over the last few months, shrugged. "Busy as usual. You know."

Meaning the exact same answer he'd given ever since we'd

moved to Pinewood for his job a few months ago. In truth, I wasn't even sure he'd wanted the new position at first, but after what happened at my old school...no, I wasn't going to think about that again. Not right now, anyway. Mrs. B swatted her husband away as he reached for the breadsticks, too. How a father and son could be so similar and so annoying was baffling.

Looking at the three of them, it was hard not to feel like I didn't belong. It was clear as day that I was adopted. They were almost the definition of the perfect, white, cookie-cutter family. And then there's me. The girl with light brown skin, dark eyes, and long chestnut curls. As dumb as it was, Ashley had been right- I'd always be an outsider to my own family.

"Who would want to be friends with *Jade*? Ew!"

"Tommy!" Mrs. B scolded. She didn't raise her voice very often, especially not to her precious baby, but she hated when we fought. Benson's blue eyes watched me carefully to see how I would react. He looked like he wanted to say something, but seemed to decide against it.

"Well, it's true! She never talks to anyone. She's always zoned out or in her stupid journal," he said, swiping the leather-bound book from the counter beside me.

"Give that back!" I yelled at him.

"Why?" Tommy mocked, thrilled to get under my skin. "It's only a book."

He flipped slowly through the pages, taunting me, holding it just out of my reach. His greedy blue eyes drank in the drawings and words I had forbidden anyone to see. My secrets.

"Tommy, you know not to touch your sister's things," Benson scolded while I bit my tongue to retort the sister comment. "Give it back."

Tommy, being the obedient son he was, immediately started to shove the journal in my direction. The only problem: it was a very old journal, already about to fall apart. The

force of Tommy incorrectly holding the journal and swinging it toward me caused pages from the spine to scatter on the floor in a confetti of papers.

For a moment, time seemed to stop. Tommy looked as stunned as I felt, and somewhere deep inside my mind, I knew he hadn't meant to. But the second I saw my mother's handwriting on the ground—the only thing I had left of her, my *real* family—I saw red.

"WHAT DID YOU DO?" I screamed at him. We yelled at each other all the time, but not like this. I'd never actually gone off on Tommy before. I tore the remaining pages out of his hands and shoved them back into the journal, tears prickling at the ends of my eyes.

"Jade, please calm down. We can put the book back together," Mrs. B intervened, trying to diffuse the situation. She knew how important that journal was to me, but she didn't even try to stop Tommy. She always took *her* kid's side.

"What was the *one* thing I told you!" I whirled on Tommy. "You do not touch this! *Ever!*"

I shoved him out of my way and made a break for the back door. I needed to escape. To be alone for a while so I could calm my racing heart.

The issue was that I shoved him a little harder than I meant to, and Tommy tumbled to the floor. Hard. His hand caught one of the plates on the island, and it shattered against the floor. The timer on the oven sounded again—I'd missed Mrs. B resetting the time.

It was the exact scene from my vision. Only the vase had been replaced by the plate.

"Jade!" Mrs. B said sharply, crouching to pick up some of the larger shards. She winced, and a bead of blood quickly began to form on her hand.

"Let me help," Benson said, rushing over to his wife. "I'm a doctor."

Mrs. B waved him off as she went to rinse off her wound. "That's still not funny, and you're a geneticist, dear."

Tommy sat on the floor, completely stunned. I had never *ever* done anything like that to him before. As nasty as the kid could be, sometimes it was easy to forget he was only nine and, at least for the moment, smaller than me.

I caused this. I had to leave. *Now*.

"I'm sorry!" I said in a panic. My breaths were erratic as I snatched my bag from the hook. I looked behind me—I couldn't have them chasing after me, thinking I was running away again. "I'll be back in a little bit."

"Jade Benson! Come back here!" my adoptive father ordered.

I stared at him. Cold. "I'm not a Benson."

I slammed the door behind me.



The eerie chill dried my watery eyes and calmed my nerves faster than anticipated. It was Friday night, yet the streets were deserted. Storm clouds, creepy ones, loomed overhead. I loved weather like this: the ominous sky painted with swirls of dark gray and purple, threatening to unleash its wrath at any moment. An oddity. Just like me.

I thought back to the Bensons, how I freaked out on Tommy. We fought like cats and dogs, but I had never laid a hand on him before. He might call me a monster, but that didn't mean I wanted to actually *be* one.

It's going to be bad when I get back. I sighed.

A red sign caught my attention as a gust of wind caught the chimes around the door, sending them swaying frantically. *Yan Mei's Cafe*, it declared. I allowed myself a smile. My favorite place in town, with a view of the storm. Perfect.

I walked into the small building and was immediately

filled with the smell of savory meats and spices. Oh, sweet, comforting Chinese food.

The Bensons and I had gotten takeout from here when we first moved in, a tradition when we settled into a new place. We gorged ourselves with bourbon chicken and chow mein on the living room floor surrounded by unpacked boxes. It was so delicious that I found myself becoming a regular here.

The shop was a little hole-in-the-wall cafe with spread-out square tables and a tall counter where one of those lucky cats waved endlessly at customers. The walls were decorated with silk tapestries of deep reds, greens, and golds. A beautiful watercolor painting hung at the back.

"I'm rather fond of that." A woman with a heavily accented voice jolted me out of my skin.

"Oh, sorry! You scared me," I yelped, catching my breath and willing my heartbeat to return to a normal cadence. A petite Asian woman was suddenly beside me, an elegant bun framing her fair skin. The first traces of silver were just starting to show in her ebony hair.

"You didn't see me coming?" she asked with an innocent smile, brown eyes warm. *If only she knew.* I smiled politely and shook my head.

"You come here often enough to seat yourself, you know. I'll put in an order for your usual," the woman said. I looked down at her to see a "World's Best Grandma" T-shirt. Someone was lucky to have her as a grandmother. She was the owner of the place, Mrs. Yan Mei. I'd talked to her a few times since we'd moved to Pinewood and she'd always been really nice. She'd sometimes tell funny stories about her grandson or how she loved cooking and always dreamed of owning a restaurant after she immigrated from China.

I thanked her before moving to an abandoned table near the window. Only a few booths were taken. It was the perfect place for my escape into solitude.

I wondered how long I would last here. The last school year flashed through my mind, and I cringed. I wasn't sure if I could handle another incident like that or another fake friend like Ashley. It was hard to be optimistic, but maybe Pinewood *would* be different. So far, it was the most pleasant location we'd moved to. Not too hot or cold, and the food was top-notch.

But I had to face my inevitable reality: I space out, see things, and then act. I couldn't explain *why*. My last school had questions that I couldn't answer. I would just ignore the visions, but then what kind of person would *I* be? I'm no superhero, but I would like to believe I'm a good person. Not including today's events.

I sighed. Pinewood's a joke. We had five months here, six tops.

"Excuse me?"

For the second time today, I jumped.

"Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to scare you," a male voice said softly. He looked to be my age, several inches taller, with light brown hair and blue eyes that somehow felt familiar. Someone I passed in the hallway? A classmate? He was slightly attractive, I guess. A sheepish smile crossed his face, and his shoulders raised. A plate of hot, steaming food was in his hands.

"You didn't," I said, holding back a glare. I usually tried not to be hostile, but it had been a *really* bad day, and I wasn't in the mood for pleasantries. My plans included running away from my problems and stress eating.

The boy cleared his throat. "You're in some of my classes. At Pinewood High. I go there too, obviously, since I'm in your class. My name's Dylan," he said so quickly that it was almost unintelligible.

"Nice to meet you, Dylan...I guess. Can I have my food now?"

His eyes went wide. "Right, sorry. I babble when I'm

nervous—I mean, here’s your food! Please enjoy!” he said with an overly cheery voice as he set my food down. The smell of sweet bourbon chicken invaded my senses and made my mouth water. I started to reach for the plate. “Be careful, it’s hot!”

For a moment, I felt our fingertips graze each other. My vision hazed, and my ears rang. I didn’t feel my body hit the floor.