

Day 7

## CHAPTER 1

**I**t was supposed to be the best week of my life, but then everything went terribly wrong. Actually, things had gone terribly wrong long before that, but no one had bothered to notice.

*“I’m the king of the world!”*

Kidding! Of course I was only kidding. That’s a line from *Titanic*, a cheesy movie that makes girls go all soft because Leonardo DiCaprio dies in the film. That’s right . . . Romance = Death.

I guess it’s good that Leonardo died, because when a girl is sobbing, you can put your arm around her and tell her that you know how she feels. Then she thinks you’re the sensitive type, when really, Leonardo drowning in freezing water isn’t what’s on your mind. The scene where Kate Winslet is naked is what you’re really thinking about.

“Say it again, Higgs,” Roo begged.

I stretched out my arms, leaned over the ship’s rail, and yelled, “I’m king of the world!”

As Roo squealed, Nick tapped me on the shoulder and asked in his best English accent, which sounded more Brooklyn than British, “Pardon me, but are you quite done?” He adjusted the collar of his *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club* jacket — it was lime green, the color John Lennon wore. “I believe it’s my turn.”

Nick worshipped at the altar of John Lennon. He even had shaggy hair and wore round wire-rimmed glasses like his idol. I didn’t have the heart to tell him that he looked more like a beefy, overgrown Harry Potter than an iconic musician from Liverpool.

Just then, I made the mistake of looking down into the bottomless ocean of blue-gray water. “Yeah, I’m done,” I said quickly as we walked past the long line of seniors who had the same original idea as we did. “Come on, Roo, let’s get out of here.”

Roo was my girlfriend. She had that whole blond hair, blue-eyed, sun-kissed SoCal tan thing going for her. Not that I was complaining. Roo was one of the most beautiful girls at school. Everybody loved Roo. You’d have to be insane not to.

Sophomore year, Roo and I had been bio lab partners, then friends. No one was more surprised than me when we got together. Not known for her brains, I gave Roo gravitas and she gave me glamour. We’d been together for two years.

“Two years, four months, and seven days,” she said as I tried not to vomit. I shouldn’t have looked down from the bow of the ship. “Oh, Higgs, can you believe that we are going to graduate in six days? It’s going to be the first day of the rest of our lives.”

Either the ship was rocking violently or I was. “Every day is the first day of the rest of our lives,” I told her as I wove my way to an empty table.

As Roo thought about this, I took a deep breath and stared at the centerpiece — a miniature life preserver with our school mascot, an astronaut, sitting in it.

Out of nowhere, Nick appeared and handed me a cold can of Coke. Good ol' Nick. He was always there for me. Unfortunately, Samantha Verve was at his side. "Who are you supposed to be?" I asked.

She was wearing a floppy white hat over her curly brown hair, a short white dress, and white boots, which matched the color of her skin. How anyone could live in Southern California and be so pale was a paradox.

Samantha lowered her oversized sunglasses. "I'm Yoko Ono," she said, as if it was something I should know.

"You broke up the Beatles," I said flatly. I wasn't sure if my nausea was getting worse because of the rocking ship or the proximity to Samantha Verve.

Samantha was Nick's girlfriend. No, wait. She was his fiancée. I'm serious. Fiancée.

Samantha proposed at prom, and Nick said yes.

And people thought *I* was crazy.

Roo leaned up against me. "This is nice, isn't it?" she asked.

I nodded stiffly. Her perfume was making my situation worse. I felt like I was suffocating, and it wasn't just that afternoon. I'd felt that way for two years, four months, and seven days. Still, so many people said Roo and I belonged together that I had talked myself into believing it. Actually, it was mostly Roo who said that, but everyone agreed with her. She had a way of getting people to do whatever she wanted, only making it seem like it was their idea.

When my brother, Jeffrey, was a senior, it was tradition to have a class picnic the Sunday before graduation. My senior year, the student council, led by Zander Findley, opted for a “Senior Sail,” which meant that we were trapped on a ship that circled the Marina del Rey harbor for four hours. Everyone was encouraged to wear something that symbolized their years at Sally Ride High School. The football team wore their helmets, which made it hard for them to eat the little sandwiches the refreshment committee put out, French club members donned berets, and there was a group of kids wearing top hats and monocles, though I wasn’t sure what that was supposed to mean. To be funny, Mr. Avis, the assistant principal, wore a prison guard uniform.

I wasn’t sure how to dress — a suit for debate, my track uniform, or maybe the black shirt, red tie, and porkpie hat we wore for jazz band? I was also president of the honor society and valedictorian — what would symbolize that? I seriously considered wearing a Harvard T-shirt since my entire high school career had been focused on getting accepted there.

However, in the end, Roo insisted we dress as king and queen of the prom, which we were. That’s how I ended up wearing a crown and sitting at a table with John Lennon and Yoko Ono as a ship sailed to nowhere while I tried not to throw up.