

# Chapter 1

*Thursday, July 7th, 1955*

The smells drifting through the wide-open window of Dana Burley's bedroom weren't exactly pleasant, but they weren't exactly unpleasant either. She sniffed cautiously. Garbage truck, for sure. She had heard the grinding of gears and the rattle of metal cans and the calls of Howard and Arnold, who got to ride around all day long on the back of the truck, hanging on with just one hand and leaning merrily out into traffic. She sniffed again. She could smell exhaust, too, from the cars and taxis that rumbled along Eleventh Street, but mixed with everything else was the scent of leaves from the maple tree outside her window, and, drifting up from downstairs, various cooking smells — coffee and eggs and something sweet, which might be a birthday cake.

From across the room, as if she had read Dana's mind (and she probably had), Julia said, "I think I smell our birthday cake."

Dana pretended she was still asleep.

“Dana? I know you’re awake.”

This was one of the problems with having a twin sister. Dana had no secrets from her. Well, hardly any. She rolled over and looked across the room at Julia.

“We’re seven today!” exclaimed Julia. “Aren’t you excited?”

Dana grinned. “Yes.”

“How come you didn’t answer me before?”

Dana shrugged beneath her cotton blanket, then tossed it back. She sat up in bed and looked out the window just in time to see the garbage truck disappear from view, Howard waving to Mrs. Morgan, who was walking her poodle to the corner. Dana turned and surveyed the bedroom she shared with Julia. She thought of a word her art teacher had recently explained: *symmetry*. Her room certainly was symmetrical. You could see, on one side, Dana’s domain, and on the other side, the reverse image, as if someone had held a mirror up to Dana’s things. This was because every time Dana added something to her side, Julia hurried to add the same thing to the other side. If Dana asked her mother to look for a blue spread for her bed, Julia begged for the same blue spread. If Dana began a collection of marbles and arranged them in a tray on her bookcase, then — surprise, surprise — Julia suddenly became interested in

marbles and arranged them on her bookcase on the opposite wall.

Even worse, most mornings, Julia waited until Dana had gotten dressed and then put on the exact same outfit.

“We’re too old for samesies,” Dana had said over and over again.

“But we’re twins. *Identical* twins. We’re special,” Julia had replied.

“Mommy, she’s copying me!” Dana would complain to their mother, and Abby would say patiently, “She looks up to you. She just wants to be like you, lovey. You should be flattered.”

Dana was, after all, nine minutes older than Julia.

“Hi,” came a husky voice from the doorway.

Dana patted her bed, and her brother ran across the room and dove onto her pillows. Then he sat placidly next to Dana, his eyes flat, his mouth hanging open slightly. “It’s your birthday,” he said seriously. Actually, what he said was, “It your birfday.”

“That’s right!” cried Julia, rolling out of her own bed and joining Dana and Peter. “You remembered. Do you know how old we are?”

“Five?” guessed Peter. His tongue protruded from his mouth and he breathed heavily.

“No, *you’re* five,” said Dana. She didn’t want to hurt his feelings, though, so she added, “But that was a good guess.”

“Party?” asked Peter.

“Yup, there’s a party today, and a magician is —”

“Cake?” Peter interrupted.

“Yes, there will be cake,” said Julia.

“I like cake,” Peter announced.

“We know you do,” said Dana. “Come on. Let’s go downstairs. But first, do you need to use the potty?”

Peter didn’t answer and Dana hurried into his room, pulled back the covers, and saw the wet stain on the sheets. Potty training was not going well.

“Do you need a diaper today?” asked Dana as she handed her brother a fresh pair of pajama bottoms.

Peter stepped into them and headed for the stairs. “I don’t know.”

Dana passed him. Then, followed by her sister and brother, she hurtled down the stairs to the second floor, ran by their parents’ bedroom, and hurtled down another flight of stairs, jumping over the last two steps to make a dramatic entrance in the hallway.

“Are those the birthday girls?” their father called from the kitchen.