

THE
LIARS
SOCIETY

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—CHAPTER 1—

WEATHERBY

No one, and I mean no one, expects me and Skip to win the Northeastern District Championship Regatta, especially not the boys with identical floppy hair in boat number 12. They look exactly like everyone else on the dock today, like they go to prep school.

I'm a public school kid, and Skip, who's my next-door neighbor and basically my uncle, stands out like a sore thumb with his bed head and too-long khakis in this popped-collar crowd. Skip was a prep school kid too so he knows how they think, even though he couldn't be more different than them. He's the opposite of buttoned-up. But I know how we look doesn't matter. We're going to win.

This event is open to the entire town. We just had to register a few months back. But there's a big white tent for

the HARBOUR CLUB (MEMBERS ONLY) stuffed with people, wearing navy blazers and pearls, eating clam chowder and buttery lobster rolls.

The floppy-haired boys keep glancing back at us and laughing a little too loud. My cheeks burn, anger bubbling up inside me, until I can't stop my words from spilling out. "I don't know what you're laughing about, but whatever it is, you're not entertaining anyone, so stop."

The shorter boy with auburn hair smirks, showing off two big dimples. "Whoa. Easy." His voice is teasing. "We're just having fun."

I know they're laughing at us, and I'm about to tell him that when Skip hands me a life jacket. "Eyes on your own boat, Star." His voice is low and full of warning. "Those are Charles Hunt's boys. They're playing by different rules. But they won't think we're funny when we beat them. Stay focused on sailing. It's almost go time."

My breath steadies. Just imagining being on the water fills me with energy and hope. I've got this. I can win. Normally if kids were laughing at me, I'd be flustered, but near the water, I'm brave. I wish I could feel the way I do while sailing all the time.

When Skip first offered to take me out on his boat, I

didn't know people competed in sailing, and I thought a regatta was a kind of cheese.

Turns out, a regatta is a day of boat races, like a swim meet. And I'm a natural at sailing, like my dad.

Every boat on the water today has two people—a skipper and a crew. The skipper is the driver. And the crew, that's me. I'm the eyes of the boat, looking out for anything unexpected, and I'm really good at seeing things other people can't.

This regatta has some teams of all kids, some all adults, some both, all genders, all competing against each other. Sailing with an adult isn't necessarily an advantage. They can slow you down. And I heard someone say teams with all kids have won three years in a row.

A rush of adrenaline pulses through me as I step into the front of the boat and take control of the smaller sail, the jib. Skip gets in position in back by the mainsail. When it's time, we push off the dock, and it's just a short ride out to the starting line.

There aren't assigned spots, like in a track meet. Each team picks the position that works best for them. Skip and I use this time to figure out our game plan, and we wait until right before the horn to take our place.

My heart hammers as the signal blasts, and we push off the line.

“Big puff coming up,” I shout at Skip, and then we’re hit with a gust. The sails fill with a surge of wind and the boat begins to tip over. I hike, stretching my body over the side of the boat and leaning out as far as I can manage, getting flat and low to the water, to help us sail faster.

As we zigzag up the course, I watch for puffs, dark spots in the water, that move as the wind blows from the shore. “Looks like a puff five boat lengths away,” I shout. “It’s a lift.” That means the wind is going to help steer us closer to the next mark and eventually to the finish line.

When we get to the puff, I’m right, and we speed up.

After I’ve been hiking upwind for more than a few minutes, my quads and hamstrings start to burn. Skip says my hiking stamina is stronger than anyone he’s ever met. Once I get in the zone, I feel like I can keep hiking forever, especially since I know pushing myself makes a big difference and can help us win.

Just when I think I can’t lean out for one more second, I spot another crew take a quick break to rest and accidentally capsize, flipping their boat upside down in the water. I

breathe in hard and ignore the sting in my legs. I let the salt water whip at my face and pull at my hair as we maneuver toward the mark.

We manage to stay in the lead for most of the race. We just have to go around one last buoy when I notice we're on a collision course with another boat. "Hunt jerks starboard," I say.

There are a lot of ways to cheat in sailing. Everyone is supposed to self-police. It's an honor sport. But Skip and I both know that some people's honor matters more than others. If the Hunts knock into us and claim we bumped them, everyone will believe them over us, because they're rich and we're not.

"We need to get in front and make a tight turn now," Skip says.

"Good call." That'll let us shoot ahead of them.

A second later, Skip counts, "Three, two, one, *go!*"

On *go*, we both lean back, pulling the side of the boat out of the water. It feels like we're going to capsize, and my stomach flip-flops as we balance on the edge.

"Up!" Skip shouts.

I smile as we leap across the boat, duck under the boom, and adjust our sails. We stay in sync, never missing a beat.

This is a dance we know by heart, even though it's harder than that, because we're making up the steps as we go. Skip and I manage a tight enough turn to beat the Hunts' boat to the mark.

Then the wind picks up, and suddenly we're moving fast. There are no boats in front of us now. A spark of excitement ignites inside me. We're in the lead. I'm full of jittery energy, practically radiating hope, as we clear the finish line and take first place.

"Victory!" I burst out, my arms in the air.

Skip is beaming back at me.

I'm having so much fun. I never want this day to end.

And we win every race.

After we dock, I'm still floating. Sailing makes me feel like anything is possible.

The Hunts walk past us, dragging their boat shoes along the pier like they can't even be bothered to pick up their feet, and I hear the younger one cough and say, "Turd."

He's rude, I think. But I don't say anything. I don't have to. I won.

When I step onto shore, the happy crowd erupts with applause and cheers. "Congratulations!" someone shouts.

A blonde woman in big pearls the size of gumballs and a

blue Barbour jacket walks over to shake my hand. “How did you learn to hike like that, Weatherby?”

“A lot of practice,” I say.

“We couldn’t believe you didn’t take one break,” she says in awe. “All the other crews, even the adults, kept stopping to adjust, but not you. It was incredible to watch you sail. You’re going places.”

“Thank you,” I say, heart leaping. I don’t mean to sound surprised. I know I’m good. But Skip is always calling me *Star*, and I guess I just thought he was building my confidence so I’d sail my best. Now I realize his compliments might mean more.

There’s a flutter of hope in my stomach as we say goodbye and I walk over to help Skip de-rig the boat. I can’t stop grinning as I take down the crisp new sails that I asked Mom to order for today.

We only have one bag, so as I start to put the sails away I line them up with our old, brownish ones, running my finger across the stamp, an inky mark that means they’ve been measured and approved for official use in a regatta. Then I look at the new sail, gripping tight, fear hitting me hard, and I grimace as I realize there’s no stamp.

My throat goes dry. I was so excited to start rigging

the boat. I couldn't wait to get out on the water. I didn't bother checking to make sure the sails were legal, and I should have. But the stamp is a technicality. If the sails are the right size, we didn't really cheat.

I start to roll the sails, and right away I can see they aren't the same.

Every muscle in my body clenches. From a distance, no one else would be able to tell. But up close, the ones we used today are slightly bigger. Big enough to give us an advantage. Big enough to help us win. Big enough to get us disqualified.

My heart is pounding in my ears. "Skip," I whisper and point. "The sails are too big." My words barely make it out.

He follows my gaze, and immediately his face falls.

My stomach plummets.

When his glassy eyes meet mine, I know exactly what he's thinking. The same thing I keep thinking—*we cheated*.

I can see how much he wishes he could go back and fix this for us—for me. "They're barely bigger." His voice is low. "It doesn't change that we won. It doesn't change how well you sailed."

"I know we didn't mean to cheat, but we did," I say softly.

"You made an honest mistake that happens all the time

in sailing,” Skip says. “It’s as simple as that. There’s nothing more to read into it.”

I bite my lip. I want to listen to him, but my family motto is already in my head: *Walkers don’t lie*. “I have to report what I did.”

“Star, even though you’re the one turning yourself in, the judges still might not believe you used illegal sails by accident.”

I swallow hard. Skip’s right. I know what those people think about kids like me, any kid who doesn’t run in their rich people circles. They look at us like we don’t belong. But I know they’re wrong, and I don’t want to win based on a lie. It’s not a win. I push myself across the dock to tell the truth, and Skip doesn’t try to stop me.

Then, out of nowhere, a tall man in a big straw boater hat with a green-and-white ribbon is standing in my path. “Miss Walker,” he says.

My heart jumps into my throat when I notice his blazer is embroidered with the hunter-green Boston School crest—a shield with a lion wearing a crown.

I’ve wanted to be a student at the Boston School ever since Dad’s journal was sent to me a few months ago, just after Skip and I signed up to sail in this regatta and our

names were listed in the paper. Everything about my dad is mysterious like that. I never met him. Peter Graff. He moved to Switzerland before I was born, and then he died. Mom doesn't like to talk about Dad, and I know she'd be freaked out that his journal was delivered with no return address and a note that said: *Weatherby, this is your dad's journal*. I still don't know who sent it. I called UPS, FedEx, USPS, even DHL, but no one could find a record. I feel a prick of guilt the way I always do when I think about how I didn't tell Mom—but it's too late to go back now.

Mom did tell me that Dad went to Boston. But Skip didn't know him. They were too many grades apart. And it's obvious from Dad's journal entries that he wasn't snobby like the Hunts. He loved his school. The tight-knit community. The sailing team. The magical trip to Hart Isle. Boston even has an environmental science program now, and I want to be a climate scientist one day to help save the ocean, aka my favorite thing in the world. Too bad Mom and I don't have money for private school. I'll just have to wait until high school to really study my passion.

“Impressive win.” The tall man's ice-blue eyes meet mine, and instantly I recognize his face. I think I've seen him on the Boston School website.

I hesitate. “Thank you,” I say, feeling itchy.

“You’re a very talented crew. The crowd was excited to watch you sail. We haven’t seen anyone like you in a long time. Are your parents here? I’d like to talk to them and to you about an opportunity,” he says. “I’m Dr. Fairview.”

The second I hear his name, I know who he is. “You’re the head of school,” I blurt out.

“That’s right.” Dr. Fairview grins. “Then you’ve heard of us, the Boston School?”

“Of course,” I say. “Everyone has.”

He nods. “Well, I have an anonymous donor who’s passionate about sailing and interested in funding a scholarship for someone exactly like you. That is, if you’d be interested.”

For a second, I can’t breathe.

This isn’t happening. This can’t be real. “A full scholarship?” I ask, straining to find air.

“Yes,” he says. “We’re looking for a student in excellent academic standing with the one caveat that they would have to join our sailing team.”

I bite down inside my mouth to stop myself from screaming, *Yes! Pick me! I have As in every subject, except gym, and everyone knows gym doesn’t count.* This is my chance to join a real sailing team and study environmental science and

share something with Dad. And being a student at Boston is the only way to get to Hart Isle—the private island that Dad visited—and I want to be part of that too.

“Don’t worry that much about grades.” Dr. Fairview’s voice softens. “The fact that your boat came in first place in every single race today is the reason we want you. You’re a winner. That’s clear to everyone here.”

My throat tightens. Dr. Fairview is offering me a scholarship because I won this regatta. Except I didn’t win. I need to tell the truth. I should turn myself in. But I didn’t mean to cheat. It really was an accident. The races are over. No one is going to find out our sails were too big now. I keep thinking about what Skip said, how if I get us disqualified, the judges probably won’t believe I made an honest mistake. I’ll just be proving them right that I don’t belong at this regatta or at a school like Boston, but I want to and now I’m being given the chance.

All I have to do is lie, and I can go to the Boston School.