

# Chapter 1

AMERICAN ROBIN  
every summer, baby birds fly from the nest



A box had arrived in the mail for Mia.

Not just any old box, but a box from one of Mia's best friends, Caitlin, whom she'd met at summer camp a few months ago.

Mia's hands shook with excitement as she opened the box. Inside she found a large baggie of homemade cookies, a letter, and something small wrapped in tissue paper. Her heartbeat quickened. She slowly peeled back the tissue, wondering if it might be the one thing she was really hoping for.

When she saw the charm bracelet, Mia let out a little squeal. Caitlin had chosen her to wear it next! She pulled the bracelet out of the paper completely and whispered, "Awesome," as she fingered the cute flower charm Caitlin had picked out. The bracelet no longer looked sad and lonely,

the way it had the last time she saw it at camp. *Like a dog without a bone*, Hannah had said.

The thought made Mia smile.

She fastened it on her wrist and just like every other time one of the Cabin 7 girls had put on the bracelet, a camp memory came to mind.

In Mia's memory, the four girls, Mia, Caitlin, Libby, and Hannah, had just gotten back from a trail ride. It was the first time Mia had ever been on a horse, and she'd enjoyed it up until the point where her horse, Jet, had stepped on a wasps' nest in the ground and gotten stung. All Mia had known at that point was that Jet flew off the trail and through the woods, giving his name new meaning. Mia had held on tightly, but when she had to duck to avoid a low branch, she lost her balance and fell to the ground with a loud *thud*.

She was okay, thankfully. But the barn wasn't exactly close by, so she'd had to get back on the horse and continue to ride the trail. Mia's three friends had been so kind and caring once they'd finally reached the end of the ride.

"Are you terribly sore?" Libby had asked her with her sweet British accent. "Shall we carry you to the cabin?"

Hannah, her southern friend, had given Libby a funny look. "Carry her? What is she, a sack of potatoes?"

Caitlin had stepped in and said, “Here, Mia. Put your arm around my shoulder and lean on me. Hannah, you’re closest to Mia’s size, get on the other side of her and do the same.”

Mia had started to resist but changed her mind. They’d really wanted to help her, and so she had let them. Once they were back at the cabin, her friends had insisted she rest on her bunk until dinnertime. The next day, the soreness really hit. Fortunately, the camp nurse gave her ibuprofen, and it had helped with the pain over the next couple of days.

Now, Mia sighed. It was so nice to have a strong memory of camp, even if it wasn’t her most favorite one because of the silly fall. She missed Camp Brookridge. More than anything, she missed her friends. Especially right now, when all of her friends at home were busy doing things Mia couldn’t do. She looked down at the walking cast she wore and stuck her tongue out at the stupid thing. No soccer. No surfing. No nothing, it seemed like. How ridiculous that she’d fallen off a horse and managed to not break anything and yet, when she fell off a simple step stool at the café a couple of weeks ago, she’d landed funny and fractured a bone in her foot.

As she nibbled on a cookie that tasted like cinnamon, she

read Caitlin's letter. She smiled, reading about how Caitlin had wanted to send a fruit pizza — which the girls had fallen in love with at camp — to cheer Mia up. It would have been too messy though, so she'd sent cookies instead. Caitlin wrote about making new friends and being in the school play with them.

It was good to hear that Caitlin seemed happy after a rough start at her new school. When Mia got to the part in the letter about the bracelet, she forced herself to read it slowly.

I hope you enjoy wearing the bracelet and the flower charm. Pretty flowers are like my Cabin 7 BFFs — they brighten up my life so much.

I know you're dying to know if the bracelet is lucky. I think you'll have to find out for yourself. I can say this: I feel super lucky to have so many great friends, and you are one of them.

Be happy! Remember, sometimes awesome shows up when you least expect it. I know it's your favorite word, so I hope you get a whole bunch of awesome real soon!

Love,  
Caitlin

So Mia would get no clue at all as to whether the bracelet was really lucky. Oh well. She actually felt better than she had in weeks, simply by wearing it, so that was something.

She stuffed the cookies back in the box, grabbed her camera, and went out to the kitchen. Her mom sat at the kitchen table with a bunch of paperwork in front of her and looking a little frazzled, her long black hair piled high on her head in a messy bun.

“Look, *Mamá*. Caitlin, one of my camp friends, sent me cookies. Do you want one?”

“How nice,” her mother replied. “*Sí*. I’d love to try one.”

Mia put a few cookies on a plate, poured some milk for the two of them, and sat down across from her mom who was studying a piece of paper in front of her.

“You don’t look very happy,” Mia said as she picked up her glass of milk. “Everything okay?”

Her mother nibbled on a cookie. “Mmm. *Delicioso*.” She looked at Mia. “Paying bills is not very fun. Times like these, I really miss your father. It’s much easier to have someone to share the responsibilities with.”

Mia nodded, although she couldn’t really understand what it was like for her mom. Not really. It had been just the

two of them for as long as she could remember. Her father, who had been a marine, went to Afghanistan shortly after Mia was born. He never came home. She was only four years old when she had attended his funeral.

“I thought the café was doing well,” Mia said, taking another cookie.

“Fairly well,” her mom said. “The cost of supplies has gone up though. And the tourist season will start to wind down now. It’s always a bit harder in the winter.” Her mother shook her head. “*Todo está bien*. I shouldn’t talk about this with you, Mia. I don’t want you to worry.”

“No, it’s all right,” Mia said. “I don’t mind. And I want you to know I’m going to find a way to help pay for camp again next summer. I don’t know how yet, exactly, but hopefully something will come up.”

“We need another set of twins born in the neighborhood,” her mother teased.

Last spring, Mia had helped their neighbor, Mrs. McNair, every afternoon after school. Mrs. McNair had given birth to twins and already had two older children to care for. Mia went over and played with the older children or helped with laundry or whatever else Mrs. McNair needed until her husband, a professor at a nearby university, got home from work.

“A mother’s helper” was what Mrs. McNair had called the position. She’d paid her well, and Mia had used all of her money to pay for more than half of the camp fees.

She worked for her mother at the café sometimes too, usually on the weekends, but that money was put into a savings account for college.

“I’ll figure it out,” Mia said, her insides twisting into a knot as she thought about it. What if she didn’t come up with a way to make some money? What if she had to stay home next summer, while the rest of her cabin friends returned without her?

Her mother interrupted her anxious thoughts by reaching out and touching the bracelet on Mia’s wrist.

“*Muy bonito*. Did your friend send that along as well?”

Mia nodded. “I know, it’s beautiful, isn’t it? The four of us bought it in a fun little shop during our field trip at camp. We’re taking turns wearing it.”

Her mother stood up. “That is sweet. Good friends are a treasure. We must always remember that. Now, I’m going to make us some dinner.” She pointed to the camera. “Are you going to the beach?”

“Just for a little while, if that’s okay.”

Her mother nodded. “You’ve been off your foot for most

of the day, so I suppose a little walk is fine. Take it easy though. And please be back in thirty minutes.”

Mia kissed her mother on the cheek and then hobbled to the front door, her camera in hand. Maybe she couldn't get in the ocean, but at least she could still look at it.