

Chapter One

I'm trapped.

I concentrate on the monitor in front of me and scan through the in-flight entertainment, attempting to tune out Jenna. Like that's even possible. When my dad's bubbly fiancée gets this excited, I swear sometimes only dogs can hear her.

We've been on this plane for over six hours. I woke up less than an hour ago, cramped, cranky, and carb-deprived, and yet the woman insists on being perky. It's as if she were born with caffeine in her veins.

"Cat, do you know what this means?!?"

I quirk an eyebrow at Dad, but judging by his all-consuming interest in the newspaper, his stance of neutrality is in full effect. To tell you the truth, it's not his impartiality that hurts. It's knowing that by staying out of it, what he's really doing is taking her side.

And moving further away from mine.

I settle for a crappy rerun and decide to throw the evil step-witch-in-training a bone. I lean forward and look across the aisle, catching a glimpse of her flying fingers on her BlackBerry—thank goodness they have in-flight Wi-Fi, or she might've actually wanted to bond.

"No, tell me, Jenna. What does it mean?"

"It means your party is practically a shoo-in for the show!"

My party. Right. As if anything about this is for me. If Jenna really cared about me, you'd think she'd have clued in to the fact that anything involving crowds, paparazzi, and scrutiny isn't exactly my thing. She refuses to grasp that while I might be a daughter of Hollywood, it doesn't mean I'm a product of it. If anything, this party is for *her*.

Jenna's too excited by her coup to notice my lack of reaction. She leans over Dad and gushes, "The buzz on this is absolutely unreal. Your party is going to be the biggest, flashiest event I've ever put together!"

Yay, me.

I turn back to the television and pick up my headphones.

Unfortunately, that does nothing to deter her. "You can even sketch caricatures of the guests as they come in the door if you want." She flashes a brilliant smile, like she's doing me a huge favor. "Adds a fun, kitschy element to the whole thing, don't ya think?"

No, I don't think. I'm an artist, not a street performer.

She kisses Dad on the cheek, then rubs her thumb over the coral lipstick stain, and I watch him turn to mush. He's so whipped. "Order me a Diet Coke if the cart thingy comes by, 'kay?" Jenna says. "I'm off to brave the bathroom line!"

I shake my head as she haltingly maneuvers down the aisle and stumbles into a woman's lap. Jenna turns on her hundred-watt grin, tosses her poufy blond hair, and apologizes profusely. Then she plops herself on the woman's armrest, abandoning all thought of bathroom trips in lieu of getting better acquainted with her new bestie.

Whatever. At least her ADD works for me, I think as I slide into her vacated seat, lay my head against Dad's shoulder, and inhale the familiar scent of his spicy aftershave and Armani cologne. He wraps an arm around me, and I snuggle closer. It's quiet moments like this when I can imagine things are back to normal. Before he fell in love with someone completely wrong for him.

Dad kisses the top of my head. "Thank you."

I lift my head slightly, not willing to move out of his embrace just yet, and shoot him a puzzled look. “For?”

“For letting Jenna throw you a Sweet Sixteen. You may not believe it, but she has the best of intentions.”

Sure she does. I glance forward to see her slap the armrest and let out a high-pitched squeal. The only intention Jenna has is having her event-planning business showcased on MTV. Date someone famous, get his daughter on television, and generate mad buzz for your business—not bad for nine months of work.

I glance back at Dad. Why can’t he see how fake she is? It’s like ever since she came into the picture, he’s had blinders on, only seeing this giggly blond happy person—who is *nothing* like me. If he loves her so much, how can he possibly still love me?

“Jenna had one when she turned sixteen,” he continues. “She said it was, and I quote, ‘the highlight of her adolescent experience.’”

He rolls his eyes and grins, and the pressure in my chest lessens. He hasn’t changed. We’re still us, even with her around. Then his forehead wrinkles and he shifts uncomfortably, and that guilty look creeps back into his eyes.

Crap. Here it comes.

“Peanut, I know you’re always trying to take care of me, but I’m the grown-up. And it’s my job to look out for you. I want you to have at least *one* normal childhood experience.”

I snort. “Normal. Right.” With a teasing grin, I lean back a little and lift my eyebrows in disbelief. “Dad, I hate to break it to you, but we live in Beverly Hills. And while having your birthday party and private life broadcast around the world for entertainment purposes may be an

unfortunate reality for media-obsessed brats, I don't think anyone would call that behavior normal."

Dad chuckles, and I gift him with a confident smirk. "Besides, when have we *ever* done anything like the rest of Hollywood?"

And the defense rests, I think, sitting back with a nod. Dad can't argue with that logic. If it weren't for our zip code and my fancy, overpriced education, you'd never know we had money. Although he's a well-known film director and has a handful of Golden Globes, Dad has this thing about "normalcy." I've never missed a day of school in my life, and he rarely takes on projects during the summer. That's time for family and vacations, but none of that "private jet to remote locations" stuff for the Crawfords. Nope, we go to good old Disney World and the beach, with the occasional stop at a film set in Canada to spice things up. We don't even have a maid or a cook.

Dad squeezes me tighter. "You're right, we're abnormal. But I still think it's a good idea." My head lolls against my seat, and he smiles. "It's a party; it'll be fun. Plus, I'm already doing a major suck-up job bringing you to Italy. Doesn't that earn me any negotiating cred?"

I have to admit, if everyone has a price, a trip to Florence would be mine. I've been obsessed with my Italian heritage—the only thing I accept from *Mommy Dearest*—and the Renaissance ever since I saw Bernard van Orley's *Madonna and Child with Apples and Pears* painting in fourth grade. Since then, I've inhaled every art book and novel on the time period or on Italy that I can find.

As bribes go, the trip is a good one.

Still, there's no way I can let Dad off the hook that easily. What he's asking of me is huge. Maybe things would be different if I were just a normal girl from the Mississippi

countryside or the Cape Cod beachfront, or if people didn't take one look at me and assume they knew my whole life story. If I could just be me, Cat Crawford, without any expectations or preconceived notions, then maybe I'd be bonding with Jenna over napkin samples and color swatches right now. But that's not reality. So I shrug, affecting the confident, blasé image I've perfected for school and the media, and move back to my own seat.

I immediately reach in front of me for my backpack. Just holding it makes me feel better—more in control of my crazy life. I peruse the contents: my makeup kit and toiletry bag; my wallet, camera, iPod, and funkadelic purple iPhone; my art supplies and color-coded binder filled with tour packages and historical information; and finally, my reading material, including the copy of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* I'm reading for English. I brought it to work on whenever I needed a Jenna break.

By the time this trip is over, I'll be a freaking Victor Hugo expert.

I pull out the book and zip my bag before leaning down to slide it back under the seat. As I sit up, I spot a familiar woman's face out of the corner of my eye and freeze. My hands slick with sweat. My heart pounds, and the roar of the jet engine beneath me intensifies.

It's just a picture, Cat, I tell myself. But it doesn't help.

Splashed across my seatmate's tabloid is a beautiful, smiling face and yet another jilted lover with the headline, CATERINA ANGELI DOES IT AGAIN.

"Another one bites the dust."

The words are out of my mouth before I can stop them. The owner of the tabloid takes a break from her engrossed reading to sneer at me, but then a hint of recognition dawns on her face. She quickly turns to compare the picture of my mother on her cover to the downgraded, non-airbrushed, soon-to-be-sixteen-year-old version next to her.

I want to sink into my seat and look away, pretend I have no clue why she's staring, but I can't. So I force myself to meet her gaze head-on with a confident smile. Casually, I turn back to my book, open it to the dog-eared page, and pretend to read. I feel the woman's eyes on me—watching, waiting for me to do something scandalous—and fight the urge to fluff my coffee-colored hair or gnaw off a nail.

Soon enough she'll stop looking at me, expecting to see my mother. She'll grow bored, go back to her gossipmonger ways, and forget all about me.

They always do.