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THE DOUGHNUT CLUB



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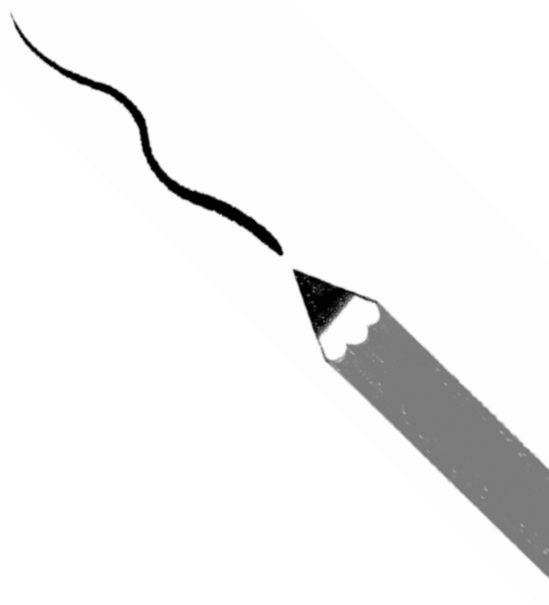
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For my family – thank you for everything
K.R.





CHAPTER ONE

My family are awesome, but I do wonder if they're trying to kill me.

Holidays are meant to be relaxing, aren't they?

Not when you're a member of the Parker family.

I'm either being made to climb up steep things, jump off high things, or swim in sea water so cold I swear the fish would ask for a wetsuit if they could.

As our car goes over a bump, a bodyboard from the boot slams into the back of my head. I take that to mean this summer trip will be no different.

It would be OK if I was more like my sport-loving, albeit accident-prone younger brother, Olly.

He loves action and doing everything at one hundred miles an hour. But I like to take my time and enjoy the things around me, rather than throwing myself *into* them or *at* them! My mums are the same as Olly. Mum is right up there when it comes to finding the most exhausting activity for us to do. Mama's more of a worrier, but if there's any chance of a competition, she's the first to shout "race you" at my brother.

I call Olly my brother because that's what he is. Technically he's my half-brother, but I'd never call him that.

You probably already know that to make a baby, you need a sperm and an egg. Mum and Mama were missing the sperm part, so they needed a donor for that. Sometimes families are missing the egg part, and there are donors for that too. There are special clinics all over the world where donors give some of their eggs or sperm to help people

make their own families.

Our parents went to one of these clinics and once they had chosen a donor they liked, Mama tried to have a baby first (because she's older, which she hates being reminded of). It worked, and she had me. Then, two years later, Mum tried and had Olly.

Olly and I share the same donor, so that makes us half-siblings. Although, I'm still trying to work out what half we have in common. Not just with him – but with my whole family.

I'm the only one with wavy red hair.

I'm the only one with big green eyes.

I'm the only one with a touch of asthma.

And I appear to be the only one who likes things slow and steady instead of fast and furious!

THUD.

"Ouch," I yell, as the bodyboard whacks me in the head again. Olly's done his trick of shoving his board on my side of the car instead of his.

"Mum, any reason for changing lanes like you're on a racetrack?" I ask, as a bag tumbles down next

to me from the crammed boot.

She can't hear me. She's got her headphones in and is busy chatting to every contact in her phone – loudly even though the radio isn't turned up.

Mama's in the front seat pretending to read, but I know her head will drop soon, her straight brown hair closing like curtains around her face as she starts snoring. Sorry, I mean 'heavy breathing'.

Not that I blame her. Mum made us leave the house before the sun came up to *beat the traffic*.

I look across at Olly. His hands have been welded to his games console from the moment the car started. The only thing that will make him peel his fingers away during this four-hour journey to the coast is if he hears the word snack.

I try to make the most of this rare time when my family are forced to sit still by doodling in my sketchbook, but after a while my stomach churns. I slam the book shut and take some deep breaths, trying to shake off memories of the last time I did this. My book ended up covered in what I'd eaten for breakfast instead of works of art.

I make do with spotting cool graffiti out of the window. I get goosebumps whenever I see the same tag or drawing splashed across a motorway bridge. I collect all my sketches in a book – seeing mysterious people leave their art across the country for all to see makes me wonder if I'll ever be that brave.

I tried to share how cool graffiti is with my family on holiday once. There was a walking tour of street art near our hotel. They decided it would be more *fun* to hire scooters instead of walk. I hadn't been on a scooter since I was in Year Three, so instead of enjoying the art, I spent the tour trying not to flip over the handlebars. I failed.

Leaning across the back seat, I try and see how much longer we have on the satnav.

It's only then I realise something. Mum isn't plugged into her phone any more, and Mama is still awake. They're doing that thing parents do when they whisper to each other facing forwards, hoping their voices don't travel to us kids in the back. I angle my ears closer to the front, but all I can hear

are the annoying adverts from the radio.

What are they whispering about?

This is a risk of long car journeys that I'd forgotten. Sometimes grown-ups like to talk about *stuff* because they know we're trapped.

Mum and Mama used this trick when they told us Great-Aunty Farida was sick. I think that was more about hiding Mama's tears though. They'd forgotten I could see her face in the wing mirror.

Mum's hand reaches for the volume dial. I knew it. Here we go.

"Olly, can you pause your game for a sec?" Mum asks, stretching her arm backwards to squeeze Olly's knee. Words aren't enough to distract him from the vampires he's shooting at right now.

"What?" Olly asks. "Are we there already?"

"Not quite," Mum replies. "There's just something we wanted to tell you both before we arrive."

Tell us… Hmm. Does that mean good or bad news?

I can't see any watery eyes in the mirror, so that's

a good sign. But Mama has started tugging at her ear, which usually means she's nervous.

"Do you remember, at the Pink Parents picnic over Easter," Mum asks, "when Tariq's dad told us about a website he'd joined where he could look up families who had used the same donor as them?"

I nod, which isn't the best way to answer a person when you're sitting behind them.

"Quinn? Olly? Anyone?" Mum says.

"Yeah, sorry, I remember," I reply, giving Olly a nudge. His fingers are creeping around his console again.

"Well, we thought we'd try it as well," Mum says, turning towards Mama.

Mama tugs at the seat belt across her chest as if it is too tight, clearing her throat of that tickly cough she gets right before she makes important work calls.

"Yes, well," she starts. "When we looked up your donor, we got a bit of a surprise."

Olly gives me a confused glance before dropping his eyes back towards his screen.

"It seems as though your donor has been … quite popular," Mum continues.

"It looks like you both have some half-siblings out there in the world," Mama adds, nibbling her lip.

"One annoying sister is bad enough." Olly laughs, nudging me with his elbow as he taps the buttons on his console.

How can he just go back to his stupid game? This is BIG news.

Mum and Mama told us about being donor-conceived as soon as we were old enough to understand what a donor was. We've had a whole box of information about our donor to look through, but no one ever mentioned the possibility of having more half-siblings.

How many more?

Should I even call them half-siblings? They're basically strangers.

Maybe we call them donor-siblings? Or does that sound like something out of my Year Seven science book?

Tariq's dad called them something funny when he was telling Mum about it at that picnic … what was it?

Donlings? Doblings?

I know … DIBLINGS!

I blink as I realise my eyes have been locked on the raindrops streaking across my window. They're so fast, it's like I'm watching the stream of thoughts whizzing through my brain.

Could I have a dibling out there that might be more like me?

"What do you mean by 'some'?" I ask.

Mama's mouth opens to speak, but no sound comes out. Instead, she turns to Mum, her eyes widening with every second of silence.

"Well," Mum begins, as her grip around the steering wheel tightens. "So far, it looks like there might be … sixteen!"

My jaw lands in my lap.