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To my friends, old and new

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RADHIKA SANGHANI

THE SUMMER MY WISHES CAME TRUE



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USBORNE



CHAPTER ONE

The First Day of the Summer Holidays – Friday

Ayesha grunted loudly as she strained for the bright yellow suitcase on the top of her wardrobe. It was too high to reach. But Ayesha refused to be defeated. She shoved a pile of freshly washed clothes off her chair, then dragged it over to the wardrobe. Tentatively, she climbed onto the chair as it wobbled beneath her. This time, her fingers easily grasped the suitcase handle. She'd got it! Now she just had to make it back down… Ayesha was in the process of figuring out how to do exactly that when she was interrupted by a burst of laughter from the doorway.

Her older brother stood there, cackling. "*What* are you doing? You look ridiculous."

"Packing for summer camp," she retorted. "Obviously."

"Camp doesn't start for two weeks," said Jay, who was so tall he had to duck down to get through Ayesha's doorway. "You need to chill."

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"And *you* need to help me," said Ayesha, waiting expectantly as her brother walked towards her. But instead of helping her with the suitcase, Jay picked up a packet of crisps from Ayesha's desk. "Hey, put those down, they're for me and Nikki to eat on the way to camp!"

"The snack cupboard's empty," said Jay, walking away with the crisps. "So I'm going to need these."

"Give those back!" cried Ayesha as her brother left the room. She tried to jump down after him, but she moved too quickly and the chair crashed to the ground, taking Ayesha and the giant yellow suitcase with it.

"Owwww," groaned Ayesha, her voice muffled by the – thankfully empty – suitcase lying on top of her. Yet again, her giant fifteen-year-old brother had ruined everything. She contemplated running after him, but as star of the school basketball team, Jay would love nothing more than outrunning her. Ayesha wasn't a big fan of running, but she *was* a fan of packing. Especially when it was for summer camp.

This was her very first time going to camp, but Ayesha knew she'd be a natural. She'd been planning for it ever since Jay had come back from Camp Willow two summers ago with a burned tongue from bonfire-roasted marshmallows and endless stories about dive-bombing into the lake, winning the basketball tournament and stealing kitchen supplies to play pranks on his room-mates. All with zero parental supervision (the camp leaders didn't count).

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Ayesha had been forced to wait two whole years till her parents deemed her old enough to go. But now that she was finally thirteen and Year Eight was over, she was *so* ready. Unlike Jay, she already knew to blow on hot marshmallows before eating them, and there was no way she'd waste her time at camp doing boring things like playing basketball. She'd be busy swimming in the sunshine, dancing all night at the camp welcome party, watching the legendary camp musical, and stealing kitchen supplies to actually *eat*. Summer camp was going to be the highlight of Ayesha Gupta's entire existence to date, and she knew that for a fact. Because she was going with her best friend in the whole world: Nikki Meyers.

Ayesha and Nikki's friendship had begun before they were even born. They'd both heard the story so many times that they could recite it off by heart. Ayesha's mum and Nikki's mum both went into labour on the same June day and gave birth next to each other in the same ward. The only difference was that Nikki's mum had to wait a few hours before her daughter slid out, while Ayesha's mum had to wait a solid twenty-four. She still went pale whenever she spoke about it.

From that moment on, Nikki and Ayesha spent all their time together. They were so close that they were practically sisters with their birthdays only one day apart. It didn't even matter that they looked different – Ayesha was brown-skinned with wavy light-brown hair and matching eyes, while Nikki was pale with straight dark-blond hair and blue eyes – because

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they always went shopping together to make sure their outfits coordinated. And most importantly, they both always wore their gold friendship bracelets with charms that made a heart when you put them together, saying *BEST FRIENDS 4EVER*. They'd bought them from the expensive jewellery shop in town after saving up five whole months' worth of pocket money. That was how much their friendship meant to them.

They'd always been there for each other, through life events big and small. When Nikki's parents had divorced in Year Six, Ayesha had been the one she'd sobbed on. And last year, when Nikki's dad met Seville – an American woman with scarily white teeth and an overly friendly accent that distracted everyone from just how unfriendly she really was – Ayesha had spent hours listening to Nikki rant about her new stepmum. It had been Ayesha who'd come up with the perfect nickname for Seville: Ze Villain.

Ayesha supported Nikki in absolutely everything. She watched musicals with her at every sleepover because it was Nikki's dream to star in one, and she listened to her describe all her West End auditions in detail, even though she'd never won a part. Her dream of being in a musical was one of the reasons Nikki was going to Camp Willow – it had an amazing musical theatre programme that she was desperate to join.

In turn, Nikki was always there for Ayesha. She'd buy Ayesha manga for her birthdays even though she hated comics, she'd keep her company whenever her parents forced her to watch Jay's boring basketball games, and she always did Ayesha's hair

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and nails before a party. When Ayesha's pet rabbit, Jolene, died, completely shattering her heart, Nikki was there every step of the way. She organized the whole funeral, created a photo collage of Jolene's best moments and came up with the idea to implement an all-white dress code for the funeral in honour of Jolene's snow-white fur.

Nikki was Ayesha's best friend in the whole world and Ayesha had no idea what she'd ever do without her.

"Ayesha? Are you…inside your suitcase?!"

Ayesha stuck a hand out from beneath the suitcase, waving. "Help," she called out to her best friend, her voice muffled.

Nikki ran over, her friendship bracelet jingling as she lifted the suitcase up to reveal a very dishevelled Ayesha.

"Jay," explained Ayesha, summing up everything with one word.

Nikki sighed in understanding as she slid down next to Ayesha. "It's so annoying he has to be at camp too. Hopefully we'll hardly see him."

"Definitely – he'll be busy with basketball."

"And we'll be busy with the musical!" said Nikki, her eyes shining.

Ayesha bit her lip. This was the one thing she was worried about. Nikki would obviously be super involved in the musical – that was her dream, after all – but Ayesha wasn't musical. At all. She couldn't sing, dance or act, and had no desire to. Performing was not her thing. But it was Nikki's. And Ayesha

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was nervous that if Nikki did the musical and she didn't, they'd end up spending so long apart that she'd hardly see her best friend. She couldn't think of anything worse!

Then she remembered the Camp Willow brochure, with its long list of activities, not just the musical, and she relaxed.

"We'll also be busy swimming in the lake," she reminded Nikki. "And going to bonfires, and the dance, and doing art, and playing rounders." Her face lit up as it did every single time she thought of what life would be like at Camp Willow. "Oh, I can't *wait*!"

Nikki beamed. "They're going to be the best two weeks ever. I just hate that first I have to spend two weeks without you with Ze Villain."

"It's so unfair," agreed Ayesha. "But at least your dad will be there too. And you'll get to see New York. I'm so jealous – you can walk down the streets with the skyscrapers, pretending you're in a movie."

"And go shopping and watch Broadway shows!" added Nikki. "I know it will be fun. I just wish you were coming with me."

"Me too." Ayesha sighed. "I'll be stuck here. Who will I get frappés with? And secretly binge movies we're not meant to watch?"

"You could hang out with other people from school," suggested Nikki. "Like Katie and Meera?"

Ayesha shrugged non-committally. Katie and Meera were nice but they were more Nikki's friends than hers. As much as

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Ayesha liked them, she'd never be brave enough to hang out with them alone. Nikki was the confident one – Ayesha was shy. She needed Nikki to bring out her confident side. And the truth was that she'd never really felt the need to make other friends when she had Nikki. What was the point? They did everything together, and it wasn't like she'd ever find a better friend than Nikki.

"Maybe," she said eventually. "But we'll still speak every day, right? I want to know *everything* about New York."

"Obviously!" Nikki jumped to her feet. "But right now, we need to plan what we're taking to camp."

Ayesha instantly turned to the piles of clothes in her wardrobe. "Okay, so I've had some thoughts. We could bring the new T-shirts we got in the sale, some shorts, our jeans, obviously. *And* we need nice dresses for the welcome dance."

"You should wear your lilac one – that really suits you – and I'll wear my pastel blue. Lilac and blue go really well together," said Nikki authoritatively.

"I was thinking the exact same," cried Ayesha happily. "We're so in sync!"

She and Nikki smiled at their reflections in the mirror. They were wearing matching strappy tops in different shades of blue, with their friendship bracelets dangling on their right wrists. Ayesha knew she was going to really miss Nikki while she was away, but having two whole weeks together at Camp Willow more than made up for it. She couldn't wait to go to summer camp with her best friend ever.

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