

zoey dean's  
**Talent**

# CHAPTER one

mac

◀ Tuesday September 1 ▶

- 10:45 AM Outfit selection for premiere party (prelim. round)
- 11 AM GPS to M Café
- 12 PM Outfit selection for premiere party (semifinals)
- 12:30 PM Last-min. tanning, SPF 30
- 1:30 PM Model outfits with new glow (final round)
- 4 PM Confirm Becks's ETA
- 6 PM Check Coco's flight stats
- 9 PM Premiere! Inner Circle reunion at Teddy's! BNE (BEST NIGHT EVER!)

**M**ackenzie Little-Armstrong held her iPhone high above her golden-blond head, pouted, and snapped a self-portrait. She needed to cross-check her outfit. Mirrors could lie. So could camera phones, actually. But they didn't lie at the same time.

Mackenzie, known to family, friends, and much of L.A.'s A-list as Mac, looked down at her camera phone and sighed at the evidence.

*Purr-fection.*

She was wearing a white sundress that she'd just had flown in from her favorite store in Paris, Stella Forest, with caramel-colored sandals that revealed her pale pink pedicure. She'd shimmered her eyelids with a white M•A•C (of course!) powder that made her turquoise eyes just a tad brighter, and polished off her look with super-black mascara. She looked

effortlessly cute, which of course took the most effort of all.

Mac admired her image at arm's length, her signature wooden bangles sliding down her tan arms, when her phone rang. It was Becks's 310 cell number, which meant *The Evangelina*—the jet MTV superstar Clutch Becks had named after his only daughter—had touched down in California. Mac yanked the phone to her ear, all seven wooden bracelets clunking to her elbow.

"Becks, you're back!" Mac squealed. Becks spent every summer surfing in Oahu with her dad, and it had been eighty-three days since Mac had last seen her. "Don't ever leave me again," Mac added melodramatically. "I caaaaan't wait to see you."

"I know!" Becks shouted so loud Mac had to hold the phone an inch from her diamond-studded ear. "T minus five hours. I see we have plans for tonight." She laughed. Mac and her two best friends had synched their iPhones so that they could always keep track of one another. Or, more precisely, so Mac could keep track of her friends and let them know where to be and when. Tonight, Mac had invited Becks and their other BFF, Cordelia Kingsley, better known as Coco, to a red-carpet premiere party for Davey Woodward's newest movie, *Sea Devils*.

Davey was The Next Big Thing, and Mac's mother, Adrienne Little-Armstrong, was his agent.

"But I have *nothing* to wear," Becks fake-whined.

"Well, Becks, on a scale of one to ten, how tan are you?" Mac asked, picking up her copy of French *Vogue* for inspiration. Becks had strawberry-gold hair and golden skin, and every summer she returned to SoCal just a tad more golden. Mac had to factor this into her BFF's outfit selection. It was a science, really.

"If I was a four in June," Becks said thoughtfully, "now I'm a six."

"Perfect." Mac closed the magazine with a quick flick of the wrist. "Wear your Marni sundress with those Jimmy Choo ballet flats I told you to buy at South Coast Plaza." Mac smiled in satisfaction. She needed to be needed the way other girls needed oxygen. Or, in the case of Beverly Hills girls, the newest Chloé bag.

"Done!" Becks said gratefully.

Mac eased into her pale green Louis XIV sofa chair and sipped her frothy soy latte, courtesy of Berta, the Armstrongs' housekeeper. She flipped through a stack of postcards she'd received that week: Bali. St. Moritz. Ile de Ré. Toyko. Maui. As she dropped the pile into her blue fleur-de-lis Pierre Deux letter

box, her eyes landed on her advance copy of *People* magazine. She got every celebrity weekly before they were released to the general public—being the daughter of Hollywood royalty had its perks.

“Have you heard from Coco?”

“Her plane lands any minute now,” Mac said. Coco had texted Mac from the runway in London to say she’d be approximately seventeen minutes late touching down. Mac loved that, despite a summer apart, she was still the information hub. Information—as everyone in Hollywood knew—was power. She licked her finger and began flipping the glossy pages of *People*. There were post-pregnancy pictures of Nicole. Brad and the latest baby in Venice. Ashlee and Jessica at the beach.

And then Mac saw *it*.

“Code red!” Mac said, almost dropping her iPhone. She spilled some latte on her dress from shock. “Guess who’s on page forty-three of next week’s *People*?” Mac didn’t wait for a response. “My entire family. The article is called *Hollywood’s Uber-Family*.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

There were so many things wrong with *that*, Mac didn’t know where to begin. “I’m not even *in* the family photo!” The photo showed her parents,

Lanyard and Adrienne; her older brother, Jenner; and her younger sister, Maude. *Like she didn't even exist.*

But it wasn't just that, Mac realized, scanning the caption. While Jenner was described as "fifteen, a Billabong-sponsored surf star," and Maude was "ten, a certified genius," and her father was "the Academy Award-winning screenwriter," and her mother was "Hollywood's most powerful agent, a partner at Initiative," Mac was just . . . "(not pictured), twelve, an eighth-grader at the Bel-Air Middle School."

Like it was an *accomplishment* to go to middle school.

It was a particularly sensitive topic for Mac because she had tried desperately, secretly, to find a talent. A familiar mental slide show began running through her mind of her many failed attempts at finding something to call her own:

1. GOLF: Bo-ring! Cute outfits, though.
2. SWIMMING: Who knew you could get disqualified for wearing a Marni bikini to a meet?
3. BALLET: Pedicure disaster.
4. TANGO: Jacob Spaghetti-Arms for her partner? No, *gracias*.

5. VOICE: Possibly tone-deaf.
6. DRAMA: Kimmie T's territory. Plus, Mom uses failed actors' headshots as bedding for Maude's Ecuadorian hamster, Jorge.
7. CREATIVE WRITING: The last thing in life Mac wanted was a reason to be all alone.
8. SOCCER: Ball kicked at face = swollen nose = no.

The problem with all of the activities—since apparently Mac had no natural talent for any of them—was that in order to get *good* you first had to be *bad*. And Mac didn't love anything enough to risk looking ridiculous for it.

"Who cares about *People?*" Becks asked, snapping Mac out of her self-pitying reverie. Becks had never understood popularity, because she'd never had to work for hers. She was naturally gorgeous and athletic, and had the body of a Roxy girl. "Hello? You're about to be elected social chair. You'll *officially* rule BAMS—as if you don't already."

Social chair was the most coveted position at BAMS, a.k.a. Bel-Air Middle School, because it basically meant being elected a school-wide VIP. The SC represented the student body to the administration

on all things fun. She (and yes, she was *always* a she) picked performers at school dances (Justin T? Check!) and made recommendations to the school cafeteria (soy lattes? Double-check). One year the SC even chose new gym uniforms (bringing Burberry plaid minis back? Check plus!).

“How can I win social chair if I’m a loser in a national magazine?” Mac already knew the answer to that. Elections took place the first week of the school year, which meant the first days of school were *crew-shal*.

“Yeah, but—”

Mac was too frustrated to listen. She wanted to throw her latte at her Tiffany-blue wall, but she loved her perfectly planned bedroom too much to get coffee stains everywhere. Instead, she carefully set her latte down on her white Saarinen side table. “Becks, sorry to bounce, but I need to get into this with Mama Armstrong. Au revoir.”

“Aloha,” Becks said. “See you tonight!”

Mac didn’t hear the “See you tonight” because she’d already begun storming downstairs to the study, where her mother was working from home, despite the fact that it was a bright summer afternoon. Mac knew better than to interrupt when her mother was on the phone, but this was an emergency.

“Talk to me,” Adrienne barked.

“My life is ruined!” Mac cried.

“I’m a talent agent, not a magician!” Adrienne picked up a snow globe from Paris and looked as if she might be about to fling it at the ecru walls, then thought better of it and put it down. The glitter inside sparkled around the Eiffel Tower. Mac realized her mother wasn’t speaking to her.

Adrienne was “rolling calls,” which meant that one of her three assistants had to get A-listers on the phone and transfer them to Adrienne, who did not do normal things, like dial phone numbers.

“I don’t have an all-American girl who can act like an all-American boy. And yes, I agree that Anastasia could handle this, but unfortunately I rep every worthwhile Hollywood darling *but* her.”

Mac stood in front of her mother’s Lucite desk so she could not be ignored. She shifted impatiently on the off-white Berber rug and examined the ends of her blond hair, which stretched all the way down to her back.

“What do you want me to say?” Adrienne said into the headset. “If the studio is serious, they’ll go to every mall in Middle America and say *Deal with It* is the role of a lifetime opposite Davey Woodward.

Otherwise, it's not gonna happen, Elliot." She sighed. "So deal with *that*."

Adrienne hung up the phone and swiveled in her Aeron chair to face her daughter. Adrienne had a tiny, heart-shaped face with a pointy chin and pointy cheekbones, and a reddish-blond bob that curled under. If you didn't know better, you might describe her as sweet-looking. "Mackenzie, promise me you will never become an agent."

Mac sighed. Sometimes she thought it was funny when her mother was melodramatic. Other times, like now, it was not.

"Mom, I need to talk to you about *this*," Mac said, waving the copy of *People* magazine in the air. "Don't you know people at *People*?" Adrienne could do anything with one phone call.

"Mac, not now." Adrienne adjusted her hands-free headset and threw a script into a recycling bin. Mac couldn't believe her mother was acting so nonchalant about something that was going to destroy her. "No one will know how cute I got this summer since I'm not even *in* this article!" she said, careful not to whine, since her mother had a zero-tolerance policy for whining.

This summer, her braces had come off, leaving perfect white teeth. Her blond hair had grown to the middle of her back, plus she was dressing way better,

thanks to several meetings with Xochi (pronounced ZO-hee) Dawn, L.A.'s top stylist to the starlets.

"I'm an über-loser in this über-article!" To make her point, Mac tossed the magazine on top of her mom's discarded script in the recycling bin.

Adrienne finally looked at her daughter. She took off her Tina Fey glasses, a sign that her limited patience was about to expire. "Mac. You were at camp, and *People* had a deadline."

It was true. Mac had been at camp all summer. It was called New Adventures, and she'd chosen it specifically for its rotating schedule. Once a week campers were "immersed" in different "unique" activities: glassblowing. Tae kwon do. Parasailing. Mac had hoped something would click, but by the end of each one-week cycle, she was beyond ready to try the next thing. A lot of good camp had done her. But that was so not the point. "Do you understand what this will do to my reputation?" Mac pleaded. "School starts next week, and everyone is going to smile to my face and make fun of me behind my back."

"In Hollywood? Never!" Adrienne pretended to gasp. She put her hands on her cheeks. And then, as if noticing Mac for the first time, Adrienne blinked, then rubbed her temples. "Sweetheart, we live in a dishonest world, which is why we have to

be honest with each other.” She paused dramatically. “And to be perfectly honest, that skirt is too short. I can’t let you leave the house dressed like that.”

Mac rolled her eyes and exhaled so that wisps of feathery blond hair blew around her face. “Mom! It’s the perfect end-of-summer style *and* fabric.” She waved her arms over her white dress for emphasis. “And I *have* to look great tonight to do damage control!”

Adrienne put on her glasses and looked right at Mac, which meant that what she was about to say was nonnegotiable: “Go change.”

Mac turned on her caramel-colored kitten heel and sauntered out without another word. Fine, she’d change. And her next outfit would be even better. Her reputation depended on it.