

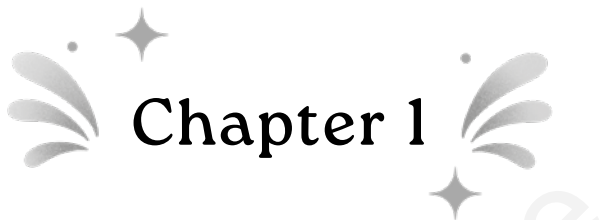
**RADHIKA SANGHANI**

**THE  
GIRL  
WHO  
COULDN'T  
LIE**



USBORNE





# Chapter 1

Priya Shah jolted awake. She was having a terrible day. But that wasn't really a surprise because lately, all her days were slightly terrible. They had been ever since *that* day. The 13th of August. Almost a year ago. The most terrible of all the days. She felt a lump rising in her throat at the thought, but she forced it down with a heavy swallow. Now was not the time to think about the worst day of her life. She had enough problems happening this very second.

"Excuse me. Earth to Priya!" Mrs Lufthausen glared at Priya over the tops of her gold-rimmed spectacles. "For the last time, please can you explain to me why you thought that double maths was an appropriate time for a morning nap?"

Priya gulped. She felt a soft, cool hand slip into her right hand. Mei. Her best friend was telling her she had her back. She smiled.

“Do you think this is FUNNY?” demanded Mrs Lufthausen. “This is the *third* time that you have been caught napping in my lessons this term!”

“*Of course* she doesn’t think it’s funny!” cried a voice to her left. “She has a weird thing where her apologetic face looks like her happy face. It’s, like, genetic. Right, Priya?” Sami. Her other best friend. Standing up for Priya like she always did. “And she wasn’t *asleep*! She was thinking, obviously. Everyone knows you do the best thinking with your eyes closed. It’s the only way to solve a quadratic equation, in my humble opinion.”

“Samantha Levin, does it look like I was speaking to you?” thundered Mrs Lufthausen. “Get back to your equations. And Priya, it is completely unacceptable for you to keep falling asleep while I try to teach you basic mathematics. If you don’t explain yourself now, I’m going to have to ask you to leave and wait outside.”

Priya’s cheeks burned with humiliation. She was a good student. She didn’t get sent out of lessons! That was the kind of thing that happened to Katie and Angela. Not top students like her. But now she was going to get sent out for the first time in her entire school history and there was nothing she could do to stop it. It wasn’t like she could tell Mrs Lufthausen the truth – that she was exhausted because, unlike her younger sister Pinkie, she was physically unable to fall asleep while her parents were shouting, and that when she finally

*did* get to sleep after they'd stopped arguing, it was time to wake up for gymnastics practice. Of course she was tired – she'd slept less than a gamer who stayed up all night playing people in Korea.

But Priya knew exactly what would happen if she said all that out loud. Mrs Lufthausen would tell the school counsellor, who would tell her parents, and Priya would end up in big trouble. Because her parents' golden rule was *Don't Air Your Dirty Laundry in Public*, which basically translated to: *pretend everything is perfect at all times*. And if Priya admitted that her gymnastics practice was affecting her schoolwork, her teachers would want her to quit – especially because gymnastics was totally separate to school. Her parents would feel shamed into making Priya quit the team, which meant her chances at getting into the Teen Olympics would be over for ever, even though she'd been training for it her whole life. And worst of all, it would mean she'd never get to watch Dan Zhang do pull-ups ever again.

Priya looked up at Mrs Lufthausen and took a deep breath. "I'm so sorry, Mrs Lufthausen. I guess I stayed up too late watching videos of dancing baby goats. It's my fault."

The teacher shook her head. "I'm disappointed in you, Priya. Please go outside for the rest of the lesson. And next time you want to watch a goat dance, try to think about the consequences."

Priya got up and left the classroom. She stood outside

feeling a burning mix of shame and anger. It wasn't her fault any of this had happened. She hadn't *meant* to fall asleep. She knew Mrs Lufthausen took it personally, but if anything, it was a big compliment that it was only in *her* lessons that Priya fell asleep. It was just so warm and cosy in that classroom, with the sun streaming in from outside, Mei and Sami sitting on either side of her, and Mrs Lufthausen's monotonous voice explaining the wonderfully stable predictability of algebraic equations. It was a complete contrast to Priya's morning – her parents arguing as per always, Pinkie making everyone late, and Priya panicking because she couldn't find her brand new trainers. It turned out Pinkie had decided to “decorate” them with a permanent black marker and when Priya had shouted at her, their mum had rushed in to console *Pinkie*, not Priya. If that wasn't bad enough, she'd then told Priya off for “upsetting her younger sister”. The unfairness of it all had left Priya speechless, and by the time she'd found her voice again, nobody had time to listen to her. They were late to drop her off for gymnastics. Which meant that when she arrived, her coach Olaf had told her off for her poor punctuality in front of everyone. In front of Dan Zhang.

Priya thought that would be the most humiliating moment of her day – until she was kicked out of maths. How was Dan ever going to realize he was the love of her life when the only time he saw her she was being told off like a schoolgirl? Okay, she *was* technically a schoolgirl – and he was also a schoolboy,

at the boys' school next door to hers – but that wasn't the *point*. Dan was in Year Nine – a whole year above Priya – and everyone knew boys liked sophisticated girls. Priya was going to have to try extra hard to prove her maturity if he was ever going to fall for her. She looked forlornly down at her bright purple and white New Balances, which were now decorated with wobbly smiley faces. This was not a good start.

Priya's stomach lurched as she inspected the invitation that Sami had just given her. It was thick, purple and sparkly. On the front, big capital letters proclaimed: *YOU'RE INVITED TO SAMI'S BAT MITZVAH!!!!* But on the back, it said something so awful that Priya wanted to cry. She read the three words one more time – *Saturday 30th June* – and swallowed. Hard.

“Don't you just LOVE it?” cried Sami. “It's going to be the party of the year.”

Mei raised an eyebrow. “Katie's parents hired out an actual nightclub for her party last month. And everyone got free iPhones. I think *that* might have been the party of the year.”

“Uh, yes, but we're actually invited to this one,” pointed out Sami.

“That's true,” agreed Mei, glancing down at her phone that was definitely not a free iPhone. “It's going to be amazing. Right, Priya?”

Sami waved her hand in front of Priya's face. "Helloooo, Priya? Why are you still staring at the invitation?"

Priya looked up with a wide fake grin plastered on her face. "Because it's only the coolest invitation I've ever seen! And I happened to see one of Katie's invitations up close when it fell out of her bag."

"Why, thank you," said Sami proudly. "I designed it myself."

"But is your bat mitzvah *definitely* happening on the 30th of June?" asked Priya. "As in, that Saturday? For sure?"

Sami's green eyes narrowed. She scrunched up her nose suspiciously and tucked her bright red hair behind her ears. "Priya Shah. You had *better* not be telling me that you cannot come to my bat mitzvah, aka the biggest day of a Jewish girl's life. The day I go from girlhood to womanhood."

"I thought you reached womanhood when you got your period last year?" said Priya, desperately trying to distract Sami from her original line of questioning.

"That is not the point," declared Sami. "The point is that you're my best friend in the entire world – I mean, you AND Mei are my best friends in the entire world."

Mei rolled her eyes beneath her black fringe. "It's cool. I'll be the afterthought."

"And," continued Sami, undeterred, "not only did you miss my starring role as Katniss Everdeen in Heartland Secondary School for Girls' performance of *The Hunger Games: The*



*Musical*, but you missed Mei's *major* AquaSplash birthday takeover."

Priya's face fell. "I still can't believe I didn't get to swim down the space bowl. It's meant to be a twelve-metre drop."

"Fourteen," amended Sami, starting to count out all the things Priya had missed on her fingers. "On top of that you've also missed countless play rehearsals I've asked you to come to for moral support, basically *every* birthday party anyone in Year Eight has ever had, and ninety-eight per cent of our sleepovers."

"You know I want to come to everything," said Priya. "It's just—"

"Gymnastics," chorused Mei and Sami. "We know."

"Olaf thinks I could be the only person from our club to make the new Teen Olympics team," said Priya. "Which is major! If I get onto it, it's basically guaranteed that I'll be in the real Olympics when I'm older! I just have to make sure I keep up with all the training sessions and go to all the competitions. I hate that they're always on weekends – you know I do. It would be so much better if they happened on Tuesdays and I could miss double maths."

Sami cocked her head to the side, conceding Priya's point. "Fine. But all I'm saying is, you owe it to me. To come to my bat mitzvah. It's super important. You absolutely have to be there. No excuses. At all."

"I think she's trying to say she hopes you can make it," said Mei.