

ALLY CARTER

NOT
IF
I
SAVE
YOU
FIRST

SCHOLASTIC INC.

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CHAPTER 1

SIX YEARS AGO

Dear Maddie,

*There's a party at my house tomorrow night. Mom said
I can invite a friend if I want to.*

So do you want to come?

YES

NO

MAYBE

—Logan

Madeleine Rose Manchester had absolutely no intention of invading the White House. But she knew seven different ways she could do it if she'd wanted to.

After all, Logan had lived there less than a year, and already he and Maddie had found four tunnels, two pseudo-secret

passageways, and a cabinet near the kitchen that smelled faintly of cheese and only partially blocked an old service elevator that really wasn't as boarded up as everybody thought.

"Charlie?" Maddie asked the big man in the passenger seat of the dark SUV. He turned to look at where she sat, her seat belt snugly around her, even though everyone knew silk wrinkled and Maddie had never had a silk dress before.

She'd already complained about it, but Charlie had told her that it was either wear a seat belt or walk, and her black leather shoes were new and they'd already started to pinch her feet, and Logan had told her there might be dancing later.

Maddie dearly, dearly hoped there would be dancing . . .

"Whatcha need, Mad?" Charlie asked while Walter kept driving.

"Did you know there's a place under the stairs in the East Wing that's full of spiders that died during the Nixon administration? Do you think that's true? I don't think that's true," she said without really waiting for Charlie to answer.

"I could ask Dad," Maddie went on. "But he didn't work here then. At least I don't *think* he worked here then. I mean, I know he's old. Like, really, really old. But is he that old?"

Charlie laughed, but Maddie wasn't exactly sure what was so funny. "I'm not sure, Mad, but you should say it exactly like that when you ask him."

This sounded like a very good idea to Maddie. "Thank you, Charlie. I'll do that." She thought for a moment, then went on.

“Did you know it’s possible to crawl all the way from Logan’s dad’s office to the press room using the air ducts?”

“No.” Charlie shook his head. “It’s not.”

“Sure it is,” Maddie told him. “Logan bet me five dollars that I couldn’t do it, so I did it, and then he gave me five ones instead of one five because Lincoln is his favorite.”

“You can reach the Oval Office via the air ducts?” Charlie asked, spinning to look at her.

“Yes. But I ruined my favorite pink leggings.”

“Then you should *definitely* tell your dad that.”

“He doesn’t care about my leggings,” Maddie said, and Charlie shook his head.

“Not about that. About . . . Never mind, Mad. I’ll tell him.”

When they finally reached a pair of tall iron gates Maddie couldn’t help but swing her legs and nervously kick at the back of Charlie’s seat, but Charlie just rolled down his window and told the man with the clipboard, “We have a VIP guest for Rascal.”

The guard looked in the back seat and smiled when he saw Maddie. Through the tinted windows she could see other guards circling the vehicle. Dogs sniffed around the bumpers, but the guard kept his gaze trained on her.

“Looks like a high-risk entrant to me, boys. I don’t know if we should let her in.”

“Hey, Felix,” Maddie said, leaning forward. “Did you know you can fit two kids and three kittens in the little compartment

underneath Logan's dad's desk? If the kittens are tame, that is. I wouldn't want to try it with mean kittens."

"Neither would I," Felix said, just as one of the men outside announced, "You're clear!"

Then Felix stepped back and waved them through the gates. "Have fun at the party!"

Logan never had fun at parties. In his experience, they very rarely meant pizza and bounce houses and ice cream. Not anymore. Sure, there was usually cake. But they were always fancy cakes that were tiny, and Logan's mom usually gave him *The Look* if he ate more than four. And ever since the time he asked the prime minister of Canada if she was going to eat *her* cake he hadn't been allowed to sit at the table with his parents.

Which, in Logan's opinion, was just as well.

"Is Maddie here yet?" he asked his mother.

"I don't know. Is she under the bed?" Logan's mom grinned and glanced through the bathroom door at the giant canopy bed upon which Logan lay.

"No. We don't fit."

"I am not going to ask how you know that," his mother said, then went back to fixing her makeup.

When the phone rang, she reached for it, and Logan heard her talking.

"Yes? Excellent. Send her up."

"Is Maddie—"

“She’s on her way up,” his mother told him, and Logan bounded off the bed, ran out into the hallway, then flew down the big stairs of the residence.

The farther he got from his mother, the more chaotic everything became. There were people with huge bunches of flowers, and staffers running up and down the stairs in high heels.

But all Logan really saw was Maddie.

“Mad Dog!” Logan screamed from the top of the stairs, racing to join her on the landing below. “You look . . .”

“Is my dress too wrinkled?” Maddie blurted as if the answer really, really mattered.

He shook his head. “It’s . . . No. I don’t think so. It’s . . .”

But Logan trailed off as he followed Maddie’s gaze through the bulletproof glass. The chaos of the building all but disappeared as, outside, a helicopter landed on the lawn. A group of men and women were running toward the house, crouching low beneath the helicopter’s spinning blades.

Only the last two men off the chopper walked upright, laughing and talking as they strolled toward the doors.

Maddie turned to Logan. “Dad’s home.”

Maddie couldn’t be sure if she was talking about Logan’s father or her own. The statement was true in either case. But there was no denying that, as the two dads came into the house, the place went a little more—and a little less—crazy.

There was an energy that always surrounded Logan’s father.

Some people stopped. Some people stared. But there was another group of people who seemed to constantly swirl and swarm around him, like a hive of bees caught inside a series of very tiny tornadoes, spinning in his orbit while everyone else hurried to get out of the way.

Everyone except Logan's mom. She didn't spin or rush or stare as she walked toward her husband, her red dress flowing behind her as she moved down the stairs.

"You're late," she said.

"Mr. President," one of his assistants cut in. "The speaker is waiting for you."

"He can wait until the president has kissed his wife and hugged his son and . . . changed into something decent," the first lady told the woman. And with that, the tiny tornadoes moved on to another part of the White House.

"Hello, darling," Logan's dad told the first lady as he leaned down to kiss her. When he pulled away she made a face and said, "You smell." Then she shifted her gaze onto Maddie. "What are we going to do with them, Mad?"

Maddie could only shake her head. "Boys always smell," she said truthfully.

"You get used to it, sweetheart," Logan's mom told her.

But Logan's dad didn't seem to mind. He just reached for his son and said, "Hey, kiddo." Then he turned to Maddie. "Kiddette."

Maddie dropped into a curtsy. "It's a pleasure to see you again, Logan's dad."

“And you, Manchester’s daughter.” The president bowed at the waist. “You are a far lovelier sight than your father, I can assure you.”

“Thank you. My dress wasn’t wrinkled when I put it on, you should know. The wrinkles are entirely Charlie’s fault.”

“I’ll have a word with Charlie,” the president said as Maddie’s dad tried to pull her into a hug.

“Come here, Mad.”

She pulled away and looked at the first lady. “You’re right. They do stink.”

“This is what I get for keeping the president safe?” Maddie’s father asked.

“From treasonous deer? It’s hard work, I’m sure.” The first lady turned to her husband. “Now do I need to remind the pair of you that the Russian prime minister and his entire entourage, your entire cabinet, and all seven viewers of C-SPAN are expecting our very first state dinner to commence in forty-five minutes?”

Logan’s dad cut a look at Maddie’s. “Save me from her, Manchester.”

But Maddie’s father just shook his head. “Sorry, Mr. President. This time you’re on your own.”

It wasn’t until the first lady dragged the president upstairs that Maddie felt Logan stir beside her. He’d been perfectly quiet—perfectly still—as if content to be a mere fly on the wall in the president’s presence.

Then her father asked, “How you doing, Rascal?” and Logan’s eyes got bigger.

“Did my dad really kill a deer?”

“No.” Maddie’s father crouched against the windowsill, bringing himself down closer to Logan’s level. “Your father and a senator from Kentucky and I sat in a tree in the woods for seven hours, hoping to kill a deer.”

“And you didn’t see one?” Logan asked.

“No.” Maddie’s dad shook his head slowly. “We saw one.”

Logan’s eyes were wide. “And my dad didn’t shoot it?”

“No.” Maddie’s dad sounded like he was carefully considering the answer. “Your dad was more interested in getting a vote out of the senator from Kentucky.”

Logan still looked confused. “You had a gun. Why didn’t you shoot it?”

Maddie’s father seemed to think this was an excellent question. He leaned a little lower. “Because when I shoot, it isn’t for fun.”

“It’s because you have to,” Logan said.

Maddie’s father nodded. “And what’s more important than shooting, Rascal?”

Logan only had to think about the answer for a moment. “Making sure you don’t have to?”

Maddie’s dad tousled Logan’s hair. “Good job.”

When Maddie’s father tried to pull her into another hug, Maddie pushed away even though her dress was already wrinkled. “You really do smell, Dad.”