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# CHAPTER ONE

Alonee Lennox and Sami Archer were walking toward their sociology classroom when they noticed a large cluster of girls at the door.

“Look at that,” Sami noted. “Looks like they’re givin’ somethin’ away. I hope it’s chocolate chip cookies or maybe cinnamon buns. I ate breakfast this morning but I’m still hungry.”

When they reached the door, the girls saw a large, colorful flyer decorated with medieval jesters and streamers.

*The Medieval Fair is coming. All junior girls are eligible to be Princess of the Fair. Be sure to vote for the girl you feel best exemplifies the qualities of our namesake—Harriet Tubman.*

Alonee recalled, “Oh yeah, I heard about that. It’s going to be on a Saturday with food booths and crafts.”

“Gonna turn out to be a beauty contest,” Sami complained. “All the pretty chicks gonna be clawin’ and scratchin’ to win. See, Lawson’s is giving a bunch of clothes to the winner. Local TV gonna cover the thing. Some cute chick gonna be wantin’ to prance and preen for the cameras.”

Ms. Gayle Amsterdam, a bubbly twenty-four-year old, was the sociology teacher. Ms. Amsterdam was overflowing with enthusiasm for her subject and her students. Just out of college, she often seemed more like one of the kids than a teacher. Before starting class this morning, she beamed out at the students. Then she announced, “I think it’s so exciting that we’re choosing a junior girl to preside over our fair. She will be a lovely girl, because *all* our girls are lovely. She’ll also be a girl who is friendly and filled with school spirit. She must be a girl everybody would like to know!”

Ryann Kern raised her hand. She was not beautiful but she was pleasant looking. She was from a small town in Alabama. Her only close friend so far at Tubman was Leticia Hicks, from the same Alabama town. “Ms. Amsterdam, do you have to fill out an application to be considered for Princess of the Fair?” she asked.

Marko Lane leaned over to his girlfriend, Jasmine Benson. He whispered, “Like that chick would ever make it!”

“No, no, Ryann,” Ms. Amsterdam replied. “That’s the beauty of this contest. Every junior girl is automatically a candidate. There are no entry forms. We don’t want any campaigning. We want it pure and honest. We want all the juniors—boys and girls—to pick that special girl. She has to be someone who has touched their heart and who will be the perfect Princess of the Fair.”

Marko Lane looked over at Jasmine. “You’re it, babe. You’re the prettiest chick on campus,” he told her.

Jasmine smiled back at Marko. She was beautiful and she knew it. Few junior girls came even close to her in that department. And already the wheels were turning in Jasmine's mind. This could be a stepping stone to something better, a really important beauty pageant.

Ms. Amsterdam bubbled on, her pretty, round face wreathed in smiles. Only a few short years ago, she was a high school girl herself, a spirited cheerleader. She had not changed much. She delighted in the social activities at Tubman High. She was reliving her own joyful high school days. The Princess of the Fair contest was her idea. She was its chairperson.

"It'll be a lovely, colorful fair with food and crafts and music," Ms. Amsterdam was saying. "Some worthwhile charities will have booths. There'll be local musicians, dancers, and even a few clowns, for the children."

When Ms. Amsterdam finally got around to her sociology lecture, nobody was paying any attention. Everybody was speculating

on who would become the Princess of the Fair. Alonee thought the idea was lame. The fair sounded like fun, but the princess contest would lead to hard feelings, she thought.

After class, Alonee walked to the vending machine with Oliver Randall.

“Well, I know who I’m voting for,” Oliver told her, as he picked a bright red apple from the machine.

“It’s a silly idea,” Alonee commented. She pulled out an orange and started peeling it. “Ms. Amsterdam said the girl who wins needs to have good qualities like Harriet Tubman had. But you know what’ll happen, don’t you? It’s going to be all about beauty. Like those stupid Miss Whatever contests on TV. The girls all parade around in skimpy bathing suits and pretty gowns. Every one of them is stunning. Then they say drippy things about how much they care about animals or homeless people. As if that makes any difference in who wins. A girl could win

the Nobel Peace Prize. But if she wasn't gorgeous, she'd never be Miss America, or Miss Universe, or Miss Anything."

"Yeah, you're right," Oliver agreed. "But I still think you'd make a cute princess."

Alonee gave Oliver a playful shove. "Like I'd win," she laughed. "It's going to go to some girl who is absolutely beautiful, in a striking way. Like Sereeta." Sereeta Prince was now dating Jaris Spain, the boy Alonee had secretly loved for a long while. At one time, Alonee had had a fantasy that she and Jaris would eventually get together. But now she was falling in love with Oliver. She didn't think of Jaris anymore in that way.

Sereeta had honey-colored skin and masses of black curls. She had large, expressive eyes and sweeping lashes. Alonee liked Sereeta. They had been friends since childhood. Sereeta was a good person too. Alonee thought Sereeta had what it takes to be Princess of the Fair as well as anybody.

As Alonee and Oliver were leaving the vending machine, Marko and Jasmine came along.

“Dude,” Marko called, “this chick here on my arm, she’s the Princess of the Fair. Right here. Jasmine is eye candy. Y’hear what I’m saying? Is this a doll or what?”

Oliver smiled. “Jasmine’s a pretty girl, yeah,” he agreed. “But like Ms. Amsterdam said, all the junior girls are lovely. The princess has to have a heart of gold too, right?” Oliver had not been at Tubman High for long. But he already knew Jasmine’s reputation as a mean girl.

“Jasmine, she’s got that too,” Marko declared. “There’s nothin’ she wouldn’t do for me. This is one generous babe.” Marko put his arm around Jasmine’s shoulders. “Am I right, baby? Don’t you take good care of your guy?”

Jasmine didn’t smile. She spoke out loud but to herself. “The princess has to be somebody who’s a do-gooder for other people, not just her boyfriend.” Jasmine



didn't get involved in any charity projects. She didn't collect food for Thanksgiving baskets or put together packages for the needy or for the troops serving overseas. Now she was worried that this might hurt her chances of becoming the Princess of the Fair.

"Alonee," Jasmine asked, "you know that group you belong to? The one where you take these foster kids around to the movies and camping and stuff? That thing Pastor Bromley put together. Maybe I could get into that. You still need teenagers to mentor with the little losers you buddy up with?"

Alonee looked at Oliver who covered his mouth with his hand to hide his smile. Then Alonee replied, "We don't call them 'little losers,' Jasmine. They're kids from foster homes. They ended up under the care of the county through no fault of their own. Their parents made mistakes, not the kids."

"Whatever," Jasmine grumped impatiently. "You got any openings that I could still get in on?"

“Not right now, Jasmine,” Alonee responded. “All the children in the program have assigned teen mentors. We needed mentors back when Destini Fletcher signed on. Remember you made fun of the project, Jasmine? You said camping in the dusty old woods with a bunch of juvenile delinquents was stupid. You asked Destini if she was wiggled out or something to be doing that.”

Jasmine frowned, an angry look on her face. “She tell you that?” Jasmine snarled, “She’s a dirty little backbiter talking about me like that. She ain’t never gonna be Princess of the Fair. She’s plain as an old whitewashed fence.” Jasmine stalked away with Marko in tow.

Alonee heard Jasmine saying to Marko as they left, “I gotta find something to do that makes me look good, Marko. What did Amsterdam say? Girl has to be friendly and filled with school spirit? She’s gotta be like old Harriet Tubman in doing good stuff for others. You hear what I’m sayin’, Marko? It’s not enough that I’m beautiful.”