

FOR EVER HOT

**G**rovehill  
GIANTS

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## CHAPTER ONE

# Cool Move

Oh my gosh, Skylar, isn't this great?" my red-headed stepsister, Madison, said to me as we rode in the car. We were stuffed in like sardines because it held everything we owned. "We're going to a new house. We'll be going to a new school. This is awesome!" the annoying child screeched. "Aren't you excited?"

Hotter than a red chili pepper and with much attitude, I huffed and said, "Oh yes, I'm overjoyed. I'm going into the eleventh grade, and I have to leave all of my friends to go to some new, stupid school where I don't even know anybody. I'm fired up that I had to quit my team—a team that's on track to win state in cheerleading. For sure, I'm

super excited to have a new mom and little sister.”

“You don’t have to be sarcastic with Maddie,” my even more annoying stepmother turned around and said to me.

Madison was just seven, and I knew that she didn’t truly get that though I was saying kind things, I didn’t mean them at all, so I kept a smirk on my face. What was a girl supposed to do? My world two years ago was perfect. It was just me, my mom, and my dad. We lived a great life. Not many worries and everybody knew us because my dad was the evening news anchorman in Birmingham, Alabama, and my mom was involved in so many different charities. Her life was about making a difference. Which is why I’m probably so angry that as much as she gave, cancer still came and took her away from me—so dramatically too. It was like one day she found out everything wasn’t okay, and six months later she was gone.

The worst part about it was that I didn’t even have my dad there to grieve with me. Yeah, physically he was around, but mentally? It was like he was already on to something else. Then

this Maggie lady sitting in front of me now, trying to tell me what to do, came to my house to help pack up my mom's things. I saw the way my dad smiled at her. I knew then that something had been going on long before my mom's body hit the ground.

Seething with that anger, I boldly uttered back, "Are you telling me what to say now, Maggie? Because my dad might be your puppet, but I can clearly think for myself. If you don't want me talking to your daughter, then tell your daughter not to talk to me."

"Mommy, don't tell her not to talk to me," Madison said in the pitiful voice of a child about to lose her toys.

Maggie threw her hands up in the air and slapped them down on her legs, letting out an I-am-miserable sigh so my dad would feel sorry for her and jump all over me, but I was ready for him. He was ruining my life. I'd already lost everything, so it didn't matter if he knew I hated his guts too. I could see him looking at me in the rearview mirror. My eyes were red—I was blazing mad!—but a tear fell unintentionally. I didn't want him to see me so upset. I didn't

want him to know he was getting the best of me, but he saw and said nothing. That hurt me most.

Maggie tried to fight back tears. She turned to her daughter, and said, “Why don’t you go ahead and take a nap? We’ll be in Atlanta soon. You’ll get to see your new room. Your bike is already there. I’ll even let you play dress-up. Okay, sweetie?”

“I don’t want to go to sleep. I want to talk to Skylar.”

My dad had been given a fantastic opportunity to be an anchorman in an even bigger market, and while things were going great in his world, mine was being ruined. With every mile we drove away from Birmingham, Alabama, I felt like the life was being squeezed out of me.

Grovehill High—what kind of school was that going to be? I knew if my mom were here, she would tell me to make the most out of all this, but what was good about my dad having another wife? Me living another life? A sixteen-year-old girl having to deal with all this strife? Nothing!

I hated being mean to Madison. That wasn’t who I was, but because life had been cruel to

me, I changed. My dad was driving, and he was happy. I loved him, but I didn't want him to be happy with someone else. I hadn't even seen him cry over my mom being gone.

Regardless of what I wanted, my dad had made his decision. He'd taken the job. He'd taken his new wife. And he was taking me out of my comfort zone. Now I needed to relax and figure out how I wanted to deal with all of this. It wasn't a long drive from Birmingham to Atlanta, but we still had an hour to go. Little Maddie had drifted off, with her head dangling in a weird position. Instinctively, I placed my hand under it and gently tilted it back so she could sleep comfortably.

"Skylar, that is so nice of you. Thank you," her mom said without me even realizing she had been watching.

"Don't read anything into it," I said with force.

I knew Maggie was trying to be friends with me. The problem was I didn't want her friendship. She had a lot going for her: a beautiful blonde-headed lady with grace, style, and class. She was the weather lady at my dad's former

station. I knew that's how they met. Maybe inwardly I blamed myself for always telling him when he came home how beautiful I thought the weather lady, Maggie Walton, was. Maybe he looked into what I was saying. Maybe he told her what I said and she was flattered, and their relationship went from there. I couldn't explain it, and I didn't want to comprehend it, but they had connected. Now I was stuck with her. In a way, I certainly regretted it when I pointed out her beauty.

"Don't be upset, Maggie, it'll be okay," I heard my dad say to comfort her.

Sick of them, I taunted, "Yeah, poor, poor Maggie. Let's give her all the sympathy. She's been through so much. 'Cause, you know, losing your mom and suddenly having to move and leave your friends you've known all your life and give up your sport—just like that—deserves no sympathy."

"You know what, Skylar? I've had about enough of your smart mouth," my dad said as he pulled into a gas station parking lot.

"Greg, it's fine. Don't even worry about it. Let's just go. We'll deal with this," Maggie pleaded.

“Don’t you tell my dad how to respond to me. If he’s mad at me, that’s my business. You don’t have anything to do with my relationship with my father. It’s bad enough I gotta watch his relationship with you.” I unbuckled my seat belt, got out, and slammed the door. My dad got out too. “Yes? What? You want to talk to me? What is it?”

He sighed. “You’re moving to a new place. Can’t you change your attitude and get ready for a new start?” he asked as I rolled my eyes. “You’re breaking my heart, Skylar.”

“You already broke mine.”

“Maggie’s a wonderful woman. Why can’t you give her a chance?”

“Look me in the eye right now and tell me that you didn’t have an inappropriate relationship with her while my mom was still alive,” I demanded, finally tired of not saying what I truly believed.

“Huh? What?” he said, clearly caught off guard and with an I’m-busted look on his face.

“I don’t need to repeat what I said, Dad. You want me to change? Then you be honest.”

“It’s a lot for you to understand.”



“Just as I always presumed,” I said, truly upset that he couldn’t admit that what I had said was right. But because he didn’t deny it, he knew he needed to get off my back.

“I’m sorry, Skylar,” he said, unable to look me in the eye.

“Yeah, me too,” I said and got back in the car.

“Today’s the best day ever, Skylar. We get to go to our new schools!”

“Calm down, Madison. This is not the first day of school. We’re just going to register,” I said to the little shrimp who loved following me like my shadow.

“My mom said you need to hurry up and get ready. We’re leaving in thirty minutes.”

“Okay, I’ll see y’all,” I told her, knowing her mom wasn’t taking me anywhere.

“No, you’re coming too.”

“No, my dad’s registering me.”

“No, my mom is. She said we’re going to go to my school, then your school. Then we’re gonna have lunch. Chuck E. Cheese, yay!”

I’d spent the first two days in my new home locked in my room, so I was a little out of the

loop. However, the last thing anyone had told me was that my dad was taking me to my new school to get me all settled in. Why was Maggie doing it? I didn't want her pretending to be my mom in any way, shape, or form. I despised her. Why would I want her help? Steam was shooting out of my ears as if I was a teakettle.

I stormed out of my room past Madison and went into the kitchen. My dad was sitting there eating like a king: pancakes, bacon, and an omelet, with orange juice and coffee to complement.

"What is Madison talking about? Dad, you're taking me to Grovehill, right?"

"No, the station wants me to come in this morning and meet all of the executives and other anchors."

"We can register me tomorrow, then," I said, letting him know I was trying to accommodate his world.

"No, honey. I start today and won't have any time. When I get off, the school will be closed."

"Oh, don't worry about it, Greg. She'll be fine," Maggie voiced in her perky weather-girl tone.

“I told you a couple of days ago that when I’m talking to my dad, I don’t need you to butt in.”

“Skylar!” my dad growled.

“Exactly, Dad. We can’t even coexist. We’re like oil and water. Why are you forcing her to be my mom?”

My dad stood up from the table, stopped eating his breakfast, and said, “You don’t have to like it, but this is the way it’s going to be. Go get ready so you can go with Maggie to register at that school.” He grabbed his briefcase and was gone.

Maggie stood there looking at me. She didn’t have a smug look on her face, but just her staring in my direction heated me to an extra-high boiling point. I was bubbling over.

“Errrrr!” I grunted out.

Before I could get to my room, Madison tugged on my nightgown and asked, “Why don’t you like me? I want you to be my big sister and do my hair and play dolls with me. I want you to protect me. I want you to care.”

“Okay, but I don’t care. Dang, now go!” I screamed before going into my room and slamming the door.