





# CHAPTER 1

Saturdays at the Pepper house were *crazy pants*.

It was the only day of the week when every member of the large Pepper family was home at the same time. They were always up to something, but on Saturdays, the Peppers of San Pimento were up to a *whole lot* of somethings all at the same time.

This Saturday  
was no different:



1. Ricky Pepper (age 12) Jamming on his electric oboe
2. Beta Max Pepper (age 9) Holding auditions
3. Maria Pepper (age 9 plus 2 minutes) Prepping for the debate team
4. Meemaw Pepper (ancient) Pretending she can hear Maria
5. Tee Pepper (Mom) Getting Scoochy ready for a playdate
6. Scoochy (age 2) Not cooperating (as usual)
7. Megs Pepper (age 10) Hosting a soccer tournament for her besties
8. Sal Pepper (Dad) Perfecting his chili recipe
9. Annie Pepper (age 8) Being quiet . . . too quiet



In the upstairs hall, Megs and her pals kicked and headbutted their soccer ball down the long hallway. Just before the ball went crashing through an upstairs window, it pinged around the hallway like a pinball, then knocked the senses out of one of the kids lined up outside of her brother Beta's room.

"YOWCH!" the unfortunate boy yelled.

"Sorry, my bad!" Megs called back.

The boy grumbled and turned back to read the loose-leaf paper taped to Beta's door:





Beta, the budding director, was having actors read a scene from his (currently untitled) horror movie. The actors were supposed to act like a giant monster was eating them, which involved lots of screaming and flailing and yelling things like “Noooo! That was my favorite arm!” and “Aw man, I just bought that shirt yesterday!” But he had to keep asking them to “SPEAK UP!” because of the loud music that was leaking through the ceiling.

Upstairs, the eldest Pepper kid, Ricky, was thrashing away on his electric oboe. That’s right. Electric oboe. (He’d been playing sad songs for over a week now, ever since his girlfriend dumped him on the last day of camp.) Ricky’s songs had titles like “How Can I Canoe without You?” and “You’ve Stomped Out the Campfire in My Heart.” Somehow the electric

oboe made a normally sad song a whole lot sadder.

Meanwhile, their sister Maria Pepper practiced a speech for the debate team on her ancient grandmother Meemaw in the den. Yes, it was the middle of summer, and *yes*, her debate subject, “Pencils vs. Pens (Who’s Really Number Two?),” was still months away, but Maria liked to be extra prepared. The only problem was that Meemaw was nearly deaf and kept shouting “WHAT? WHAT?” every time Maria made a point.

In the kitchen, the kids’ dad, Sal, added spice to a simmering pot of chili. He tasted it. *Needs some paprika . . . or is it peppermint?* he wondered. He was always adding things to his chili. Their father didn’t consider himself so much a chili expert as a chili *inventor*. Sal just

knew that this was the year he would finally win the annual San Pimento Chili Cook-Off.

The smell of chili made Tee Pepper's stomach grumble as she tried to ready the littlest Pepper for a playdate. But toddlers like Scoochy prefer using their pants as a pirate flag to actually wearing them.

There was always a lot going on in the Pepper house.

But this Saturday, there was one exception.

