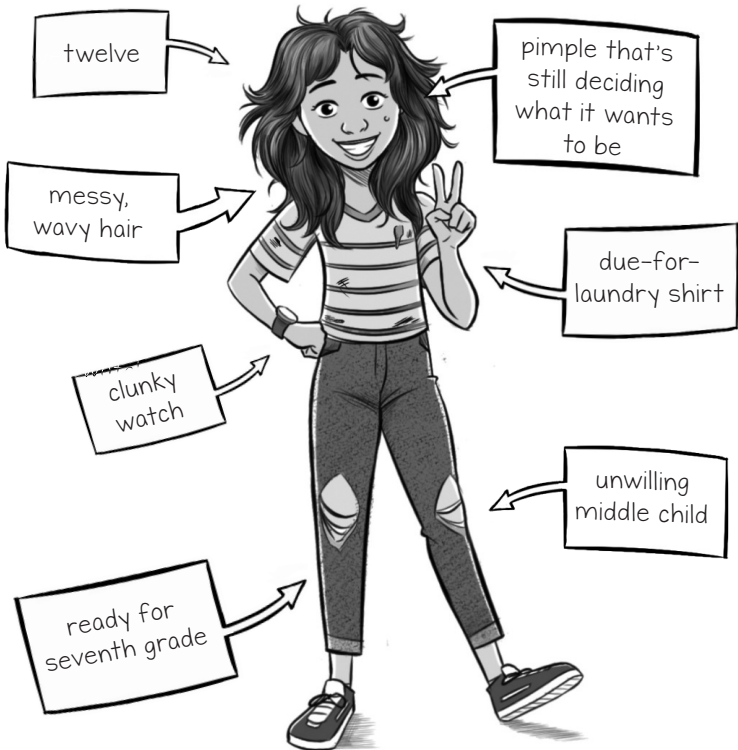




# ★ CHAPTER 1 ★

For the first time in my life, I can't wait to go back to school.



Bring on the first day of seventh grade!

I'm no longer a lowly sixth grader with no social media presence thanks to my strict mother, who makes me wear a clunky watch meant for toddlers. I can only text her on it. It's ridiculous, but my Very Cuban mother got it for me after I started riding my bike to school so she can always track me through GPS.



Even though I'm still stuck with the embarrassing accessory, Mami says I can get an *actual* phone if my report card is good.

And after my awful summer, I plan to make it *spectacular*.

(See? I'm even using vocabulary words now.)

### List of Reasons Why Maggie Diaz had a Terrible Summer:



1. Friends were away and busy at camp!



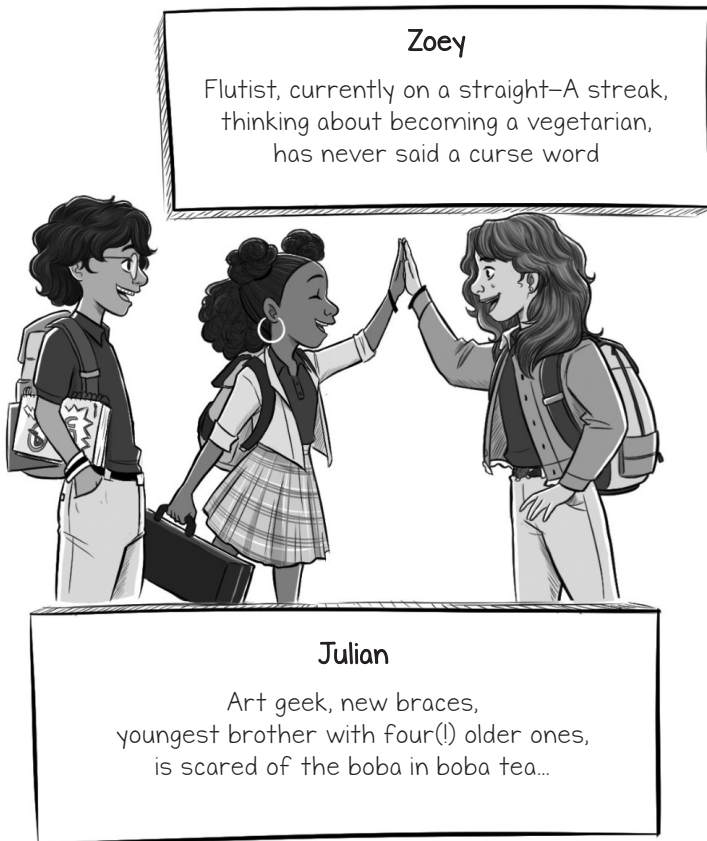
2. Dad had to go out of state for a few months. Ugh, jobs!



3. Abuela moved in and became her ROOMMATE.

Needless to say, I am desperate to get out of my crowded house and hang out with Julian and Zoey again. As soon as I get to school, I park my bike alongside the jumble of others and then race to where my best friends wait before first bell.

“Maggie!” Zoey calls out with a big smile. She has her phone out, playing music.



Julian's smile disappears once I get closer. "You are looking . . . very sweaty today."

It's not even 9:00 a.m. and it's already like a hundred degrees. Welcome to Miami.

"I had to ride my bike very fast or else miss telling you both the big news." I also super missed them. I high-five both of them.

Zoey and Julian are next-door neighbors and have known each other longer, but the three of us became best friends during a group project in fourth grade. It was about ways to help bees and we crushed it.



Zoey's face scrunches up. "Is your big news that you forgot to take a shower?"

I sniff my shirt. I'm good.

“Drumroll, please,” I ask, and Zoey taps rapidly against Julian’s backpack. “I’m getting a phone!”

“Finally!” Julian says, because I’m pretty sure I’m the last person in the history of twelve-year-olds to not have one. Not having a phone means I’m practically invisible. No texts, funny videos, or games. No Maggie to be found anywhere.

“When do you get it?” Zoey asks. She inherited her older—but definitely still functional—phone thanks to her sister, who is *much* cooler than my sister, Caro. Zoey’s mom is Haitian American and can be just as strict as mine over anything to do with the internet or pushing for too much independence too fast. We tread new ground with them carefully.

“As soon as we get our report cards,” I tell them with a big grin.

Their faces fall. I am not known for my grades.

“I’m more mature this year,” I hurry to explain. “We’re seventh graders now.”

We’re no longer the babies of the school. I plan on not



only paying attention, but on raising my hand and participating, taking notes in a readable handwriting, and getting way better grades that will prove to my mom how responsible and capable I am now.

And I'll get all the way out of my older sister's shadow.

This year will be the year people at my school stop referring to me as Carolina's baby sister.

It's going to be awesome.

"Who do y'all have for homeroom?" Julian asks.

Zoey and I grab our printed schedules. "Mrs. Delgado,"



I say.

"I've got Jones,"

Zoey says.

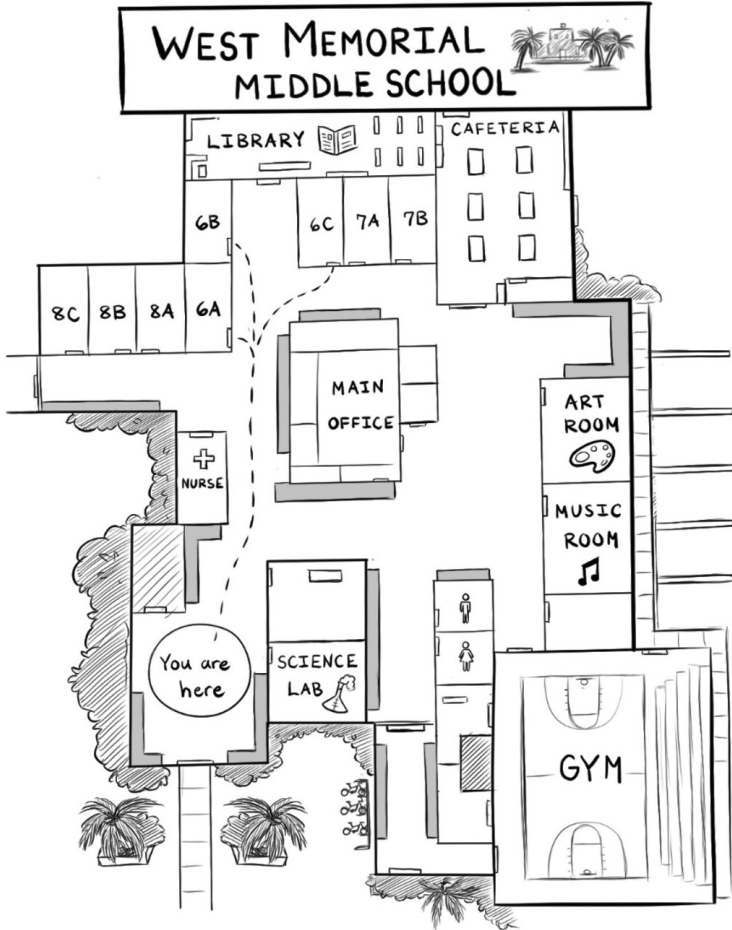
"Hey, me too."

Julian smiles, high-fiving Zoey.

I try to hold on to my smile and new-year positivity despite the disappointment of not getting to be in homeroom with my best friends. But it's fine, because it won't be like summer when they were busy or off at camp. And I'll have a phone soon, so I won't be totally out of the loop anymore. It's probably way better this way, because I'll be so bored that I won't have any choice but to pay attention.

After checking the updated maps that were mailed

along with our schedules, we move with the rest of the crowd toward third hall. Unlike our elementary school, West Memorial Middle is huge.



I'm pretty sure it's even bigger than the nearby high school. For some reason, they are always building new