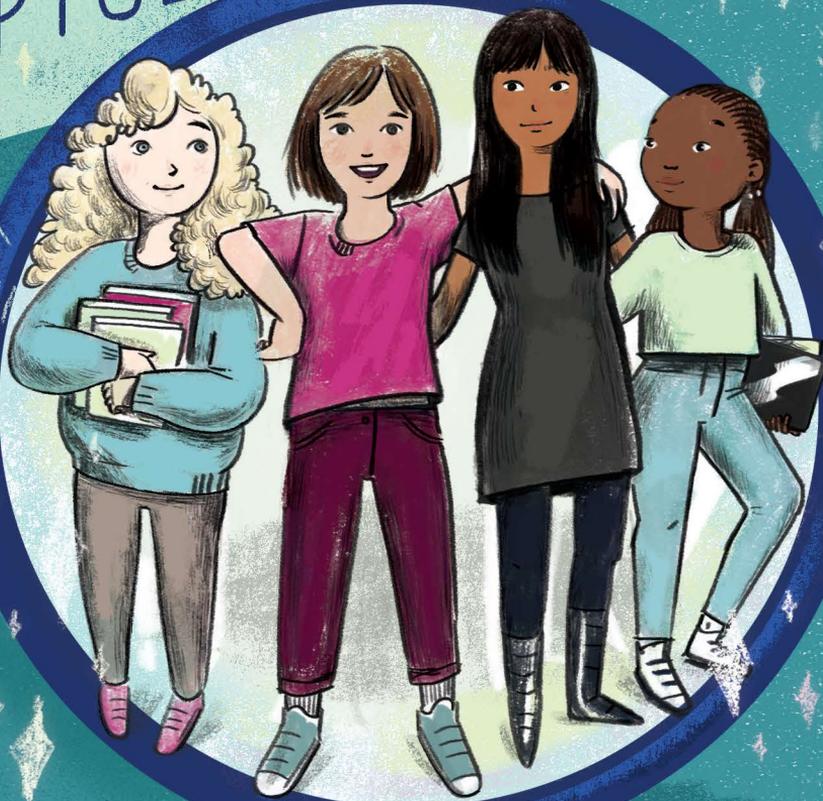


#1
THE SPYGLASS SISTERHOOD



ELLIE MAKES
HER MOVE

Marilyn Kaye



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NEW YORK

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For Alice Clerc, with love, from her Tatie



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WHENEVER I START READING A NEW BOOK, I want to know right away who's telling the story. I want to know who the main character is, and how old they are, and if the story is happening now or a long time ago. Or in the future, if it's some kind of science fiction. So before I begin telling my story, I'm going to introduce myself.

My name is Elizabeth Marks, but everyone calls me Ellie. I'm twelve years old, and the strange tale I'm about to tell you is all happening right now, in the middle of January, in a town called Lakeside.

You should probably know that none of this could have happened to a more average person. I'm all *about* average. Average height, average weight, brown hair, brown eyes. Light skin, a few freckles. Not beautiful, but okay-looking. I usually do pretty well at school, but I'm not a genius. I'm fine at sports, but I'll never be a superstar athlete. I've taken piano lessons and ballet lessons, but I'm not going to be a concert pianist or prima ballerina. I don't have any real talents.

I'm ordinary. Absolutely, positively ordinary. And a few months ago, I was an ordinary, happy seventh grader at Brookdale Middle School on the other side of the state. I'd lived in Brookdale all my life and I had lots of friends. I liked school, and I got along most of the time with my parents and my older sister, Charlotte. When Charlotte went off to college this past September, I got to move into her much-bigger bedroom. All in all, it was a good life.

Then my dad did something that made everyone hate us.

No, he didn't rob a bank or anything like that. He started a massive campaign to raise money to build a homeless shelter in Brookdale. I thought that was a good thing to do, because I knew people were sleeping on the streets in town and that

was really sad. My mom supported the idea too, and so did my sister. But it didn't work out so great for us, because it turned out that a lot of people didn't want a homeless shelter in Brookdale. Maybe they thought people without homes were criminals or something stupid like that, I don't know. Anyway, people started writing nasty letters to the newspaper and leaving nasty notes in our mailbox and making nasty phone calls, and pretty soon, it seemed like nobody liked us anymore.

Except for the one nice rich man who was on board with Dad's idea. He jumped in and decided to donate some land and a gazillion dollars or something to build the shelter. People probably hated him too, but he didn't care. He didn't have to. He was like a hundred years old, he owned an island somewhere, and he was hardly ever in Brookdale anyway.

So Dad got the shelter built, but we suffered for it. Dad lost clients. My mom was voted out as president of the PTA. People gave us looks when we went out, and Charlotte didn't want to come home for Thanksgiving so she wouldn't run into her old high school classmates. My parents were fed up with Brookdale and decided to move.

So here we are now, in Lakeside, which already has a homeless shelter so my father can't get into

any trouble. And it's been okay for everyone else in my family. Dad was bored with his job at a big corporate law firm and had wanted to start his own business anyway. Good for him. My mom, who used to mostly be at home or out doing volunteer work, was seriously thinking about going back to work full-time. Good for her. Charlotte didn't care about the move because she had left home anyway and was having a great time at college.

But in the middle of seventh grade, just after winter break, on top of everything else, I had to start a new school, East Lakeside Middle. Not so good for me. Now, I don't mean to sound like I think I'm more important than the people who needed that shelter, because I'm not. I'm glad it got built. But personally, in my family, I think I was the one who suffered the most from what happened.

There's one last thing I want to tell you about myself. I've always been a pretty down-to-earth kind of person. I've never believed in ghosts, or zombies, or monsters, or anything like that. I like reading books about magic, but I've never thought it happens in real life.

Here in Lakeside, that was all about to change.

But now I'm getting ahead of myself. It's time to start the story.



On my third day at East Lakeside Middle School, I sat alone in the cafeteria at lunchtime, just as I'd done for the past two days. And I wondered if all the middle schools in the whole wide world were exactly alike. Were they all made of yellow brick? Did they all have the same pukey green walls, the same gray metal lockers, the same boring food? Even some of the teachers here reminded me of teachers back at Brookdale. The science teacher, Mr. Clark, was bald and wore wire-rimmed glasses, just like my old science teacher. My English teacher, Ms. Gonzalez, was young and pretty and smiled a lot, just like Ms. Henson, my favorite teacher at Brookdale.

Looking around the cafeteria, I saw that boys and girls sat separately, just like at Brookdale. There wasn't any rule about that, it's just what they chose to do. And I could spot the same kind of cliques we had at Brookdale. There were the sporty kids, who had short hair or wore running headbands and dressed in T-shirts with the names of basketball teams or sneaker company logos on them. The brains, who all had their heads together and looked like they were very important people discussing something serious. And there were the popular girls, who looked just like the popular girls back home. They wore

nice clothes, they had nice hair, and when other kids passed their table, they looked at these girls with admiration and maybe a little jealousy. The girls all seemed very content and sure of themselves.

Back at Brookdale, I was one of them. Yes, I confess: I was a popular girl. Not the *most* popular girl, and certainly not one of the mean ones, but definitely in that clique. Maybe it was just because I looked like them and I'd known them since kindergarten, but I sat at the popular table in the cafeteria and I went to the sleepovers and I generally felt pretty content and sure of myself too.

Then my dad ruined my life. Like I said, people were angry at him, and they passed these feelings on to the whole family. All of a sudden, I started to be excluded—from a birthday party here, a sleepover there, a shopping trip. Friends stopped speaking to me. And one day, there wasn't a seat for me at the cafeteria's popular table.

That hurt. I mean, it really, really hurt. I couldn't believe those girls would act like that. Even Lily, my very best friend. At the beginning, she told me she felt awful about other kids being snotty, and she still came over to my house to do homework together. But then she started making excuses, and she stopped asking me to spend the night like she

used to. Finally, she texted that her parents had said she'd be grounded if she hung out with me. And I had a feeling the others in our group told her to quit talking to me or they'd dump her too.

Thinking about all this now, I had that burning feeling behind my eyes, and I knew tears were forming. So I made myself stop thinking about it by continuing to look around the cafeteria.

I saw people who didn't seem to belong to any clique. Loners. We must have had loners back at Brookdale, but to be honest, I never paid much attention to them.

Now I did. Because I had no intention of seeking out friends here at East Lakeside Middle School, not popular kids or kids in any other clique. I'd seen what friends can do to you. So now, I was officially declaring myself a loner too.

I recognized three other loners from my English class. Along the far wall, I saw the girl with braided black hair and brown skin who sat in front of me and who had spent the entire period playing with a tablet under her desk. A few tables away, there was the pale, round-faced girl with long, curly blond hair who looked at the floor when she came into class, and who walked out when the bell rang without having said a word. And at the table just alongside mine was the goth girl.

I don't know much about the whole goth thing—there wasn't a goth crowd back at Brookdale and I hadn't spotted one here either. To be perfectly honest, the only goth type I'd ever seen was a character in a TV series. The girl at the table next to mine looked like her.

She certainly didn't look like anyone else I'd seen in real life, at least, not in middle school. She had long, straight black hair, black makeup around her eyes, and dark red lipstick. Despite all the makeup, I could see that her complexion was a golden tan color. She was wearing a long black skirt with a black T-shirt. Silver skulls dangled from her earlobes.

I tried to recall her name from roll call—Alice? Alison?

I know, I know, I'd just decided to be a loner myself at this school, but it was very boring sitting there with no one to talk to, and I didn't have anything to read. Maybe I was making decisions too fast. And it's not like I'd sworn to be a loner and signed a legal document or anything.

I'm not trying to make a friend, I told myself. I just want to stop being bored.

I got up, lifted my tray, and went over to the goth girl's table.

"Okay if I sit here?" I asked.

She looked up and stared at me as if I was

speaking a different language. But she didn't say no, so I sat down across from her.

"I'm Ellie. I'm new here."

No "Pleased to meet you" or anything like that. She turned her attention back to her food.

"We're in the same English class," I said.

She stabbed a carrot with her fork and put it in her mouth. I waited till she finished chewing.

"The teacher seems nice."

Was that a shrug?

"You're... Alice?"

"Alyssa."

She spoke! Okay, so maybe direct questions would work.

"Do you know what we're going to be reading next?" I asked.

Another shrug. She picked up her spoon and started eating the pudding.

So I began to eat my pudding in silence too. But I guess I'm just sociable by nature. I couldn't help myself, I had to talk.

"There's something I was wondering about," I said. "This town, it's called Lakeside. But I haven't seen the lake. Where is it?"

She scraped her spoon around the pudding cup and ate the last bit of it. Then she spoke again.

“There’s no lake.”

“Then why is it called Lakeside? That doesn’t make sense.”

She put her spoon down, rose, and picked up her tray. But at least she offered some parting words.

“Nothing here makes sense.” With that, she walked away.

I would remember those words later. But at that moment, all I could do was let out a sigh so loud I could actually hear it. And I went back to my pudding.