

THE
SPYGLASS SISTERHOOD

#2



RACHEL TAKES
THE LEAD

Marilyn Kaye



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chapter one

HELLO. MY NAME IS RACHEL LEVIN-LOPEZ, AND I have to tell you right off that I really don't want to be doing this. I'm supposed to introduce myself to you, but the thing is, I'm shy. Very shy. I don't like talking about myself, and I don't think *writing* about myself is going to be any easier for me. But since I'm the one telling this story, you readers deserve to know who I am. So I'll try.

I'll start with the easy stuff. I'm twelve years old, and I'm in the seventh grade at East Lakeside Middle School. I'm short, and I have long, curly blond hair that can get very frizzy, depending on the weather.

I'm pale, and I blush a lot, which turns me pink. Sometimes even red. I live in a small, pretty house with my parents: Jane Levin-Lopez, who I call Mom, and Cecilia Levin-Lopez, otherwise known to me as Mami. Mami was born in Mexico and that's how you say *Mom* in Spanish. Mami teaches Spanish at Lakeside High School, and Mom is a graphic designer who works mostly at home. I love them both and they love me. Maybe a little too much.

Now I'll get to the not-so-easy stuff. My parents are what you might call overprotective. They don't want me to be out alone—they want to go with me everywhere I go, or at least get me there and pick me up. Mom even walks me to and from school, as if I was a little kid. It's kind of embarrassing, at my age, but I guess I can understand why they do this.

You see, before I was born, they had another child. Her name was Leah, and when she was ten years old, she was hit by a car while walking home from school by herself. And she died. Mom and Mami don't talk about this much, but there's a framed photograph of Leah on the mantel over the fireplace. Every now and then, when one of them looks at it, I can see the sadness in her face. And because of this tragedy, one or the other or both of them want to be by my side, watching over me, protecting me from any possible dangers. All the time.

So I'm an only child. Growing up, I wasn't ever really sad about that. I've always been good at keeping myself busy. I read a lot, and I like to write down ideas for stories and poems. I haven't actually *written* any stories or poems, but I think someday I will. And I keep a diary, which I don't show to anyone. But I have to admit that sometimes I've been lonely. When you're as shy as I am, it's not easy making friends.

Then, almost two months ago, in January, all that changed.

It began when Ellie Marks arrived in Lakeside. Her family moved into an old Victorian house, complete with a turret on top, and it was up there that Ellie discovered an old telescope bolted to the floor. She soon realized that this was no ordinary telescope. Looking through it for the first time, she saw our entire town, including a community center with a swimming pool. Which seemed normal, except later that day, she learned that the community center didn't exist. The citizens of Lakeside *wanted* a community center, but it hadn't been built yet. Pretty weird, right?

At first, Ellie thought the telescope could show her the future. Which would be cool enough—but it turned out there were more surprises to come.

Those surprises began when she peered through the telescope again and saw our classmate, Alyssa

Parker, sitting on a broomstick, flying over Lakeside. Of course, that wasn't something that could ever happen—not then, and not in the future. But Ellie was curious about what the vision might mean, so she got to know Alyssa and found out that Alyssa sometimes *daydreamed* of being a witch. Mainly so she could put curses on people she didn't like. Of course, when Ellie told Alyssa what she'd seen, Alyssa was curious, so Alyssa and Ellie started looking through the telescope together.

Next, Alyssa and Ellie saw me, walking with Mom—only in this telescope vision, I looked like I was about five years old. When they cornered me in the school cafeteria to ask me about what they'd seen, I confessed that five years old was exactly how I felt sometimes because of the way my parents treat me. After that, I was invited to look through the telescope with them.

It wasn't long before Ellie, Alyssa, and I saw another classmate through the lens: Kiara Douglas, running around in the playground with oversized cartoon bears and rabbits. Eventually, we learned that Kiara was hooked on playing this online game where all the characters are animals. It turned out that her fellow players were her only friends. She didn't even know who they really were, since they used avatars with made-up names. Since Kiara wasn't exactly an

outgoing person, it took some effort to connect with her, but she eventually decided to join us too.

So the telescope wasn't just showing the future. It was showing us *feelings*—what people wanted, their fantasies, and maybe their fears too. This realization was pretty exciting. But what was even more exciting, for me, was that this telescope brought us together. We started calling it a spyglass, which sounded more magical to us, and we decided to call ourselves the Spyglass Sisterhood. We vowed not to tell anyone else about what the spyglass can do, not even our families, for two reasons. First of all, no one would believe us. And second, because even if they *did* believe us, they'd all want to look in the spyglass and it would become famous and someone would take it away from us.

Having friends is a big change for me. One thing I learned really fast is that being friends doesn't mean we're alike. The word *sisterhood* might make you think we have a lot in common, but that's not true at all. In our looks, our home lives, our personalities, in just about every possible way, we're very different.

Alyssa is tall and thin. She has long, straight black hair and a golden-tan complexion. She's into the goth look and wears black makeup and clothes all the time. And she's dark in other ways too. She doesn't smile

a lot, she's sarcastic, and she acts unfriendly to most people. I think she does this mainly to annoy her family. But with us, the sisterhood, she's cool.

She lives in a big, modern house that was designed by her stepfather, who's an architect. Her mother is a very important surgeon. Alyssa calls her "Dr. Gina Khatri, cardiac catheter wizard to the stars." Alyssa has a younger brother, only nine years old, who's already a talented actor. She has an older stepbrother who's a big deal at Lakeside High—an athlete, president of the student body, and smart too. And an older stepsister, a figure skater who's training for the Olympics. Personally, I think Alyssa's style and attitude are her way of standing out in this family of big shots.

Kiara is tiny, as short as I am, but much thinner. She's Black, and she wears her hair in an elaborate cornrow design that looks like she's wearing a beautiful tiara when she pins it up. Her mother died when she was a baby, and she's an only child like me. She lives in a fancy apartment with her father, who's a professor of history at Bascomb College here in Lakeside.

I guess you could say Kiara has kind of a quirky personality. At first, we thought she was snobbish, because she resisted our attempts to bring her into the sisterhood. But friendship's not something you can push. Especially with someone like Kiara, who's

just not a very sociable person by nature. With us, she says exactly what she thinks, and sometimes this hurts, but unlike Alyssa, she isn't rude on purpose. It's just the way she is. She's totally honest, and very intelligent. She has an amazing vocabulary and she's a science and math whiz. As far as style goes, she's not particularly interested in fashion. She's always neatly dressed, but that's about it. She probably wouldn't even have her cool hairstyle if her aunt wasn't a hairdresser.

I suppose Ellie could be called the leader of our group. She brought us all together, she has the spy-glass, and we hang out at her house. She definitely likes to take charge. And even though I don't want to say anything negative about my friends, Ellie can be a little bossy sometimes.

She has an older sister who's away at college, so we haven't met her yet. Her mother's a newspaper reporter, and her father's a lawyer. He works from an office in their house, which makes my parents happy since they know there's always an adult around. What's really nice about Ellie's parents is that they don't mind that we're over there all the time. And even though they're both busy people, they still manage to keep the kitchen stocked with snacks for us.

Ellie's neither short nor tall, fat nor thin. She has brown hair, a medium complexion, and a few

freckles. She calls herself ordinary, but I think that's only because she *used* to be. Before she moved to Lakeside, back at her old school, she was part of the popular crowd. She says she was a follower, she just blended in and did what everyone else did, until the day her parents started a campaign to build a homeless shelter in their town. A lot of people were against the idea, and they turned their kids against Ellie. So when she came to Lakeside, Ellie was determined to have nothing to do with popular kids. Which is funny in a way, because she's actually friends with a popular kid here, Mike Twersky. She claims he's not her boyfriend, but I'm not sure I believe her.

Ellie's definitely not a follower anymore, but she still *looks* like she could be in the popular crowd, with her nice haircut and lip gloss. Her jeans are like theirs too—classic straight-leg ones, which she tops with cool sweaters in bright colors. I don't wear jeans or leggings—I prefer sweatpants and hoodies in the winter, little dresses in the spring and summer. At least my parents don't bug me about how I dress, the way Alyssa's mother does.



Thinking about the sisterhood now, maybe we do have something in common. We're all pretty smart. Like I already said, Kiara is particularly good in science and math. I do very well in English. Ellie is above

average in just about all subjects. Alyssa doesn't make perfect grades, but not because she isn't smart. She just doesn't try all that hard at school. I think maybe it's just another way for her to upset her outstanding family.

There's something else, too. We're all loners. We don't fit into any of the cliques at school, and we don't try to. But we have different reasons for that. Ellie, because of her bad experience in her hometown. Me, because I'm shy. Kiara, because she prefers doing stuff on her own. Alyssa, because she says she's just not interested in most people. But we've got each other now, so I guess we're not really loners anymore.

You might be thinking I've told you more about my friends than I've told you about myself, and I guess you'd be right. It's funny, in a way...I think I probably know them better than they know me. And sometimes I wish I could be more like them. For example, I'd love to be as sure of myself as Alyssa (though not in the same way, since I don't want to wear skull earrings). Or maybe I could be more forward, the way Ellie is (though not as bossy). And I admire the way Kiara doesn't care what people think about her, and I wish I could be like that. And all three of them seem to have so much more confidence than I have.

Maybe that's why I don't open up very much to

them. Maybe because I never think I have anything interesting to say, and I always wait for them to start conversations. This is something I should probably work on.

Or maybe they don't know me very well because I don't really know myself. Does that make any sense?

Maybe if I knew myself better, they'd know me better. I think I need to work on that too.