

Chapter One

A Tree, Me, and the Boy Next Door

“Ollie ollie in come free!”

What? Ollie ollie in come free already? I was in the most incredible hiding spot ever, and they were already calling everyone in. Looking down at my watch, I realized I had actually been in the most incredible hiding spot for somewhere in the neighborhood of about 40 minutes. I guess my daydreaming had again gotten the best of me, and time had just flown by. Which technically was very dangerous since I was at the very top of the tallest tree I could find in the time allotted to hide in. I figured no one would be able to find me way up here, especially since my favorite green peasant shirt and dark brown Levi shorts camouflaged me. I looked so cute!

I climbed up the tree in record time so I could see where everybody else was hiding. There were a total of seven of us playing, including the seeker. And I had kept my eye on everyone until I saw him... the new kid in town. His name is Gavin Boyer and if he ends up in my homeroom class he will sit right behind me! I could just die! Speaking of die, I haven't gotten out of the tree yet. Okay, get with the program, Emmy, let's go! But for some reason I'm not moving. I cannot figure out how to get out of the tree. And as the wind starts to blow, I am finally realizing that I am really high up and the tree actually moves this

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close to the top. It moves a lot in fact. I closed my eyes and tried to get my bearings, but unfortunately when I opened them back up, the ground looked even farther down. In fact, I am not sure I can actually see the ground!

“Emmy! Emmy! Ollie ollie in come free! Where are you?”

“Ryan? Ryan! I’m up here!”

“Emmy? Emmy where are you?!”

“Up here!”

“Where?”

“In the tree!”

“Well, I figured that! But I can’t see you!”

“I am WAY up in the tree!”

“You need to gain some weight. I can’t see you, and if I can’t see you then I must look totally ridiculous talking to a tree.”

“But it’s a great tree, right?”

“Yeah, Emms, you picked a great one. Now come down!”

“I can’t!”

“What do you mean you can’t?”

“I mean my mind won’t let my body get out of the tree! I’m stuck!”

Ryan is my best friend. We have been best friends since pre-school, and now we’re on the threshold of being seventh graders. Ryan is so excited to be going back to school that he wears an extra watch just to count down the time until school starts again. Oh and by the way, we still have a couple months of summer left.

“Emmy, how did you get all the way up there?”

“Never mind! Just help me down!”

“How the heck am I going to do that? I can’t get to where you are to help you down even if my life depended on it. Oh, I know, I’ll get your mom!”

“My mom? NO! Wait!”

“I’ll be right back!”

“NO RYAN! Ryan? Ryan?!”

OH GREAT! How embarrassing is this going to be? My mom is going to wig out and probably call the fire department to come get me down. OH MAN! Can you believe what is happening here?! Okay

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picture this, the potential love of my life is sitting in his house, which is about a stone's throw away from me right now. Point of fact, he will be able to sit and watch from his bedroom window as his potential future wife is hauled out of a tree! And! Can you believe there is an "And"? *And* be able to tell our potential children how their mother was rescued by a nice fireman. Please God, may Gavin's mom burn their dinner and have to take the family out. Some place far. Oh and may they be gone and out of the house before the fire department comes, AMEN! Oh no! Hurry God! There are the sirens!

As the sirens got closer, I felt my stomach turning from the embarrassment. That should truly add pain to injury. Not only will I have to be rescued out of this tree, but I will probably throw up all over the nice fireman who has the misfortune to have to come and get me out. Well, at least it can't get any worse right? And as my father always says, when you can't get any lower, the only way is up. This really is not a very good saying, but for some reason always makes him laugh. Just as I felt myself chuckle from the thought of my dad laughing, Ryan was back under the tree.

"Emmy?! You still there?!"

"No, Ryan, I'm not."

"Ha, ha, very funny. Well, I couldn't find your mom."

"What? What were you doing all this time?"

"Well, first I ran to your house, and your mom was not there, so I ran to my house, figuring our moms would be there, but they weren't. So I was on my way back and saw someone I thought could help. So I asked them for help and they said they would, so I came back here to wait with you."

Did you follow all that? It may take a little while, but you'll get used to Ryan, I promise. Now Ryan is not a secretive person; in fact, he has to buy my presents the day of my birthday and the night before Christmas just so he does not give them away. So I knew right away what he had left out and done before he opened his mouth back up.

"Gavin and his dad are on their way!"

Okay, so I was wrong, things could get worse. That is something to live by—things could always get worse.

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“You’re kidding, right, Ryan? You know better than to get Gavin, right, Ryan? Gavin? Ryan, you got Gavin?”

“Don’t forget his dad, I also got his dad.”

“Why would you do that to me, Ryan?”

“What are you talking about, Emmy?”

“Ryan, you know I—”

But before I could get it out, guess who is coming across the grass?

“Hey, Gavin! She’s over here!”

Great, so now not only is the future love of my life here, but soon my future father-in-law would be too. Talk about making a first impression! Emmy Bolan? Oh yes I know her, she was that girl who got stuck in a tree. Yep, that fact right there should make me unforgettable.

“Hey up there!”

Even his voice is beautiful.

“Hey down there!”

“Where are you? I cannot see you!”

That does it. I am never wearing this fashion combo again. Just then I noticed the sirens had passed and must have kept on going.

“Did you call the fire department?!”

“No. Why would we call the fire department? Are you on fire?”

Now how the heck am I supposed to respond to that and still come out cool?

“WHOA! What’s going on down there? Stop rocking the tree! I want to get out of here alive!”

Just then the tree started really swaying, and I thought I was going to be thrown out of it just like one of those cartoon characters that gets flicked out of a tree a hundred miles or so and lands in another state. The thing about that is, I’m not a cartoon, I’m real, and I will die. Needless to say, I closed my eyes and hung on for dear life.

“What are you doing? I am going to fall!”

“No you’re not, I am a few branches below you, and I should be next to you in no time.”

NO WAY! Right then and there my heart did the happy dance, and I lost a second to the music. Gavin. *The* Gavin was with me in the tree and making his way up. I hope he can’t see up my shorts. Oh I could just

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die a second time! He looks so cute, his hair is wet and tattered as if he had just gotten out of a pool or shower, toweled it off, and left it. He has on a white tee shirt, which as he gets closer I can see is a Tommy Hilfiger tee, khaki cargo shorts, and black Tevas. Oh and he smells soooooooooooooo good! Finally we were but a few branches away from each other and he stops. Why'd you stop? You were almost here. Suddenly afraid? Come on, you can do it!

"Well, if we are going to get out of here, you are going to have to come down to me because if I climb any higher, our weight could break the limb, and we could both fall."

Okay then, that answers my internal questions. I don't want to die, good reason for you to stop.

"Um. So, Gavin, are you afraid of heights?"

"Nope."

"Can you look down?"

"Yep."

"Are we high up?"

"Yep."

"Does it bother you that you could fall?"

"Nope."

"Really?"

"Yep."

"Why?"

"Exactly."

Exactly? Okay, that is twice now he has said something that I do not know how to respond to. What the heck am I supposed to do with that?

"Hey, Emmy, are you okay?!"

Saved by the Ryan.

"Yes, Ryan!"

"So, Emmy, are we going to try to get out of here, or would you rather keep talking in the tree?"

He said my name. Say it again. Say it again! Okay, since Gavin is just staring at me, I have a distinct feeling he is not going to say my name again right now. I guess I can wait until we get out of the tree.

"Do I have a choice?"

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Gavin smiled at me, and I smiled back, knowing for sure that the answer to my rhetorical question was obviously no. I grabbed up every last bit of courage I could find, took a deep breath and started towards Gavin. My heart was pounding so hard I thought it would leap from my chest. Though to be honest, with my luck it would leap from my chest, hit Gavin in the face, send him plummeting to earth, in which case he would in turn land on Ryan and kill him. Yeah, that's what I should be thinking about as I am trying to get out of this tree. Sweat was starting to accumulate on my forehead, and I had to stop and wipe it off before grabbing for the next branch. Thanks to Gavin's soothing voice and the constant screamed praises from Ryan as I accomplished yet another branch, I was doing it. And in no time at all I was more than halfway down the tree. And then it happened...

"Gavin!"

Gavin had missed the branch he needed to step on, stepped on a branch that could not hold his weight, and started to fall. He tried to grab the branch above him, but he missed, and as luck would have it, grabbed me. I did not have as good a grip on the tree as you would have thought, especially for someone afraid of heights, and down we came. We were not very far up, but far enough. Gavin's dad tried to grab Gavin, and Ryan was unfortunately there to break my fall. Gavin hit a branch and broke it before landing on his dad. The fall had broken both the branch and his arm. And both breaks were loud enough to make you cringe. I was able to grab part of the tree, ripping off many leaves and slowing down my fall. Still though, the landing was not a good one. I landed on Ryan and brought the branch down right on my face. Ryan had the wind knocked out of him, but he was okay. I, on the other hand, was not.

"Emmy? Are you all right?"

"I think so," was all I could get out before the taste of copper filled my mouth. I sat up to spit and that is when I saw it...my front tooth.