

Chapter One

I'm a big wisher. I'll wish on anything. Shooting stars, stray eyelashes, dandelion tops, coins in fountains. Birthday candles (my own and other people's). Even when my glasses fog up. When I was younger, the wishes used to vary. A pony. A best friend. A new bike with streamers on the handles. A baby brother or sister. Some of these even came true (not the pony). But over the past year, every wish has been spent wishing I was twelve already, a date I've waited for my whole life and one that is only six weeks away. Looking back, I wish I had saved one of those wishes because, if I had, I wouldn't be stuck in this drainpipe right now.

Yes, drainpipe.

Here's how it happened. My day started out pretty normal. My sixth grade class went on yet another field trip to the Willow Falls Reservoir. We were standing on the shoreline, listening to the guide go on about water tables and filtration systems as if they were the most fascinating things in the world. The air smelled swampy, and my orange sneakers were slowly sinking into the muddy banks. I kept glancing over at the forest on the other side of the shoreline. It reminded me of the setting of a fairy tale, like the ones my mom used to read me before bed. So peaceful and pretty, and sort of mysterious. At any minute Hansel or Gretel might dart out from between the trees. An opportunity to slip away came courtesy of Rex Bueford, who thought it would be funny to jump into the water. And it *was* funny, for about a second, until the tour guide told us that now our drinking water would taste like Rex's sweat.

While our teacher yelled at Rex, and then at his friends for laughing, I slowly backed away. I kept going until I couldn't hear the group anymore and found myself among a cluster of sharply sweet-smelling evergreens. The needles cushioned the ground beneath my feet, and a blue jay twittered on a low branch. I breathed in deep, and held the sweet air in my lungs. If my parents let me out of their sight more, I probably wouldn't have felt the need to escape from the group, but that's not going to change until I turn

twelve. I have a whole *list* of things I'll finally get to do when that day arrives.

As I stood alone in the woods, a delicious chill of anticipation ran through me, as it always did when I thought of my twelfth birthday. I leaned back against a large gray rock, intending on gazing at the puffy clouds and daydreaming about the Big Day.

The only problem? That large gray rock? Not a rock. What I thought was solid igneous rock, here on earth since the creation of the planet and therefore more than sturdy enough to support my weight, was, in fact, a rubber flap covering the opening of a narrow gray drainpipe. When I realized this, my arms and legs flailed wildly. But I couldn't catch my balance in time. I fell, butt-first, into the pipe and was instantly wedged in. I could still see out if I craned my neck up. My sneakers dangled mere inches from the ground, but it might as well have been a mile since I couldn't move.

"Can anyone hear me?" I called as loudly as I could. "I'm stuck! Anyone?" But my voice got carried away by the wind like it was no more than a whisper. My head filled with my grandmother's voice. *Well, this is a fine kettle of fish.*