

## Chapter 1

“Bailey Bird, stand still for a minute!” I said. Honestly, my best friend could drive me nuts when she was in a state, and today, on our one day off, she was in a state *beyond* a state. She was huffing and puffing while pacing between bookshelves at the Cookbook Nook. Her short hair was a mess, her flouncy white blouse askew. She hates to be *askew*.

Our current project was not causing her distress. It wasn't requiring any heavy lifting, just extra hours. We had both agreed to come in at seven a.m. to get a jump on it. We wanted the window display honoring the Crystal Cove Renaissance Fair, which officially kicked off tonight, to be perfect. When we were done, we would eat lunch. Afterward, we would primp for the evening's revelry.

I followed her to the sales counter. “Talk to me.”

Bailey spun around, hands on hips, and exhaled hard enough to make her bangs fly up. “I'm worried, Jenna. Worried with a capital *W*.”

Watch out. Whenever she spouts capital letters, she is ready to have a meltdown. A cute meltdown, but a meltdown nonetheless.

“About the display? Don't be. It's going to be great. With the muted colors, it goes nicely with our beach-themed color scheme.” I'll never forget the first day I walked into the shop. It hadn't been open to the public since the 1980s, back when it was a used bookstore. The walls were a funky color and were the first things we painted. “We've already set out the marionettes and the backdrop of a forest, the beer stein tapestry, the shaft of wheat, and the bow and arrow.” Researching the Renaissance Fair websites for inspiration had been a joy. “I still have a box of Celtic jewelry to unpack. After that, all

we have left to do is position the cookbooks and the Renaissance-themed adult coloring books, and—”

Bailey leveled a searing glare at me.

“The chaotic display isn’t what’s bothering you?” I asked.

She shook her head.

“Then what is it? The sun is shining. The temperature is a perfect seventy degrees.” April is always a good month weather-wise in Crystal Cove. I aimed a finger at my pal. “I know what you need . . . music.” I slipped into the storage room and switched on a queue of medieval-style music that started with “Maids When You’re Young” to lighten the mood. I reemerged and moved to the main display table to arrange copies of *The Medieval Kitchen: A Social History with Recipes*. I had plenty more unique books to add, with long exotic titles on a variety of topics, that I would sprinkle throughout the store. I hoped fairgoers would come and browse. Ours was the sole bookstore in town, let alone at the fair. “Are you concerned about your wedding plans?”

“Why would you say that? What have you heard?” Bailey’s voice skated up an octave. “Should I be—”

“No, you should not.” I gripped her arm. Being a whole head taller and a ton stronger, I held sway. “I haven’t heard anything. I was worried that Tito—”

“What about Tito?” Bailey wriggled out of my grasp.

Bailey and her beloved Tito Martinez, a reporter for the *Crystal Cove Crier*, are getting married two weeks from now at Baldini Vineyards, a beautiful spread in the hills that boasts an incredible view of the Pacific Ocean. Bailey had her heart set on saying *I do* at a vineyard, and when the one she had secured slipped up—CC Vineyards had

double-booked and had no other dates available for two years—I contacted Nick Baldini, who is a regular customer of ours and the main person responsible for putting on the annual Crystal Cove Renaissance Fair. Baldini Vineyards doesn't do a lot of weddings, but when it does, the event is top-notch. For Bailey's gig, Nick had engaged the catering services of a local hotshot chef.

I said, "I was worried that Tito might be changing things up, or—"

"It's Mom!" Bailey stomped toward the storage room.

My anxiety kicked up a notch. "What about your mother?" I zipped after her, my flip-flops flapping. I'm a sandals girl unless tennis shoes are required. Occasionally I'll stuff my feet into heels. *Occasionally*. When I'm dressed up. Today, however, I was wearing an aqua spring sweater and matching capris. "Bailey, talk to me! Is she okay? Is it her health?"

"She's as strong as an ox."

"Phew!" I whistled. Long story short, two years after my mom died, my father and Bailey's mother hooked up. They are now engaged. Lola has always been like a second mother to me. I would be devastated to lose her. "So what's the problem?"

"She's got"—Bailey wiggled her hands next to her head—"vibes."

"Vibes as in *V-I-B-E-S*?"

"I can spell it."

"Don't snip. Vibes about what? The wedding? Relax." I fanned the air and shifted to another display table to set the books upright. Presentation is everything at a bookstore. Covers need to be visible and appealing. "It will go off without a hitch." As of Nick's latest update, everything at the vineyard was going swimmingly.

“That’s not it.”

“Is she miffed that she isn’t in charge of the catering?” I asked. Lola owns the Pelican Brief Diner, which is known for its scrumptious seafood. We sell her cookbooks in the shop. “Is she getting vibes that something about the food will go haywire?”

Bailey growled. “No. She’s got”—more hand twirling . . . *vibes*—“that something *bad* is going to happen. Heck, she’s so crazy, she even has Hershey and me feeling vibes, and we don’t feel vibes.”

“Um, cats *do* feel them,” I said. Hershey is Bailey and Tito’s cat. Bailey has never owned a cat before. “Is Hershey acting oddly?”

My rescue ginger cat Tigger mewed from beneath the children’s table at the rear of the shop and lifted his chin as if to signal that he was being a model cat. He’s not always, especially of late. I waved for him to go back to sleep.

“Whatever.” Bailey swatted the air.

“Has your mother been more specific? Does she foresee what bad thing might happen?”

“No, but I’m warning you, the next thing you know she’ll claim she has ESP and want to start giving palm readings like your aunt Vera.”