

Chicago Bound

Praise for *Chicago Bound: A Jake McGreevy Novel (Book Two)*

☆☆☆☆☆ "Art, mystery, music, humor, and adventure—*Chicago Bound* has it all. . . . This is a grand read."

—*Jack Magnus, Readers' Favorite*

"*Chicago Bound* is a powerful new Jake McGreevy novel for middle-grade audiences. . . . Readers will be fascinated to the end."

—*Diane Donovan, Senior eBook Reviewer, Midwest Book Review*

"Having spent many years searching for Mary Cassatt's 1893 mural done for Chicago's World's Fair, I was delighted to encounter Sean Vogel's *Chicago Bound*. . . . [A] thrill-packed adventure. . . . [it] is loving and eventful, and most of all a great read."

—*Sally Webster, author of Eve's Daughter: Modern Woman, a Mural by Mary Cassatt*

Praise for *Celtic Run: A Jake McGreevy Novel (Book One)*

"Romance, danger, intrigue, and personality clashes between peers . . . all make *Celtic Run* a vivid coming-of-age novel."

—*Diane Donovan, eBook Reviewer, Midwest Book Review*

☆☆☆☆☆ "*Celtic Run* is a fast-paced, action-filled novel. . . . The action starts within the first couple of pages and doesn't stop, as cars are hotwired, cliffs are dived off of, and fears are conquered."

—*Kayti Nika Raet, Readers' Favorite*

Awards for *Celtic Run: A Jake McGreevy Novel*

IBPA's Benjamin Franklin Awards:

A Silver Medal Winner (Young Reader: Fiction)

The Mom's Choice Awards:

A Gold Recipient (Juvenile Books)

Dan Poynter's Global eBook Awards:

Winner (Children's Literature)

A Jake McGreevy Novel

Chicago Bound



SEAN VOGEL

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For my daughter, Emma,
whose smile melts my heart
and whose laugh sings to my soul.



Chapter 1



Sunday Afternoon (December 21st)

Jake inspected the figure-eight knot that secured his harness to the climbing rope. He watched the slack tighten until he felt a slight upward tug and then reached back to grab a pinch of chalk. Rubbing his palms together, he prepared to make his first move onto the indoor rock wall.

“Climbing!” Jake shouted with a little more gusto than needed, given that his partner, Ben, was only a few feet away.

“Climb on,” Ben replied as he worked the ropes through his belaying device.

The rock-climbing gym was conveniently located near Jake’s home in Manhattan, but it was also insanely crowded. Consuming nearly a city block, the gym boasted the most diverse selection of routes of all the indoor fitness centers in the tri-state area. Membership was also wildly expensive, but Jake had splurged on it with some of his own money. Last summer, he’d had a fantastic and dangerous adventure in Ireland, culminating in the discovery of some long-hidden treasure, and once he’d returned home, he had zealously embarked on an exercise program, having come to the conclusion that it was important to be prepared for *anything*.

The beginner’s bouldering area was behind them near the entrance. And the gym’s most complex routes, with the most

challenging holds, were farther down the line. To gain access to those routes, Jake and Ben would have to prove themselves on this 5.6 Yosemite Decimal System–rated climb. Attempting to tune out the masses of people around him, Jake placed his foot on the first climbing hold and hoisted himself onto the wall. His toes screamed in pain. *Rats. Forgot to cut my toenails again.* By design, rock shoes are extremely tight, and the millimeter of extra length his nails added quadrupled the pain factor.

With purpose and care, Jake made move after move until he was nearly forty feet in the air. He shook his head to flip his shaggier-than-normal sandy blond hair from his eyes. As best he could tell, the next handhold was a good eighteen inches higher than his reach. Although he'd hit a growth spurt over the summer, Jake was still well below average height for a fifteen-year-old. He looked down at Ben. "I'm not sure about this next move."

Ben nodded and pulled any remaining slack out of the rope so that if Jake missed the hold, he wouldn't fall too far. Tall and slim, with a mop of red curly hair, Ben had become a good friend of Jake's. He occupied second-chair violin—right next to Jake, in first chair—in the school's orchestra. They were both freshman at a large private New York City high school, and together they'd weathered the difficult middle-to-high-school transition. Knowing that later tonight they would be cramped inside a bus heading to a performing arts camp in Chicago, where they'd spend winter break, Jake and Ben were grateful to squeeze in some physical exercise before heading west.

Lunging, Jake stretched for the climbing hold. His fingers curled around the tiny grip and his muscles strained as his entire weight was suspended in the air, supported only by his right hand. He flexed and lifted himself up by one arm, just

enough to get his other hand onto a hold. Moments later, he'd found decent footholds and took a minute to catch his breath.

"Nice move," Ben called from below.

"Thanks!" Jake smiled down at him. *Good thing I added pull-ups to my workout routine.*

CRACK! The sound of metal cracking echoed throughout the facility, followed quickly by a scream. Jake swiveled his head in the direction of the noise. On the route next to his, a middle-aged woman swung suspended in the air. Jake tilted his head to examine the pulley system that was attached to the top of the rock wall. It had separated from its mount and appeared as if it could give way at any time. "Ben!" Jake called.

"Go, Jake, go!"

From the moment they'd met, Jake and Ben had instantly been on the same wavelength. Whether it was music, climbing, movies, or girls, they always seemed to know what was on the other's mind. Jake let go of the rock holds and let the rope take his weight, snapping him into a position that was perpendicular to the wall. He ran sideways along the fake rock like a Cirque du Soleil acrobat as Ben expertly played out the slack. There was another loud snap, and Jake dove and wrapped his arms around the woman. She screamed as the pulley system gave way. Jake grunted as her entire weight bore down on him. Like a pendulum, Jake and the woman swung back toward his part of the rock wall. Ben let the rope slide freely and the two of them glided quickly but softly to the ground.

Immediately, the woman's climbing partner and the facility's staff descended upon them.

"You . . . you saved my life." The woman was near tears.

"Well, it was teamwork." Jake stood up and brushed himself off. He went to high-five Ben but stopped when he saw blood dripping from his friend's fingers. "Wicked rope burn!"

"I wanted to make sure you two descended fast in case it was difficult to hold onto her," Ben said, wiping the blood onto his shorts.

"Good call, Ben. Hope it doesn't interfere with your violin playing, though." Jake took a step backward from the crowd of people enveloping them.

* * *

By the time Jake made it home to the two-story brownstone he shared with his father, the cell phone video of the rescue had garnered thousands of hits.

"Quick thinking, son," Mr. McGreevy said, greeting Jake as he walked through the door. "There are more than a few messages by the phone from reporters wanting to talk with you."

"No thanks," Jake said, as he shed his shoes by the front door and followed his dad into the kitchen. "After last summer, I think I've had enough of reporters. Besides, Ben and I were just at the right place at the right time—that's all."

"I understand, Jake," his dad said, giving his son a quick pat.

Their townhouse was very similar to the other hundred or so in the neighborhood—with the exception of the widened doorways and the mini-elevator that went to the second floor. Mr. McGreevy had been paralyzed after a horse-riding accident nearly two years before, and their house had been modified to accommodate his wheelchair.

"Dinner smells good. What is it?" Jake bent down to peer into the oven.

"Osso buco with a savory rosemary-balsamic reduction," Mr. McGreevy replied.

"I assumed it was pizza," Jake said.

"Of course it's pizza." Mr. McGreevy smiled and Jake laughed, their running joke continuing for another night. Mr. McGreevy, despite his exacting architect's mind, disliked

following recipes and cooking, so they tended to eat a lot of pizza.

"It won't be ready for a few more minutes. Remember our deal? You have to finish unpacking that last box before you leave tonight for Chicago," he said as he rolled over to the cupboard to get some silverware.

"All right," Jake grumbled, heading upstairs to his room. They'd moved into their brownstone two months ago, but Jake hadn't yet finished going through the last box. He entered his room and padded over to it. Lifting the lid, he stared at the old things strewn about. *What am I going to do with all this junk?* He shuffled through the matchbox cars, empty CD jewel cases, and pieces of electronic gear that even he, with his knack for fixing things, couldn't save. He spotted a medium-sized teddy bear. "The Art Institute of Chicago" read the bear's shirt. Chicago: Jake hadn't really thought about it before, but he suddenly realized that he was going to the same city where his mother had died.

He freed the stuffed animal from its cardboard dwelling and sat on the bed with it. *My mom bought this for me, right before . . .* Two years old then, Jake couldn't remember receiving the gift, but he did recall his dad telling him when he was young that it was the last gift his mother had purchased. *Dad was so angry when he found me roughhousing with the bear.* After that incident, Jake had let the bear sit on a shelf in the closet. He gazed into the bear's eyes. *Who was she?* Lately, his father had opened up a little more and discussed the mother he never knew, but he still felt a persistent emptiness.

Turning the bear over, he saw some brown thread, slightly off color from the rest of the stitching along the seam. *Never noticed that before.* The string was loose and Jake gently tugged on it. The bottom of the bear separated, revealing a yellowed piece of folded paper.

Dear Richard,

I'm sorry you couldn't be here to explore the city with me. I took a break to clear my head and went to the Chicago Theatre. You simply must read the notes in my binder so you can understand what I experienced. The Art Deco sconces on the second floor remind me of our spectacular time in Paris together.

Love,

Karen

The date at the top nearly leapt off the page. *The day she was killed! She died outside the theater, so she must have written this note just moments before. What's it doing inside my bear?*

Chapter 2



Sunday Evening (December 21st)

"Jake, dinner!" Mr. McGreevy's voice echoed from downstairs. Jake stuffed the note back into the bear and placed it inside his backpack. Slowly making his way downstairs, he tried to compose himself so as not to give away the confusion roiling his mind. He entered the kitchen, grabbed a drink from the refrigerator, and plopped down at the table.

"Did you unpack the box?" Mr. McGreevy asked.

"Just about. I'm not sure what to do with it all. It's mostly stuff that I should throw away," Jake replied as he picked up a slice of pizza. He chewed without interest, the flavor lost on him.

"Looks like that pizza is eating you more than you're eating it," his father said.

"Hmm?"

"I said, what's on your mind, son?"

I need a better poker face. "Sorry. I was just thinking that I was going to Chicago, and . . . well, that's where Mom died."

Mr. McGreevy stared at his son, his eyes almost misty. "I've thought about that every day since you showed me the flyer about the performing arts camp."

"I don't have to go," Jake responded.

"No, you *should* go. The chance to learn from the best and experience new things is too good to pass up. I know nothing

bad will happen, but it's a father's prerogative to worry about his son who's going away for two weeks."

Especially to the city where your wife died, Jake finished his dad's thought. "What was she doing there?" Jake hated to push his father, knowing the pain of her death was still great, but he needed to know.

"You are so much like her, it's amazing. When I learned you found that Spanish treasure last summer, I thought, 'He's just like Karen.' You see, your mom was always trying to solve historical mysteries. She was a wonderful artist, but her real talent was verifying provenance."

"What's provenance?" Jake asked.

"It's the backstory, or origin, of an artifact. For example, let's say you have a baseball signed by Mickey Mantle that your grandfather gave to you. It might do well at auction. But if you have a signed baseball *and* a picture of your grandfather standing with Mickey Mantle, then the value increases because you can *prove* provenance."

"Because you can clearly show it's a genuine signature?" Jake said.

"Exactly."

"So Mom was like a history detective?" Jake asked, referring to his dad's favorite TV show.

"That's a good way of putting it. Not only did she have the determination to follow trails and pursue leads, but she had a strong eye for artistic style and detail. I see that same analytical and tenacious mind in you, Jake."

Jake felt his cheeks get red. His dad was great at building up his confidence, but it never failed to embarrass him, even though nobody else was in the kitchen to hear the compliment.

"So she went to Chicago to investigate something?"

"Not just *something*. A huge sixty-four-foot painting by the famous American Impressionist Mary Cassatt, which had

been missing for more than a hundred years. The Art Institute contacted your mom and asked her to come to Chicago to validate it before they purchased it. She had already made quite a name for herself in the art world as one of the most thorough researchers in her field, but this assignment was going to be her biggest yet. And although she enjoyed her investigative work, her dream was to land a permanent position with a museum in New York City, so really, this opportunity would have helped her . . ." Mr. McGreevy's voice trailed off.

Jake drained the last of his iced tea. His gut twisted as he tried to decide if he should tell his father about what he had just found inside the bear. *No, he's already struggling with my going to Chicago. It can wait for now.*

* * *

After dinner, Jake scurried up to his room to finish packing. He and Ben, along with Jake's lifelong friend Julie, were part of a select group headed to Chicago for a performing arts camp called Sound in Motion. Combining musicians from high school orchestras with rhythmic gymnasts, the camp offered daily mentorship from the top performers in their fields. The winter break program paired holiday music with the athletic but dancelike rhythmic gymnastics. The camp would be holding several concerts to raise money for music programs in underserved schools across the country that had been hit hard by the economy and Mother Nature. Jake and Ben were representing their school's orchestra. Julie had managed to gain the last place on the gymnastics roster when she narrowly beat her chief rival in a head-to-head competition. At first, Jake was thrilled to be spending this time with his friends, but the stress of having to perform on stage with the best of the best, combined with the regret that his father would be alone for the holidays, made him wonder if he should be going.

Jake had filled his suitcase with the usual items, like clothes and toiletries, and his violin and accessories were packed and waiting by the door. But he had yet to select which gadgets to bring. He worked part-time at a security and spy shop, which gave him access to tons of cool gizmos. *Two weeks in Chicago, crammed into an old school building with a hundred other students. What could I possibly need? Maybe I'll just keep it simple.* He spotted his fiber-optic camera sitting on a shelf and smiled at the memory of its use in Ireland. *Camera—check.* He also packed the essentials required by any gadget whiz: a Leatherman multi-tool, Maglite LED flashlight, and duct tape.

Satisfied, Jake zipped up his backpack and set it next to his luggage.

"Jake, the taxi is here to take you to the bus," Mr. McGreevy called.

Jake grabbed his things and hustled down the stairs. "Wish we were flying instead of driving."

"I can see the wisdom in taking a bus at night. It's cheaper than airfare—and by driving all night, they're hoping the kids will sleep instead of getting rowdy." Mr. McGreevy stretched up from his chair to tussle Jake's hair.

"Hey, Dad?" Jake paused in the doorway.

Jake's dad stopped and spun his wheelchair on the hardwood floor.

"Yes?"

"I saw an advertisement for a school trip this spring from the civics department. Kids from around the world are going to spend ten days setting up a mock government and such."

"You haven't even gone on this trip yet. You keep running away like this and I'll get a complex!" Mr. McGreevy winked at him.

"Maybe I just want to eat something other than pizza," Jake laughed.

Mr. McGreevy fake snarled at him. "Where's this one—the moon?"

"Closer. Paris."

"We'll talk about it when you return. I'm not so sure about another overseas excursion . . . although Paris does sound good. Your mom and I often talked about going but we never made the trip." Mr. McGreevy hugged his son goodbye.

Jake stopped halfway to the taxi and turned to see his dad waving. He was so excited about the possibility of actually going to Paris that it took a moment for his dad's answer to sink in.

He's never been to Paris? But the note in the bear said "our time in Paris together." Dad couldn't have forgotten about a trip to Paris . . . My mom was trying to tell him something!

Chapter 3



Sunday Evening (December 21st)

The noise on the bus was deafening and grew in intensity each time another kid climbed the stairs. Jake and Ben sat next to each other about halfway down the aisle.

"Latke? I tried a new recipe that says you can serve them cold." Ben unzipped a plastic bag and offered a traditional potato pancake to Jake.

"Definitely!" Jake pulled a treat from the bag. "Tomorrow's the first night of Hanukkah, right? What are you going to do about the candles?"

"I guess you've rubbed off on me, as I now cart around gadgets just in case." Ben brandished a miniature battery-operated menorah from his backpack. "They're LED, so it should easily last all season."

Jake chuckled. "It'll be a little ironic if the batteries die before the eighth day, seeing how the story is about the long-burning oil."

Ben smiled. "Yes, that *would* be bad. Hey, I know Christmas is still a few days away, but did you and your dad open your gifts before you left?"

"No. Even though we'll be here through Christmas and New Year's, it wasn't a big deal to wait. I'm fifteen. It's not like I'm rushing down the stairs early in the morning to see what Santa's brought," Jake replied.

Jake's best friend, Julie, boarded the bus and sat in an

open seat across from them. She was nearly 5'8", which made her the tallest gymnast on her team. For the longest time, Jake had yearned to be her boyfriend. But since last summer, his feelings had mellowed somewhat.

Sharing her seat was a petite girl with wavy shoulder-length chestnut hair and a heart-shaped face. She had a youthful appearance, but Jake had caught how her keen eyes sized up each person stepping onto the bus. *I bet there's a lot going on behind that cute face.*

"Hi, I'm Jake McGreevy. I play the violin." Jake extended his arm past Julie to shake the girl's hand.

"Natalie Silver, also violin," she said.

"I know that name. You're first chair over at East High," Jake said.

"East just has a small orchestra, though." She smiled shyly.

But you're probably the best musician on the bus. "These are my friends, Julie O'Brien and Ben Meyers." Jake elbowed Ben, who was absorbed in his tablet PC.

Natalie brightened. "Hi, Julie, Ben! Hmm, Ben Meyers. Are you related to Danny Meyers?"

"Yes, he's my brother," Ben uttered with all the enthusiasm of a dental patient waiting for his root canal procedure to get underway.

"I saw him at Carnegie Hall last year. He's an amazing pianist. Do you play the piano, too?" Natalie asked.

"No, I torture the violin." Ben's joke generated a look of confusion on Natalie's face.

Free of city traffic, the bus accelerated onto the highway and most of the kids settled down, either to sleep or concentrate on their electronic devices. Jake pulled a Chicago tour book from his backpack.

"You want to use my digital version? It has pictures and videos." Ben offered his computer to Jake.

"No, thanks. I enjoy guidebooks. I like to bend the pages of the places I want to see." Jake switched on the light above his seat but the bulb didn't turn on.

"I already tried them. They don't work. Another reason to progress from the Stone Age: backlit screen." Ben thumped the LCD on his computer.

Jake stared up at the ceiling. The light assembly was housed beneath a shelf for small luggage. The shelf had a narrow railing to prevent objects from sliding off and striking passengers. Jake bent over and pulled a shoestring out of his running shoe and then retrieved his Maglite flashlight from his backpack. Using a clove hitch knot, he lashed the light to the railing and adjusted the beam to shine directly onto his seat.

As he sat down again, he caught Natalie's eye. *She's staring at me.*

"Is that the Maglite XL200?" she asked.

Jake's heart pounded. "Uh, yes. Good eye."

"I have the XL100." She smiled before returning to her magazine.

Never knew a girl to recognize gear like that before. Jake turned around to see if Ben had heard the exchange, but he was concentrating on his video game. Jake retrieved the foldout map from the Chicago guide and studied it intently.

"What are you looking for?" Julie leaned over the aisle.

"The intersection where my mother died," Jake responded. "A hit-and-run driver struck her at the corner of East Benton Place and North State Street, right by the Chicago Theatre. They never caught the guy," Jake said.

"My goodness." Natalie put her hand to her heart.

"We should visit where she died. I can say Kaddish, the mourner's prayer," Ben said.

Although Jake and his dad weren't all that religious, they

had respect for spirituality and tradition, and Jake knew that Judaism was important to Ben's family. "I'd really like that. Thanks, Ben."

* * *

The drama at the rock climbing gym, the mysterious note from his mother, and the overall anxiety about the performing arts camp kept sleep at bay. Just when Jake didn't think he could take the confinement of the bus anymore, they turned north off Interstate 80 and headed into a cold Chicago morning. The low clouds and the fog hadn't yet burned off, and a dull gray sky dashed any hopes of their seeing the Willis Tower or the John Hancock Center. Chatter and excitement intensified and Jake started packing away all his gear, with the exception of the foldout map.

"Are we there yet?" Ben yawned as he stretched himself awake.

"Not quite, but we're approaching the south branch of the Chicago River, so Stanley House can't be too far away.

"Found it." Ben peered at his tablet, which was connected to the Internet through his cell phone hotspot. "Looks like this boarding school is smack in the middle of a residential area, but overall, it's not far from the big attractions, like Shedd Aquarium and the Field Museum."

For the next twenty minutes, the bus carved its way through the southern and mostly industrial part of Chicago. Eventually, it turned off the road onto a tree-lined driveway. Emerging from the mini-forest, it rolled to a stop before a massive iron gate in front of the century-old boarding school, which would be, for the next two weeks anyway, the kids' performing arts camp. The driver spoke to the guard, who, after checking his clipboard, waved the bus in.

"This doesn't look as inviting in person as it does in the brochure," Julie said as she peered out the window.

"I'll say. It's more prison than school," Ben commented.

"What?" Jake said. "You guys just don't know how to appreciate architecture! Look—it's great. The wall we just passed is pure Chicago brick—the original type. That kind of brick is a collector's item, and you'd never be able to afford to build a fence using brick like that today." Thanks to his architect father, Jake had little interest in baseball cards or sports cars, but he had an outsized appreciation for construction and design.

"Jake's right. Old Chicago brick is about \$2.24 per square foot versus 30 cents a square foot for standard brick," Ben read from his computer.

"I smell a challenge: brain versus computer!" Julie's eyes sparkled in the dim light. "We're approaching the building. Whoever can describe the architecture faster wins—Jake the brainiac or Ben the computer whiz."

Jake looked over at Ben who returned his nod. "Contest!" they replied, bumping fists.

"Go!" Julie said. "*Buona fortuna*," she added, happily sprinkling in some Italian she'd learned in school last semester.

Jake studied the massive structure and tried to block out the furious typing coming from Ben. "English bond brickwork, recessed and arched entranceways, elongated water spouts—"

"Stanley House boasts rustication on the corners, tracery or shapes creating a pattern in the windows." Ben's reading interrupted Jake's description.

"Collegiate Gothic!" the boys yelled in unison.

"Tie," Julie called, as nearby students shot them weird looks.

"So we both win?" Jake asked.

"Nope. A draw isn't a W."

"What was the prize, anyway?" Ben asked.

Julie leaned across the aisle close to Jake and Ben, her

light-scented perfume invading their noses. "It would have been a kiss," she winked.

Jake, who was used to some of the flirtatious things Julie said, knew she was kidding, but Ben withdrew back into his seat. *Poor Ben. He's not great with girls.* Julie was one of the friendliest and best-looking girls in the school—not conceited in any way, and tomboyish enough to be fun to hang out with—and she had many suitors. Jake wouldn't have been surprised if Ben was one of the hopefuls.

The kids retrieved their luggage from under the bus and were ushered up the steps and into the building by a young man wearing an apple-red parka with "Stanley House" emblazoned on the front. "Okay, line up, kids, in three rows of twelve students each!"

It took several noisy minutes for everyone to arrange themselves into even rows. The reception area was a cavernous room with granite floors and dark wood paneling. Several tapestries and paintings hung on the walls, the faces in them glowering at the students. Holiday decorations added the only warmth to the room. A large switchback staircase led to additional floors, and Jake found his pulse increase. *Can't wait to explore this old building.*

BANG!

Chapter 4



Monday Morning (December 22nd)

A sharp sound of metal striking the hard stone floor echoed throughout the hall, and the kids stopped talking.

"Much too slow. In the future, when you're told to line up, you will do so, quietly, in less than thirty seconds." A tall reedy man with bushy eyebrows and a creased face walked to the front of the group. A poor dye job left his hair too dark, with a few streaks of silver filtering through. He was carrying a large umbrella with a metal tip and with each step, like a cane, the tip hit the floor.

"I'm the dean of the school. You may call me Dean Stanley. My great-grandfather founded this facility and it's been run by a Stanley ever since." The man paced back and forth.

"You're here because you're talented. Shortly, another thirty students will join you. Although volunteer professionals from each area of expertise will be instructing you, I'm responsible for your well-being. When school is in session, we are home to elite students from around the world. The rooms and the amenities are all exceptional, and I want you to keep them in the same pristine condition in which you will find them. To reach your level of achievement took focus and discipline, and I expect you to apply that same control to your behavior *outside* the music room or gymnasium, as well."

"Ben was right. This is prison," Julie whispered from the side of her mouth.

"One demerit for Ms. O'Brien," Dean Stanley bellowed as he marched right up to Julie.

"That's right. I know who you are." He spun around to the rest of the group. "I know who all of you are. We work on the demerit system here. Amass five demerits and you'll find yourself back home. Let me give you some advice. Focus and discipline are the foundations of success. So focus now on the rules and be disciplined each day and I can almost guarantee that you'll be successful here. You might even *enjoy* yourselves. Now, without further ado, here's the schedule: You must line up like so each morning at six in the gymnasium." A groan emerged from the kids. "Breakfast is served from 6:05 to 7:00. You will be in class until 11:00. Lunch will commence at 11:45. At 3:00 P.M., you will have two hours for private study or one-on-one training with your coaches or instructors. The rest of the time will be yours—to use wisely, I'm sure. You will gather in the gymnasium at a quarter past five for evening roll call and then have dinner, which ends precisely at 6:30. After that, it is more study time or private training sessions or, on certain days, evening performances at various venues in the city. Lights out, and I mean lights *out*, is at 10:00 P.M. Any questions?"

Jake glanced around. Most of the kids were too fearful to raise their hands. *I have one: Are you practicing for the role of Scrooge in this year's A Christmas Carol?*

"Ah, one more thing. For those of you who didn't notice, we have state-of-the-art security here, designed to keep you safe from the outside. However, we can only keep you safe if you're here, so any attempt to leave the grounds without permission will result in immediate expulsion from the program. Now, line up for your room assignments." The Dean motioned to the uniformed staff waiting patiently nearby. Jake and Ben lucked out and ended up rooming together. The

floors were segregated, with the boys on the third floor and the girls on the second floor.

"We're in room 305. Where are you, Julie?" Jake asked as the three of them dragged their luggage up the switchback stairs.

"I have my own room—207," Julie grumbled.

"That's great. Wonder how that happened," Ben said.

"Guess," Julie responded.

"Your dad pulled strings?" Jake said.

"*Giusto*. As usual, my dad means well, but I'd rather just be a regular student, not the rich girl." Julie stopped at the entrance to the second-floor hallway. "This is me."

"It's only ten o'clock and the first activity on the agenda doesn't start until three. I was hoping we could go inside the Chicago Theatre, but since we're confined to this building, I don't know what we're going to do."

"Inside? I thought you just wanted to visit the intersection," Julie said.

Jake told her and Ben about the note he'd found hidden inside the bear and the fact that his parents had never been to Paris.

"Okay, but I still don't see what's important about the theater," Ben said.

"Well, I think my mom mentioned Paris to clue my father in that something wasn't right. She went to a lot of trouble to talk about the Art Deco sconces—you know, decorative light fixtures—but I read in my guidebook that the Chicago Theatre was built using French Baroque architecture. Art Deco wouldn't fit . . . the styles are totally different," Jake said.

"Oh, now I get it," Ben said. "But you're right. The Dean made it pretty clear we can't just wander off."

"That's what he said, all right." Jake frowned, furrowing his brow and trying to think his way around this roadblock.