



NINA SONI

FORMER BEST FRIEND

Written by
Kashmira Sheth

Illustrated by
Jenn Kocsmiersky



CHAPTER ONE

“What’s so great about going fishing every weekend?”
I asked Jay, waving my paintbrush.

Crash! My “asking hand” knocked over his pirate ship. It flung green paint from my brush too. Unlike Jay’s pirate ship pieces, the paint splattered quietly. “Sorry, sorry, sorry!” I picked up the pieces of the captain’s head and a prisoner’s arm from the floor.

The whole class stopped what they were doing to stare at us.

“Nina, why can’t you be more careful?” Jay’s green

eyes, the color of bitter melon, were full of anger. My triple apologies seemed to have had no effect.

“Sorry,” I whispered again. “I didn’t mean to. Honest. I talk with my hands waving here and there—that’s the way I am.”



“That’s just an excuse for being careless and ruining my ship,” he said.

“You know how Kavita always sings, right?” Kavita is my little sister who makes up songs.

“Yeah.”

“And my hands always move when I talk, right?”

No answer.

Even more when I am nervous, I wanted to say. But I did not; instead I waited for Jay to say something. Anything.

Silence.

“Right?” I repeated. “Hey. I didn’t mean to knock down your ship and I’m sorry. Really sorry.”

I don’t think I had ever used six sorrys in two minutes before. That’s three sorrys per minute. I thought that was an excellent apology.

Mr. Hays walked over. “What is going on here?” he asked.

Then he saw the sunken—I mean broken—ship,

headless pirates and prisoners, and splotches of green paint. His mouth flew open.

Other kids came closer. They gawked and gasped.

I wanted to hide under the table. On the floor, next to the broken pieces of Jay's ship.

"Everyone, go back to your own projects," Mr. Hays said.

I picked up a chunk of clay from the floor. I think once upon a time it was the captain's cabin. "I'm sorry, Mr. Hays. It was an accident."

He put his arm around Jay's shoulders. "It was a beautiful ship, Jay. I'm glad I saw it before it was broken. You will get an A."

That made me smile. "Thank you, Mr. Hays."

Jay was silent, staring at his broken ship and pirates.

Mr. Hays said, "Accidents happen, but try to be more careful, Nina."

"I will." I turned to Jay. "See? You still get an A. So no worries, right?"

Jay shot me a look that said *shut up*. He would have said it out loud if Mr. Hays wasn't around.

Jay and I cleaned up the mess and wiped green paint from the floor. But he didn't say a word to me.

I guess I haven't had very good luck with Jay Davenport lately. Until almost now he was my best friend. He used to come over all the time with his mom, or without her, to just hang out with us. We made squishy dough, rolled rotis, slathered them with buttery ghee after they were cooked, and ate them. While Mom worked on her landscape projects, we sat at the dining table and drew our own gardens and colored them. I loved going to his house and playing with all the blocks and building sets that belonged to his dad when he was young.

Then Jay's cousins moved here from California and Texas. So Jay got busy with them. On weekends, he went fishing with his grandpa and had sleepovers with his cousins, and every Thursday they had a big family dinner.