

Stynkchro Boy

By Christy Choi

Chapter 1

I whoop with joy as I plunge into the wide blue pool. The familiar coldness rushes over me. I take a deep breath and smell the welcoming, yet sharp, smell of chlorine. I dive under the water to swim my warm up lengths.

I am an average kid with one exception... I love synchronized swimming. You might wonder what's so weird about that, so I'll tell you in three words: I'm a *boy*. I want to be a professional synchronized swimmer when I get older; maybe even compete in the Olympics. Synchronized swimming is traditionally a women's sport. So yes, that means that only women can compete in the Olympics currently. I hope that will change. My idol, Kenyon Smith, is a male synchronized swimmer. He could probably compete in the Olympics if he was allowed to.

I keep my passion a secret from everyone outside of my team and family. It's because at my school, synchronized swimming is for girls... and girls *only*. I used to think that too, until I went to my sister's synchro practices.

I started going when my mom started to work more. I was embarrassed to be there, but I immediately found out that the coach was awesome. She let me swim as long as I wasn't disturbing the team practice. At first, I was just making fun of synchro by copying the moves, but then I realized how complicated and unique the sport really was. That was when I found out synchro is cool. I soon memorized my sister's synchro routine, and when it was time for my sister's competition, I could do it just as well as she could. I never thought that I could be on a team or even compete.

At my sister's competition, last October, her teammate, Tiffany, couldn't make it. She sprained her ankle during volleyball practice. The coach didn't know what to do, so that's when I stepped in. I told the coach that I thought I could do it. She was nervous but basically, the coach had no choice. You need eight people to compete to get the maximum amount of team points, and we really needed them. The other team's coach said that I couldn't go in the place of the girl, but the rule book didn't say anything about that. I went into the competition and our team won. That was when I fell in love with synchro. It's a hard sport and I loved performing.

Chapter 2

“Yo, Brandon!” Ryan, my best friend yells. “Wait up!” I turn around to face the old school building and see my friend weaving around kids on his blue and black skateboard. He skids to a stop and adjusts the strap of his backpack.

“Hey, Ryan! What up?” I ask, raising my hand for a high-five. He slaps my hand and adjusts his familiar blue and white cap.

“Did you hear about the new skate park that opened? I heard that it’s so sweet! There are all kinds of ramps, lots of pipes, and like everything!”

“Yeah, I heard about it too. I want to go there so flippin’ bad!”

“Well guess what?” He asks in a serious, low tone. I pause for a moment, staring at his face. He raises an eyebrow at me and I get the hint.

“No way! You’re not going there, are you?” I question. A smile slowly forms on his pale pink lips.

“I *am* going, and I want *you* to come with me. My mom says that she will drive us there.”

“Man, that’s off the hook! When are you going?”

“I’m going on Saturday... at five. Can you make it?” I think hard for a moment. I know I have something that day, but I can’t remember. I think harder and then it hits me: the statewide synchronized swimming competition. How could I have forgotten? If we win that one, then our team will go on to the nationals. The team needed me.

“Sorry, dude. I can’t make it,” I sigh, shoving my hands in my pockets.

“Why not?” he questions, folding his honey-bronze colored arms across his chest. His index finger tapped impatiently on his shark tooth necklace.

“I just can’t...” I sigh, hoping that he won’t ask any more questions.

“S’okay man... totally cool,” he says, frowning. “S’cool. See you on Monday... and remember, I’ll always be there for you bro.”

“I know that Ryan,” I sigh. “I know man.” I wonder if that would still be the status if I told him about synchro...probably not. “Why are you going all deep with me?”

“I think that you’re hiding something from me...” I tense up and look at him like he was crazy. He looks up at me and says, “I’m just kidding!” I breathe a quiet sigh of relief.

We say goodbye and I put down my skateboard and coast away from my best buddy and ask myself why I can't tell him about synchronized swimming... I really didn't even want to keep it a secret. *Would he really think I was "cool" if he knew I blew off the skate park for a synchro meet?* I answer this question instantly: *Nope, probably not.* But synchro really means a lot to me; it is like an adrenaline rush, competing with my team. I feel like I can fly, leaping off to dive, and feeling the rush of air that follows before I enter the water after the deck work. How could Ryan ever understand? I bet he would just laugh and think I was joking. Then, he'd probably tell George, Theo, Colter, Forrest, and the gang. I wouldn't be able to look at them for the rest of my middle school career! Ugh!

I mess up my hair as I roll down the sidewalk towards my house. I slam the door shut, lock it and place my skateboard next to the closet. I kick off my brown and blue Vans and ditch my backpack as I run upstairs to the safety and comfort of my bedroom. I hate thinking of what would happen if my secret slipped.

I toss my back pack on my bed and fish out my blue and black binder. I take out my math homework and work on a few problems. I send a text to my sister, Selena, reminding her to pick me up. I lay on my bed waiting for her reply; I'm too tired to finish my math homework.

Bzzz. I check my phone, expecting it to be my sister. Instead, it is a text from Courtney: my worst enemy. I know the "worst enemy" thing is lame, but it's hard not to resist if you know someone hates you and plays nasty tricks on you and all of that. And anyways, she started it.

Why is she texting me? I pinch myself to see if I'm dreaming. My phone still reads Courtney's number. I shake my head and sigh. *Ever since she joined the synchro team, she has been nice to me... and she is never nice to me... ever. She must be up to something.*

When Courtney joined the synchro team, I told her that my mom made me do it, even though it isn't true. I also asked her to keep quiet about it. I glance at the familiar smiling face of Kenyon Smith posted on my wall. When my friends come over, I always cover the poster up with one of Ryan Sheckler, an awesome skateboarder. I wonder what

Kenyon Smith would do about Courtney. I think he would read the text. I grudgingly do so.

COURTNEY: R u coming 2 synchro 2day? I text her back as fast as lightning.

BRANDON: Yah... but I may b L8. *Bzzz*. I look at my phone again.

COURTNEY: R U gng 2 the GIRLS synchro practice? U want me 2 give u a ride???? I can pick u up at 4:30. I hesitate and then start texting again.

BRANDON: Um... sorry but no, my sis is driving me there. Thnx anyways.

COURTNEY: Oh, ok. C u @ synchro. G2G. 2dles.

BRANDON: Bye.

Chapter 3

Later, at practice, I step out of the locker room and an ice cold hand lands on my shoulder. My heart skips three beats. I turn around to see who it is. Courtney. What does she want?

“Hey Brandon,” she coos, twirling a strand of her long blond hair. “Did I scare you?” I think she’s trying to pout and flutter her lashes innocently, but she just looks silly.

I twirl my goggles on my index finger. “Maybe, maybe not,” I reply. I shiver at the sound of her fake cute, innocent, nice voice... the voice you use to kiss up to parents. Disgusting.

“Anyways, I’ve been thinking about your synchro secret. If I’m going to keep your secret, then you have to do something for me.” she shifts her weight onto her right leg. “That’s reasonable, right?”

“Yeah. I guess so.” I mumble, worrying about the things that she might ask for.

“So can you umm... make Theo like me and then like, I don’t know... hook me up with him?” She says Theo’s name like he’s a god or something.

I open my mouth and then close it like a fish. I was about to yell at her that I can’t make Theo like her (nobody in his right mind would “like” Courtney) but I thought better of it. “You know what? We really need to warm up. I’ll tell you after practice? Okay?”

“Fine,” she sighs. “After practice.” Her act of innocence has disappeared. If I didn’t know better, I’d think she would have killed me on the spot.

Chapter 4

Back at home, I lie on my bed, thinking about what I have just done. I agreed to make my buddy like some stuck up brat. *How was I ever going to do this? Could I pay him?* As I scheme, I twist the rough brown cord on my wrist. All the guys in the gang have one. Feeling guilty, I untie the reminder and throw it under my bed. I sigh. I could tell that this was going to be a very long week.

Chapter 5

For four whole days I work on Courtney's request: a hook up with Theo. I try everything that I can think of: mentioning Courtney, asking him if he thinks she's cute, and suggesting he ask her to the movies. He says "No way" to everything. Finally I get desperate. Courtney keeps glaring at me constantly. I decide to bet Theo can't go out with Courtney for a week. Everyone knows Theo can't turn down a dare...

As the bell rings for lunch, I part with Ryan and make a mad dash to the snack line. I am the first one there. I quickly slap down my lunch card and order my usual: pizza sticks, chips and a slushy. As I wait for the lady to get my lunch, I replay my plan in my head. I sigh. If this doesn't work, then my future will be like Humpty Dumpty... beyond repair.

At our lunch table, Ryan tells the rest of our buds about how our chubby gym teacher fell on her face during class. We all break into laughter. When the laughter quiets down, I casually ask them who they would go out with for a skateboard. Ryan snorts and replies, "I'll give my skateboard to go out with your sister!"

I punch him in the arm and say, "No, seriously. Uh... Theo! Would you go out with Courtney for a skateboard?" Gagging noises immediately follow after the word Courtney.

"I could use a new skateboard... but Courtney? That brat? No way." Theo shrugs. "What's up with you trying to get me to like Courtney anyways? Is it a joke or something?"

I freeze. Then Theo says, "I think you like her." I ignore his comment and turn to Forrest to talk. He rolls his eyes at me and turns around to throw his apple core into the trash. I sigh. I know I have to make him change his mind, and fast... I needed a miracle.

Chapter 6

The next day at synchro practice, I see Courtney strutting over to me, so I quickly dive into the pool and start my warm up. I know there is no way to avoid her, but I can't help but try. As I dive back under, I feel something grab my ankle. I quickly pop my head up and turn around. Low and behold, it's Courtney.

"Brandon Evens!" She shrieks. "Why didn't Theo ask me out? Tell me... now!" She glares at me and puts her hands on her hips. Her mouth twists into a frown.

"Hey, Courtney, I tried my hardest but he just doesn't like you. That's something I can't change." I stare her down.

"Yes you can change that. Did you even try? Wait... no. You don't even move that lazy butt of yours, do you?" She snickers. "Guess not."

I fume with anger. The stress of the past week pours out. "Actually, no one *wants* to go out with you. Okay?" If she wasn't a girl, then she would be seeing stars... maybe even worse. I don't know.

Courtney freezes with her mouth wide open. For a moment, she looks like she is going to cry. But then she steadies herself to deliver another mean blow. "At least *I* keep *my* promises. I *really* thought that I could trust *you* to keep your side of the deal. So don't be surprised if the *whole school* finds out that you do synchronized swimming. Got it Mr. Evens?"

I am speechless. She can't be serious.

Chapter 7

Friday morning as I ride to school, I wonder about Courtney's threat. She couldn't have done anything yet. As I approach school grounds, immediately, it seems like everyone is staring. I quickly enter the building, and then I freeze. There are fliers all over the walls saying "Come see STYNKCHRO BOY at the Star Lake recreation center on Saturday at 5p.m." On the poster there's a picture of me in my trunks. I don't know what's worse; the nickname, the advertisement, or me, half naked, all over the school. I can't believe this is happening.

"STYNKCHRO BOY!" I hear someone call out to me. Right on cue, muffled laughs and giggles follow.

Until lunch, I hang my head down, trying not to be noticed. I have to talk to Courtney before this gets worse. I find her at her locker, applying lip gloss. I guess she saw me in her mirror because she tosses her hair and snorts,

“Having a nice day *Stynkchro Boy*?” She tosses her hair again and spins to face me.

“Okay, look Courtney. I really think you’ve taken this *way* too far. Me not being able to get Theo to go out with you was just a little thing that nobody knew about, but you’re like, *dissing* me with all those fliers... that’s *not* cool.”

“That’s nice to know, but *I. Don’t. Care.* You went back on your word.

“My word?” I make air quotes around “my word.” What the heck is ‘My word’?”

“You didn’t talk to Theo, so now the whole school knows that you do synchronized swimming. Duh. So can you please, *please*, act like you don’t know me? You’re an *outcast* now. Remember? Being caught with *you* will hurt *my* image, so go away. *Now.*”

Speechless, I walk to the bathroom and slam the door shut. I decide to skip lunch. I avoid the gang all day, ignore phone calls, etc. I can’t handle having my friends know my secret. I need to think of what to say to them about synchro... especially Ryan.

Chapter 8

“Hey, Brandon, wait up. We need to talk!” I hear voices behind me. I know it’s the guys, but I just board even faster. Unfortunately, George and Forrest are faster than me. “Brandon. Stop.” They stop right in front of me, blocking my way. ‘*Shoot.*’ I think to myself. ‘*What am I going to say?*’ Before I know it, the whole gang is surrounding me. ‘*Crap!*’

“Brandon, my man! Where were you?” Forrest says it like I am his long lost friend.

“Anywhere but in the girls’ bathroom,” I joke, hoping to loosen up the tension. The guys laugh along with me like nothing has happened.

“Okay, so anyways, is it true?” Forrest asks me smoothly, like we’re talking about ramps.

I play dumb. “What? Oh, you mean how my fish exploded when I was three? It’s true.” He stares me down. “No. I mean, “Stynkchro boy.” Is that true?” His eyes burn holes in me.

My heart drops and then it rips. I look down and get ready to speed away home. “Yes.” I choke it out softly and coast away faster than I ever have before, my vision growing blurry.

Chapter 9

When I come out of the locker room to stretch with the team right before the routine started, I freeze. The whole school is there, sitting on the bleachers. Even some of the *staff* is there. I can’t believe it. In the first row, I see Theo, George, Forrest and Colter were sitting. My eyes then wander to the last person sitting on the bleachers. Ryan. That made the whole gang. My eyes linger on Ryan. His gaze meets mine but then we both quickly turn away. I sigh. I was officially friendless.

I snap out of the thought as the coach tells us to hit the deck. As I walk over, I ignore the presence of the crowd and spread my arms out in an oval, parallel to the ground and seal my face into a smile. The music starts and I nail the five second deck work, and so does the rest of the team. As I dive into the water, the rush of blue greets me and the adrenaline rushes through my veins. Nothing and no one can stop me or bring me down now. I concentrate on the routine, running it over in my head. We rock the flamingos, ballet legs, and the other moves, but now we had to do the lifts. We had practiced them forever but we rarely get them perfect. I take a deep breath and brace myself for the lift. I stand on the platform made by my teammate’s legs and rise. I don’t even wobble. The music stops and I smile even wider. We did it perfectly.

Chapter 11

I sigh. The locker room was quiet except for the sound of my heartbeat. As I shrug into my blue synchro team sweatshirt, I let out a long sigh. It had been a long day. I basically lost all my friends and got humiliated in front of like the whole school. The only thing that went right was the synchro routine. We got first, but that didn’t really matter to me anymore. After all, I had no one to celebrate with... My phone vibrates against my thigh and pulls me back to Earth. I check the screen. My eyes go wide as I read who the text is coming from. Ryan. It read this...

RYAN: Hey, man, nice job. Y r u ignoring me? I thought we were best buds. BTW, I'm srty tht I was mad @ u. I just wasn't really cool about not knowing about synch, not tht u do it. Anyways, like I said b4, I will always b @ ur side... I reread the text a few times to make sure that I was seeing correctly. I take a deep breath and text him back.

BRANDON: Thnx. So r we cool? I hit send and wait for a reply. My phone vibrates after half a minute and I look down at it. My eyebrows rise in surprise; it isn't a text from Ryan. Instead it's one from Courtney.

COURTNEY: R u sorry yet? Y don't u just quit? Realization strikes me. She wanted me to quit all along so she could compete with the team. After all, she's the extra. I shake my head in disgust.

BRANDON: Look Courtney, u can't just make me stop synchro. I don't care wht any1 thinks anymore. It's a part of who I am & u can't change tht fact... think about it. I grin as I type, and that grin slowly grows to a full smile as I hit send. The name Stynkchro Boy finally felt right on me... like it really belonged and no one could take it away, just like synchro was to me. It might not be the most popular thing to do, but it was like my ligaments, if I didn't have it.... Correction, If I didn't do it, I would fall apart... it is a necessity in my life. Stynkchro Boy. I laugh for the first time in days.

