



“A kick-out story about family, friendship, and wrestling down stereotypes. Mikayla Delgado rocks!”

—Wendelin Van Draanen, author of *Flipped*, the Sammy Keyes series, and *The Secret Life of Lincoln Jones*

“Kids struggle every day with the dynamics of high expectations, performance standards, and social relationships. *Takedown* is a great example of how the sport of wrestling can help everyone involved conquer these challenges and appreciate some of life’s most valuable lessons.”

—Kyle Snyder, Olympic wrestling gold medalist



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**TAKED  
OWN**  
LAURA SHO VAN

## CHAPTER 1

# *Mickey*

I have two names. At home, I'm Mikayla. It's the name my mom picked, a gift she gave herself when I turned out to be not the third son Dad wanted, but the daughter of her secret dreams.

Mom chose my name because it sounds like a melody. It starts with a note—*Mi*—and ends with a note—*La*—like that “Do, a Deer” song in her favorite movie, *The Sound of Music*.

My mom is a really good singer. In high school, she was in all the musicals. Now she saves her voice for when we're alone in the car, with no older brothers to complain about her taste in music.

Sometimes I wish Mom didn't like my name so much. She makes everyone call me *Mikayla*, all three syllables. When I was a baby, my brothers thought that was a lot of name for a little person. Evan and Cody tried to call me *Kay-Kay*, but Mom would have none of it.

If Dad had gotten his way, I'd probably have a short name like my brothers. Their names sound like punches,

Evan and Cody, a right hook and a left jab. I was supposed to be the uppercut, to give Dad the full boy combination.

It was Evan who said my name was too soft if I wanted to be a wrestler like my brothers. Four years ago, after our parents split up, Dad put a wrestling mat in his basement so Evan and Cody could train whenever they wanted. I wasn't about to play quietly while they practiced moves with cool names like *whizzer* and *cement mixer*. I was seven years old and full of energy. My best friend Kenna and I were taking dance lessons, but it wasn't enough. I wanted to wrestle.

"What you need is a tough name," Evan said one day. "No one's going to take a wrestler named *Mikayla* seriously."

"They'll take me seriously when they see me take you down," I said, jumping on Evan's back. He was in eighth grade, solid as a tree, and still growing. That was the year Evan won state champ.

"What are you going to do, pirouette for them?" Cody said. My face got hot. I hated when my brothers ganged up on me. They knew I was about to lose it.

"Suck it up," Evan said. "No crying on the mat."

I had to show my brothers I was strong enough to wrestle. Dad was spending every weekend at tournaments with Evan and Cody. They hardly ever took me along. I was tired of staying behind with Mom and not seeing my father. Maybe Dad would let me join a team, if Evan said I was ready.

I grabbed his right leg behind the knee and pulled it hard against my chest. Evan hopped, then wrapped his arms

around my middle and lifted me off the ground, breaking my hold.

“Fight fair!” I said.

“Settle down, Kay-Kay,” Cody teased.

Evan had my arms wrapped up, so I kicked at Cody. But I was too high off the mat to make contact.

He laughed. “Mick the Kick. *Really* tough.”

“Zero percent funny,” I said.

Evan loosened his grip. “Not Mick,” he said. “That’s a boy’s name. How about Mickey?”

That’s how Mickey became my second name, my second self. Mikayla is for home and for school, where I work hard to stay on the honor roll. School is the one place where I know I can dominate my brothers. But put a wrestling singlet on me, and I’m Mickey Delgado, determined as any boy on the mat. I may not be the strongest kid, but I’m one of the quickest. And my rec league coach says Kenna and I are two of the smartest wrestlers he’s ever seen.

Kenna is more than my best friend. She’s been my training partner since I started wrestling. Now that we’re eleven and in sixth grade, it’s the perfect time to join a travel team. We’re both good enough to test our skills against competitive wrestlers. Not just from our own state, Maryland, but kids from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and New Jersey too. I hope our new coach is ready, because there’s a whole lot of girl power coming his way.