

PROLOGUE

"You coming squirt?" Corey fought to open her eyes. When she did, she saw her dad's weathered face only inches from her face. For just a moment, she considered saying no, rolling over, and going back to sleep. "Yeah," she mumbled. As pleasurable as sleeping in might seem at that moment, even in her half-awake state, Corey knew that she'd kick herself later if she didn't get up and go with him. "Good," her dad whispered before straightening up and heading for the bedroom door. "Be ready in fifteen minutes." "Okay." She threw back her covers. Why did fishermen always have to leave so early? Corey knew that she and her dad caught just as many fish mid-morning as they did during the first couple of hours after dawn. So why couldn't they sleep in just a little bit later?

Corey put on her swimsuit, and then pulled on a ratty pair of shorts and an old T-shirt. She tiptoed down the stairs to keep from waking her sister Diane, and her friend Fran, who were sleeping in the room next to hers. Her mother, in her faded blue house dress, was standing behind the breakfast bar spreading mayonnaise on pieces of white bread. She looked up and welcomed Corey with a warm smile, "You want ham or turkey?" "I don't care. Do I have to eat breakfast?" "Of course." "Why can't I eat a honey bun on the boat like dad?" "You're wasting your time arguing. Hurry up or your dad will leave you." Corey poured milk over a bowl of Cap'n Crunch cereal and began to shovel the food into her mouth. She watched as her mother wrapped the sandwiches in plastic and then put them into another plastic sack. She added a bag of potato chips and some cheese crackers. "Take off your shirt." Corey paused long enough between bites to pull off her shirt. If she had learned anything in her ten years of life, it was that her mother was serious about sunscreen. "Oh.... that's cold." She arched her shoulders as her mother squirted Coppertone suntan lotion down her back.

Her mother didn't reply but just kept rubbing vigorously. "I'm done," Corey said, as her mother wiped the remaining lotion onto the sides of her arms. Corey started to pull her shirt back over her head. "Wait," her mother ordered. "Do you want to rub off what I just put on you? And here, take these sandwiches." With all of her tasks done, she deposited a kiss on Corey's cheek and handed off the bag of food. "Okay, Mom." Corey sighed as she headed out the door carrying both her shirt and the bag. Her father was already waiting for her in his old, red, Dodge truck parked at the bottom of the stairs. He looked at his watch as she climbed in. "You're five minutes late." "Mom's fault. Had to have breakfast and, you know, sunscreen. Besides, does it really matter what time we leave?" "According to last night's fishing report, the best time to fish for Spanish mackerel is between now and 9 a.m." Corey let out another sigh. Her parents were as predictable and constant as the ocean's tides that her father followed so closely.

At the marina, her dad climbed into the flatbed of his truck and handed the fishing poles down to Corey. Then he jumped down, opened the ice chest, and put the sandwiches in. The air already seemed heavy as they started toward their boat slip. Corey struggled to balance the heavy fishing poles and keep the lines from tangling at the top. Ahead, she could see that their beach neighbors, Bob MacKinnon and his son, Tripp, were already on their boat. A curly-headed

boy, whom Corey didn't know, was peering over the back of the boat pointing excitedly at something floating in the dark water. "Morning Bob, Tripp." Corey's dad put the ice chest down in front of the MacKinnon boat. "Y'all heading out to the buoy line today?" "Morning Frank. Yeah, we're hoping to catch some Kings today. How about y'all?" "We're going trolling for Spanish. I've heard they're striking close into shore." During the adult's exchange, Tripp and the other boy pointedly ignored Corey. Feeling awkwardly uncomfortable, Corey wouldn't put the fishing poles down figuring that if she did so, it would only encourage her dad to talk longer. Finally her dad noticed her discomfort, finished with the chitchat, picked up the ice chest, and began walking again. As Corey followed him, she looked back over her shoulder to where Tripp was busy untying the MacKinnon boat from the dock. Just you wait, Tripp MacKinnon, she secretly promised him. The next time you come around my house wanting me to go fishing with you, I'll show you how it feels to be ignored.

Within minutes, Corey and her father had their boat out of its slip. The morning sunlight was beginning to peak through the tops of the trees as they chugged slowly along the canal. The familiar smells of stagnant water and gasoline followed them as they went. The water in the canal was smooth like glass except for the ripples radiating out from the back of their boat. In the distance, Corey could see the ocean waves crashing against the rocks at the canal's end. She held her breath in anticipation. Her dad had to turn the boat sharply into the oncoming waves and throttle up the power, or risk having the waves hit the side of the boat and push it back against the rocks. Corey knew with her dad at the controls of the boat, she had no reason to be afraid. Nevertheless, her heart always beat just a bit faster as they approached the end of the smooth waters. She thought it strange that she was only nervous about going out of the canal, particularly as the ocean waves were usually much higher and rougher by the time they returned. Yet it was only the going out that made her nervous. She never gave a second thought to the dangers of the rocks when they were coming home.