

Terri Clifton /RB 1

Liz stood on her toes, peering through the screen door for a glimpse of Cory's car across the farm fields. Last week's rain had caused the corn to jump. In another week it would be too tall to see over, but just now she could still catch the burst of sunlight that glinted off his windshield.

She wanted more than anything to slip out back to the shower. She needed to soap away the sweat and smell of fish. Her cut offs were dotted with stains and her tank top felt glued to the space between her shoulder blades.

The box fan leaning in the window whirred on high, moving the air but cooling nothing.

It was mid June, just two weeks after her high school graduation, and already it had been busy. Tourists and fishermen had streamed in all day. Liz was more than ready to be done working.

The store sat to itself on the only road to Cedar Beach, a tiny bay-side summer town that every year drew fishermen and a handful of out-of-town families to rent the simple cottages and spend the season on the strip of land between salt marsh and the Delaware Bay. Adam's Bait and Tackle was a low, wooden building that had weathered decades tucked under old pine trees at the edge of the marsh. It sold fishing gear and basic necessities-- snacks, sodas, milk, bread--that saved everyone a twenty minute trip into town. Scales sat outside for weighing big catches and the wall next to the door was covered with photos showing people with trout, flounder, sharks and more. A Polaroid camera was kept behind the counter for capturing the moment.

The sun was a red giant as it began to set across the cornfield, haze giving the woodline a soft focus. It would be hot again tomorrow.

Liz turned just as Cory's Firebird pulled in out front, tires crunching the clam shells

covering the now empty parking lot.

She grabbed her gym bag from under the counter as he jogged up the wooden steps and through the door. He was already getting tan, his blonde hair starting to bleach out. By the end of summer his curls would be silver white.

“So go get ready.” He grabbed a soda from the old refrigerator in the corner and sat on the stool by the cash register, ready to watch the store. They had a system.

She ducked under the hanging crab pots and around a display of clam rakes, out the backdoor into the deep shade of the overlapping branches.

The shower was just a square of plywood on a concrete pad but she loved showering under the trees. She peeled off her clothes, tossed them over the door, then freed her long brown hair from its braid. Shaking it out, she turned on the water. She drew a quick breath as the cool water met hot skin, closed her eyes and stepped fully under.

She heard Cory turn the radio up. She sang “I Love Rock and Roll” with Joan Jett, lathered enough herbal shampoo to make her feel clean again, and gazed up at the deep green.

She'd been up since dawn but she still had until her midnight curfew to have some fun. This was her last summer home. She might as well enjoy it.

“Hurry up!” yelled Cory.

“I am!” she yelled back, trying to pull on tight jeans over still damp skin. She'd have to brush the knots out of her hair on the way to the boardwalk. And it wouldn't be the first time she'd put on her eyeliner using the rear view mirror. There was a band playing at one of the bars, and even though they were too young to get in, they would still have a blast dancing in the sand, drinking rum from Coke cans and smoking pot down by the shoreline where the lights didn't

reach.

“Finally,” said Cory, as she came back in with a towel around her shoulders. “I’ve already counted the drawer and stuck the money in the freezer.”

Her boss, Rowdy Adams, was a head boat Captain that took anglers out on the bay for day trips. He would be by later to pick up the cash.

They turned off the fans, closed the windows and locked the doors. Liz was just tossing her gym bag in the backseat of Cory's car when a clean black Camaro pulled in too fast, scattering clamshells and dust.

The driver hopped out. “No, no, no. Don't be closed,” he said, coming forward, pushing his sunglasses up onto his head as the dust cloud he'd created drifted slowly toward the trees.

Good looking, hot car. He must be lost, she thought. Most tourists that looked like him were heading south to Rehoboth Beach; the same place she and Cory were headed. It had crowds and a boardwalk along the ocean. Arcades and bars and pizza and all the things vacationers love. Cedar Beach had none of that.

“Sorry.” She looked at him over the roof of the car as Cory started the engine. She tried to guess how old he was. Twenty, maybe?

“Oh, man.” He frowned. “I just needed ice. Now I'll have to drive back to the highway, unless there's another place to get it around here?”

Liz shook her head. “No, but I can get you ice, if that's all you need.” She heard Cory making impatient noises inside the car, but she ignored them.

“Thanks,” he said. “I'm staying for the summer. Cottage on the far end of Bay Drive. I'll be a regular customer.”

Liz found herself smiling, hoping that were true. He smiled back.

She walked to the ice machine next to the steps. Rowdy used a combination lock so his friends could get ice anytime, an honor system. She spun the knob and unlocked it.

He carried three bags over, one at a time, and put them in the trunk of his car. Liz watched him. Blue jeans, T-shirt, high top sneakers. Dark hair, clean cut. Cute. He wasn't here for the fishing.

He looked at her and grinned. Dark eyes amused, too confident.

Probably a jackass, she thought, but grinned back, in spite of herself.

He closed the trunk and wiped his hands on his faded Levi's as he walked over to Liz. "I appreciate that." He took out his wallet and held out a twenty.

"I don't have change." She pushed the locked closed. "Just stop by one day this week."

"Will you be working?" Again the grin.

"Most of the time, yeah. My exciting life." She gave an exaggerated sigh.

"Your boyfriend seems impatient to go."

She laughed. "That's just Cory. We've been best friends since we were nine." She glanced at the dark blue Firebird. Cory's blonde curls hid his face as he dug in the backseat for a different tape. "He'll be okay as soon as he has music and a joint."

He looked at her a moment, eyebrows raised. "Oh. Well then." He walked over to his car and leaned in the driver's window. He walked back and handed her a neatly rolled joint. "For your trouble," he said.

"No trouble at all." She closed her hand lightly around it.

He walked her to the passenger's side of the Firebird and opened the door. "I'll see you this week."

She just smiled and waved as Cory backed up.

“He was pretty,” said Cory. “Nice car. Bet he's an ass though.”

She couldn't help shaking her head at the way his thoughts mirrored her own. She held up the joint.

Cory's eyes went wide. “Guy's a prince, Liz. You should give him a chance.”

She laughed as Cory swung the car around and out onto the country road and cooling air rushed in the open windows.