



**Kacey  
& Friends**

# Spring Break

C. Fennessy

# Kacey & Friends on

## Spring Break

written and illustrated by  
**C. Fennessy**

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## Chapter One

“I can hardly wait for winter to be over this year,” Ava commented as she looked outside of her friend Kacey’s bedroom window. Kacey joined her, viewing the dark grey afternoon skies and drizzling rain. The late February snow piled along the curbs had turned to dirty slush, and the bare trees surrounding the house swayed in the sharp wind, scratching against the windows.

“I know what you mean. This winter has been awful. First, we had a ton of snow at Christmas, and since then it’s been either raining or snowing. We didn’t get to ski much this winter, either. The weather’s been crazy.”

Ava’s face brightened as she said, “But spring is coming, and you know what that means!”

Kacey thought a moment, and then grinned, “Spring Break!”

“Right! And this year we’re college freshmen, so let’s plan our Spring Break vacation!”

Kacey’s mood changed instantly from glum to happy.

“Great idea! Where should we go?”

“Well, lots of people go to Daytona or Miami Beach. That might be fun,” said Ava.

“Yeah, it probably would be fun. I’ve always wanted to try surfing.”

“We should text Emma to see what she thinks.”

“Yeah,” Kacey agreed, “Want to stay for dinner? I’m making spaghetti and meatballs with salad. You can help me cook.”

Ava nodded as she began to text Emma. “Sure. I’ll make the salad. I’ll let my mom know I won’t be home for dinner tonight.”

The two girls began cooking in the kitchen where Kacey lived. Her house was on a nicely landscaped lot across the street from a golf course. She lived with her father, who was a church pastor, and she attended Westfield University, where Ava also went to college. Sometimes they drove to classes together. Kacey’s older brother, Brian, lived in Boston and was engaged to be married. Because Kacey’s mom died of cancer when she was in high school, Kacey and her father were very close. She chose to live at home while going to college so she could have her own room, and to help pay for her education by saving the cost of going away to school. She also liked living close to her two best friends, Ava and Emma, and her

boyfriend, Joshua. Emma decided not to go to college after high school; she went to a cooking school instead where she became a certified chef. Now she was working in a local restaurant as an assistant chef.

The two girls talked about where to go during Spring Break. They both decided that a beach in Florida would be perfect, but couldn't decide on which one.

Kacey made meatballs and put them into the red sauce to cook while Ava used a yellow cake mix and a can of pineapple to make one of her own favorite cakes. By the time the meatballs were almost done, Kacey started boiling water for the spaghetti, and Ava made a tossed green salad. Everything was ready when Mr. Carlson, Kacey's father, came in the door.

Kacey greeted her dad with a smile, and he grinned back and said hello to them.

"Ava's staying for dinner, Dad," Kacey told him.

"Oh, great! We always love to have your company, Ava."

He excused himself to wash up for dinner, and the girls put everything on the dining room table.

They all sat down to eat, and bowed their heads for prayer along with Mr. Carlson. Afterward, as Kacey passed the bread, she told her father,

"Dad, Ava and I were just discussing what to do on Spring Break, and we came up with a great idea!"

"Oh, what's that?" her father asked as he helped himself to spaghetti.

"We're going to Daytona Beach!"

Mr. Carlson's fork of spaghetti froze in mid-air. His smile dissolved into a frown.

"Daytona?" he asked incredulously.

"Yeah, Dad," Kacey replied, "That's where all the college kids go."

Mr. Carlson set his fork down quietly and appeared thoughtful. Kacey knew her father well enough to know that he was not happy with this news.

"What's wrong, Dad?"

He cleared his throat and took a sip of water, deciding how he should phrase his answer.

"Well, Daytona's a very nice place, but won't it be rather crowded at Spring Break?"

Kacey and Ava looked at each other and shrugged, "Maybe, but so what?" Kacey asked.

“Well,” he began, “I guess I’d rather see you go somewhere else. Florida has many beautiful places.”

Ava said, “Yeah, we thought about Miami Beach as another place, but that might be too expensive. We don’t have a lot of money.”

Mr. Carlson didn’t reply, but began eating his salad. Kacey knew he was pondering this information and wasn’t thrilled with the idea.

“What’s wrong with going to Daytona, Dad?” Kacey asked.

“Well, it’s not Daytona that I’m worried about. It’s a very nice place. I’ve been there several times, in fact. But it does get very crowded with college students at Spring Break, and a lot of drinking and drugs go on. That’s the part that concerns me.”

Her father put down his fork and looked at her with unease.

“I don’t mind you going to Florida on Spring Break, Kacey, but the crowds at some of the places where college kids get together have gotten out of hand in recent years. People have gotten hurt or worse in some cases. I think it’s too dangerous for your girls to be there on your own.”

“But Rick and Joshua are coming, too,” Ava said, adding quickly, “But they’ll have their own place to stay, of course.”

“Even so, I still don’t think you should go anywhere where there will be large crowds of college kids congregating for Spring Break.”

The mood at the table quickly changed to a somber one. Kacey looked down at her plate in silence, and Ava felt uncomfortable. Mr. Carlson thought a moment, and then said,

“Wait, I have an idea! My brother owns a resort hotel in Lake Buena Vista, near Disney World. It’s a five-star resort, with a golf course, tennis courts, several swimming pools, and it’s located on a lake with a sandy beach. And it’s close to the theme parks.”

The girls looked at him with interest.

“But we wanted to go surfing,” Kacey said.

“Fine. You can rent a car and drive to Cocoa Beach, which is only about an hour away on the expressway. Plus, you can go to all of the theme parks in the area. But I’d prefer that you stay at a hotel where I know you’ll be safe. They have excellent security at this resort.”

The two girls looked at each other.

Ava shrugged, saying, “Well, that sounds like fun.”

“If you want to get a suite at the resort, I’ll have to call for a reservation as soon as possible,” Mr. Carlson said, “They get very busy during Spring

Break, but you won't have unruly crowds there. I'll sleep a lot better knowing that you girls are staying somewhere where I know you'll be safe."

Seeing their hesitation, Mr. Carlson put down his fork and stood up.

"Excuse me, please. I need to make a quick phone call. I'll be back soon."

Kacey smiled, guessing that her father was making an excuse so the girls could talk privately.

"Thanks, Dad."

After he left the room, Kacey turned to Ava, asking, "What do you think?"

Ava shrugged, "Well, I think staying at the resort might be fun. We can swim, play tennis, go to the theme parks, and still go to the beach to go surfing."

"You don't mind staying at one of our family's hotels? I know you wanted to go to Daytona."

"I know what your father means about Spring Break crowds. My cousin went to Miami on one of her Spring Breaks and got into big trouble. She was just hanging out with her friends and they met up with some guys. Well, to make a long story short, things got pretty ugly, and she ended up getting arrested. If that ever happened to me, my parents would kill me. But also, it would put an end to my career plans."

Kacey knew that Ava was studying criminal justice and hoped to be a detective or an F.B.I. agent someday. An arrest record would ruin her chances.

Kacey thought it over and said, "Well, if you and Emma and the guys are okay with it, I guess we can go to the resort in Lake Buena Vista."

"Great! I'll text them and let them know. I hope Emma can get off work for the week to join us."

"Yeah, me too," Kacey agreed. Spring Break wouldn't be the same without Emma.

The thought of going to a warm, sunny, beachside resort sounded like the perfect escape from the cold, dreary winter weather. The girls weren't so much interested in hanging out with big crowds of kids as they were in having fun together.

Mr. Carlson soon returned to the table and sat down to finish his dinner.

“Well, have you two made up your minds about your plans for Spring Break?” he asked casually.

Kacey nodded, “We decided to go to the resort in Lake Buena Vista. It sounds like fun, Dad.”

He smiled broadly. “I’m glad to hear that. In fact, I just called Uncle Bill to see if you could get a reservation on such a short notice. He got in touch with the hotel, and they had just received a cancellation for one of their suites. He says you girls can have it if you call him back before nine o’clock this evening. He can’t hold it open after that, and I’m sure it will be taken by tomorrow. He says if you decide to come, you will be his guests at no charge, including meals and any hotel activities.”

“Great! Let’s call him back to reserve it,” Kacey said, “But first we have to see if Emma can come.”

Ava checked her messages to see if Emma had replied, and shook her head, “Not yet.”

Ava served the dessert after the table had been cleared. As she was finishing the last bite of pineapple cake, her phone buzzed.

“Hey, it’s Emma. She says her boss said she could take off a week. She can come!”

“Great! Spring Break in Florida! I can’t wait!” Kacey exclaimed.

“Neither can I!” Ava smiled.



## Chapter Two

"Come on, Emma, get up! We've got a lot to do!" bellowed Ava, pulling the covers from Emma's bed.

Emma grabbed onto them, groaning. She grumbled, "I thought this was going to be a vacation. Why do I have to get up so early?"

"Early? It's almost nine o'clock!" Ava replied, and then added coyly, "Breakfast is waiting, and all you have to do is pick up the hotel phone and order it."

Emma bolted upright and looked for the phone, asking, "Where's the room service menu?"

Ava tossed it to her and handed her the phone, saying, "Don't order a big breakfast because we want to get on the road. We're going to Cocoa Beach this morning, remember?"

"Okay, okay," Emma grumbled as she glanced down the menu, her mouth watering at the tempting delights.

Ava went into the main room of their hotel suite where Kacey was putting her towel and sun block lotion into a beach tote.

"I want to get to the surf shop first and find out about surfing lessons. Then we can go find a nice spot on the beach," Kacey told her.

"I'll drive," Ava volunteered, "You can be navigator this time."

Kacey smiled, "Oh, you don't like my driving, huh?"

"Well, last night you did pull onto a main highway going the wrong way! We almost had an accident with our rental car the minute we even got it on the road!"

"It was dark! And I didn't know that there was a big, green island in the middle of the two lanes. Luckily, I was able to drive onto the right lane before anyone hit us."

Ava shook her head and laughed.

"Yeah, that was lucky all right! Pretty funny, too! Can you imagine if you'd been stopped by a cop and given a ticket for driving on the wrong side of the street?"

Kacey pulled a face, "Please, let's not go there!"

The three girls shared a luxurious two-bedroom suite at the Bella Vista Resort and Spa in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. They had arrived yesterday afternoon from the airport and checked in. They unpacked their things, went for a swim in one of the hotel pools, had dinner, and then took a taxi to the

car rental place where they rented a bright blue convertible. By the time they left the car rental place, it was dark, and the roads were unfamiliar to them. Kacey was not used to Florida's double-lane turns and highways separated by wide, green islands between them. Her mistake was thinking that she had turned on the highway onto the right lane, but it was part of a two-lane road going one-way in the same direction. Once the girls realized they were on the wrong side of the street, she had to drive over the green island in the middle to reach the other side safely. All the way back to the hotel her friends teased her mercilessly.

As soon as breakfast was over, the girls piled into their blue convertible and headed to Cocoa Beach, just an hour's drive from the hotel. Before leaving, they had put the convertible's top down. As Ava drove, they sang along with their favorite music. The weather was warm and sunny, without a cloud in the blue sky.

Following all the signs on the roads, they found the Surf 'N'Ski surf shop easily. When they went inside, Emma exclaimed, "This place is huge!"

The girls looked around, awed by all of the merchandize; from surf boards to swim suits, sandals, diving gear, and fishing gear, to beach toys. They soon found the counter where they could sign up for surf lessons. A young man with a deep tan and bleached hair greeted them. When Kacey told him they wanted to sign up for surfing lessons, he replied,

"We're booked all morning, but we can probably fit you in later today at three o'clock, if that's okay."

"That's great!" Kacey replied. The young man smiled at her, saying, "Cool. My name's Kyle, by the way."

"Oh, hi, I'm Kacey. This is Ava and Emma."

"Will all three of you want lessons together?"

"Yes-" Kacey began.

"No," Emma interjected.

Kacey and Ava looked at her.

"What? Don't you want to learn how to surf?" asked Ava.

Emma shrugged, "Well, not really. I'm more the beach type than the water type."

Kacey and Ava shook their heads, "Okay," said Kacey, "Just for Ava and me, then."

Kyle booked their lesson and told them where to meet their instructor at three o'clock. They paid the bill and he gave them a receipt.

The girls spent fifteen minutes looking around the surf shop, but soon left to go to the beach.

They parked their car and carried their bags out to the crowded beach.

The wind dashed waves against the shore, and swept over the beach-goers. People splashed in the shallow water, and several surfers were already riding the waves farther out. The girls found a spot away from the crowded areas and spread out their blanket. Ava and Kacey put sun block on each other, but Emma insisted on using suntan lotion.

"I want to go home golden tan," she said.

Ava grimaced, saying, "You'll probably go home red as a lobster...and just as cooked!"

Emma ignored her and pulled off her top and shorts, revealing her two-piece bathing suit underneath, and she lay down on the blanket face down. Once the girls were situated, they lay down facing the ocean, and watching the other beach-goers as they passed by.

Emma took out her cell phone and began taking a selfie.

"Texting Dave?" asked Kacey.

"Yeah. I'm sending him a photo of me on the beach...just to make him jealous."

"That's awful," Ava said, "It's not his fault that his boss wouldn't let him off work to come down here."

"I know. But I'm still sending him this," she said, smiling for her selfie. She then took two other photos of the three girls and sent those also.

"Poor Dave," said Kacey, "I wish he could have come down here with Rick and Josh on Thursday. At least we can spend a few days with the guys before we leave."

"By then we'll be expert surfers, right?" Ava said.

"Of course," replied Kacey. She turned to Emma and asked, "Why don't you want to learn how to surf?"

Emma shrugged, "I just don't like the idea of all those nasty things in the ocean that can hurt you, like jelly fish, sting rays, sharks..."

"Oh, they won't be here this time of year," Ava assured her.

"Maybe not, but why take the chance?" Emma replied, while browsing on her phone.

After an hour, Ava and Kacey decided to go for a swim to cool off. They dove into the cresting waves and floated on the salt water.

After playing in the water, the girls went back to the blanket and lay down to dry off in the warm Florida sun. Emma flipped over and began working on tanning the front of her body. When the girls were dry, Kacey suggested,

"Hey, let's go for a walk on the pier."

The girls agreed and packed their blanket into a beach bag. The beach was crowded with students on Spring Break who played volleyball or surfed. Some of the young men whistled and called to the girls. They smiled and waved back.

The Cocoa Beach Pier was a long pier jutting out into the ocean. On the pier, restaurants and bars crowded among the small shops where the girls browsed for sandals and beach wear. At one of the restaurants, they ate lunch at a table by a window where they could watch the surfers.

"I don't know how they get up on their boards. It doesn't look easy," Kacey remarked as she watched the surfers skimming over the waves.

"I'm sure there's a trick we'll learn at our lesson," Ava replied.

They finished lunch and walked back down the pier toward the shore. Two surfers waved at them from below as the surfers paddled out to the big waves. The girls smiled and waved back.

Walking along the pier, Ava suddenly stopped and stared down into the water.

Emma and Kacey noticed that she was behind them, and stopped to ask, "Hey, what's keeping you, pokey?"

Ava's face was taut with worry.

"Down there," she pointed to the water below, "That girl with the long red raft. She's in trouble!"

The girls came to her side and looked down. They could see the girl, about 12 years old, disappearing under the water as her raft drifted away. Then her head bobbed up and she gasped for air once before disappearing again.

Ava and Kacey looked around for a life guard. They spotted one on the beach and began yelling for his attention, but he was too far away to hear them.

"Oh, no! She's drowning!" Emma cried, "*Do something!*"

Quickly, Kacey and Ava pulled off their sandals, shorts, and tops, and dumped their bags at Emma's feet. They both climbed up on the pier rail and jumped down into the water, thirty feet below. They landed with a great

splash, and a crowd of people gathered around Emma to see what was going on.

Kacey came up out of the water first, and looked around for Ava. She saw her about ten feet away and waved. They both looked for the girl, but there was no sign of her.

"Did you see her?" Ava shouted.

"No!" Kacey replied, but just then, they saw something swirling in the water to their right, about ten feet away. They both swam as fast as they could. Ava dove under the water and could see the girl through murky water. It appeared as if her leg was caught on something that was dragging her down under the water. The two girls swam up to the young girl and Kacey grabbed her neck from behind to lift her out of the water as Ava dove down to free the girl's leg.

As soon as Ava saw what was there, she stopped. A six-foot long shark had latched its teeth into the girl's leg and wouldn't let go.



Ava suddenly remembered something she had seen on TV, and swam up to the shark from behind. As she drew closer, its round eyes rolled in her direction. Ava made a tight fist and punched the shark on the nose as hard as she could. The shark jerked away, letting go of the girl's leg.

The shark swam off quickly for deeper water. Ava grabbed the girl's bleeding leg on her left calf. When she reached the surface, Kacey was holding the girl's head above the water.

"She's bleeding badly," Ava shouted to Kacey, "I'll hold her leg while you tow her back to shore!"

Kacey nodded, and said to the terrified girl, "Stay calm. You're going to be all right. I'll take you back to shore. Just relax and let me do the work. Just do a back float and I'll do the rest."

After they calmed the girl, she went into a back float, and they began to tow the girl through the water. Ava swam with one hand holding the girl's leg tightly to stop the bleeding as Kacey swam while holding the girl's chin. Within a few minutes they were in shallow water.

Two life guards came running and splashing toward them. When they reached the girls, they cried, "We've got her!"

"Her leg's bleeding! It was a shark!" Ava told them. They nodded in understanding and lifted the girl up, and carried her the rest of the way to the shore.

Kacey and Ava followed, and Emma came running up the beach with beach bags flailing.

The lifeguards lay the girl on the sand, and one examined her wound while the other called for an ambulance. The life guards made everyone get out of the water until it was safe to return.

Emma arrived breathlessly asking, "What happened?"

"Shark attack," Kacey explained, "Look through the bags. We need to make a tourniquet for her leg!"

They dumped out the contents and used a towel to wrap around the bleeding bite wounds. Kacey found her hair band that she had taken off before swimming.

"This will work!" she said. She wound the hair band around the girl's upper calf and asked Emma if she had any pens or pencils in her purse. Emma quickly produced a pen, and Kacey used it to loop it through the band to tighten the tourniquet.

The lifeguards were calming the girl and assuring her that she would be okay. A crowd gathered around them. Someone offered the girl a bottle of water, and Kacey used some of it to wash away blood and sand from the bites. She gave the rest to the girl and told her to drink it.

"The bite's not too bad," Kacey told the girl, "You'll be okay. He only got a nibble, not your whole leg."

"Thank you!" the girl sobbed, "I was so scared! I couldn't call for help because the shark kept pulling me under the water! I thought I was going to

drown!"

Ava held the girl's shoulders, saying, "You're safe now. You'll be fine."

A woman pushed her way through the crowd, yelling, "Jenny! Jenny! It's Mom!"

The girl's mother hugged her daughter frantically, and Ava assured her that Jenny would be okay. Kacey kept a tight hold on the tourniquet to control the bleeding.

The lifeguards told the crowds to stay back and cleared the way when the medics arrived. The medics put a new tourniquet on and gave the hair band back to Kacey. They cleaned the girl's leg wound with antiseptic and wrapped a clean bandage around the girl's calf. Then they placed her on a stretcher and carried her off to the ambulance as her mother followed.

Kacey, Ava and Emma looked at one another.

"*Whew!*" Kacey said, "That was close. Did you see that shark?" she asked Ava.

"Yeah. It was about six feet long and it had the girl's leg in its mouth. I gave it a good, hard punch on the nose, and it swam away."

One of the lifeguards looked at the girls with admiration.

"You girls look like you've done this before. Are you lifeguards?"

They laughed, and Kacey said, "No, we've never seen a shark attack before. But we learned first aid and water safety training in high school."

He grinned and shook his head, "Well, you certainly kept your heads cool and saved that girl's life. She could have drowned if you hadn't scared that shark away. Or worse, he might have finished her off. And then you made a tourniquet to stop the bleeding, too! But jumping off that pier took a lot of guts."

They smiled and thanked him. Ava said, "I just happened to look down into the water when we were walking along the pier. I saw the girl being pulled down into the water, so we jumped in to help her. Anyone could have done it."

"Well, you're much too modest. You girls are heroes."

"Thanks!" they replied. As he left, they noticed that other people were taking pictures of them with their cell phones.

Emma turned to her friends and said, "I'm sure glad you two are okay. But I have to say it: I told you so!"

Ava pulled a face, but Kacey said, "Yeah, okay, you were right...shark attacks do happen, but usually not in March."



A teenager in the crowd who looked to be about sixteen came forward asking, "Hey, can I take your picture with me?"

The girls asked, "Why?"

"Are you kidding? You girls are heroes for saving that girl! I got the whole thing on video and it's going on You Tube! I want a photo for my Facebook page. Okay?"

The girls agreed, and he stood next to them and took their photo. He asked them to describe what happened after they saw the shark, and the girls repeated their story to him. He also got their names and thanked them for the information. As he walked away, he was already uploading his files to You Tube from his cell phone.

"Hey, you two are going to be famous!" Emma exclaimed.

"I doubt it," Kacey said, shaking her head.

A few other people who had witnessed the rescue also made comments to the girls.

"Great job, girls!" one young man called to them.

The girls thanked him, and then they headed to the car to go to the place for their surfing lesson. All the way, Emma kept on saying,

"Maybe you shouldn't go into the water today. That shark might still be out there! And if he gets a good look at you, Ava, he might decide to take revenge."

They assured her that they would be careful, and would let the surfing instructor know that a shark was in the vicinity.

When they reached the location of their lesson and told the instructor about the attack, he assured them that they were far enough away and that they would be safe. He pointed out that several lifeguards were on duty, scanning the horizon for any sharks in the area.

Their surfing instructor was a tanned and athletic-looking young man named Rico. He introduced himself and told each of his students to grab a surf board and lay it on the sand. While demonstrating, he explained how to paddle out to the area where the waves were forming, and how to mount the board.

"Lie flat on the board, using the center line to keep your body centered on the board. Now put your hands on the top of the board like this...and push up. Get up on your hands and knees, and then bring your foot forward," he explained while demonstrating.

"Now stand up and keep your knees bent. Bring your arms up to balance yourself...sort of like a yoga warrior pose, see?"

He had everyone try the move on their boards on the sand. He told them the importance of the leash.

"If you fall, and you probably will, just get back on your board and try again. The leash will keep your board from going too far away. Now when you're out there, find the peak of the wave. That's where you want to start, and head down along the steepest slope of the wave."

"As we get into the water, lie centered on your board and paddle using both arms, like you're swimming. Once you find a peak, paddle up to it and start popping up. Let's practice getting up a few more times before we go into the water."

As the students practiced, Ava asked Kacey, "Do you think that shark is still out there?"

"We're pretty far from Cocoa Beach Pier, and on the opposite side, so we'll be okay."

Emma sat in the shade at a nearby snack stand, drinking Coke and watching the girls. As they practiced getting up on their boards, she waved and gave them a thumbs-up.

"Okay, let's get out there and surf!" Rico announced, "Follow me!"

The small group of newbies followed him into the surf and paddled their boards over the rolling waves. A group of cresting waves off to the right drew their attention, and they paddled toward them. When Rico started to climb up on his board, the others found their peaks and climbed up. Kacey found it difficult to keep her balance as she was trying to stand up, but Ava got up quickly, crouching low on her board. She used her feet to balance the board and steer it, much like she had used her snow board last winter. She caught the peak of the wave and began surfing toward the shore. Emma gave a whoop and cheered from her seat on the beach.

Kacey fell off the board on her first attempt, but got back up again. She crouched and balanced herself and started to slide down the wave but lost her balance and fell again. She got back on again and found a short wave to ride to the beach. This time she stayed up on her board.

Ava's ride was slightly longer, but she fell into the sea as the wave broke. Both girls waved to each other, grinning.

"You did great!" Kacey yelled to her.

"Thanks! I decided I'd rather be out of the water than in it--too many sharks!"

Kacey laughed, and the two girls paddled out farther to wait for the next waves.

After surfing for almost an hour, Rico blew a whistle and waved to call them back into shore. They put their boards back onto the rack and Rico thanked them.

"Hey, you guys did a great job out there! Thanks for taking lessons with me, and if you ever want another lesson, you know where to find me."

"Thanks, Rico!" the girls replied and grabbed their towels to dry off. Emma came back to them and gave them their beach bags.

"You two looked like real surfers out there!" she commented.

"Well, Ava did. I still need more practice," Kacey smiled.

Ava shrugged, "I just pretended I was on my snow board. It's almost the same thing."

Emma shook her head, "Well, I was never good at that, either, and I didn't have to even think about sharks."

Kacey laughed, "Right! No snow shark attacks!"

"Hey, I'm starved," Emma said, "Let's find some place to get an ice cream sundae!"

Ava looked at her friend and asked, "*You're* starved? We're the ones who've been rescuing people and surfing all afternoon!"

Emma frowned in offense, but Kacey quickly intervened.

"Emma's right. I'm starved, too! Let's get some ice cream!"

### **Chapter Three**

The girls decided to go to one of the hamburger stands they had passed on the way to the beach. They loaded their beach bags into the trunk of the convertible and headed up North Atlantic Avenue. After a few minutes, Kacey pointed across the road ahead.

"There it is!"

Ava nodded and made a left turn into the parking lot of the restaurant. The parking lot was crowded, but they found a spot near the back.

Inside, the place was crowded with beach-goers. It was a bee hive of activity, with servers calling out orders and patrons weaving their way

through the crowds carrying trays above their heads.

"Mmmm this place smells so great!" Emma remarked, "Maybe I should get some fries instead of ice cream."

"But it's hot outside. Wouldn't something cold be nicer?" Kacey asked.

Just then, a man carrying a tray of milkshakes and ice cream sundaes passed her.

"Yeah, maybe you're right. A hot fudge sundae would really hit the spot."

Emma and Ava ordered hot fudge sundaes and Kacey ordered a chocolate milkshake. They paid for their items and looked for a table, but they were all filled.

"Let's eat outside," Kacey suggested. They all went out and headed back to the car, but Ava said, "Look, there's a bridge over there. Let's go take a look!"

The girls followed her to the small bridge that crossed the Banana River, leading to a row of condos and cottages on the other side. They walked along the bridge and looked across the water at the cottages and large boats tied to docks.

The late afternoon sun bathed the shoreline with golden light. The girls ate their ice cream standing against the bridge railing and looking out at the water. The bridge was quietly empty of traffic.

"It's so beautiful here," Kacey remarked.

"It sure is," Ava agreed, "A nice change from the cold, wet winter up North."

"Look!" Emma cried, pointing down at the water, "A giant turtle!"

The girls followed her pointing finger and soon saw a large green turtle floating in the water below. They watched as it tried to swim, but seemed to be moving aimlessly on a current.

"Oh, look! His flipper is all wrapped up in some kind of string, and he can't swim!" Emma exclaimed.

The girls leaned over the bridge to get a closer look.

"Yeah, it looks like the string is wound around the left one, so he can only use his right flipper," Kacey remarked.

"Well, he's probably safe here in this river, away from the ocean," Ava said.

"With all these big boats around?" Emma asked, "He could be run over and not be able to get away in time to avoid being hit by a boat. He needs

help!"

"Yeah, but how are we going to help? We don't know anything about turtles," Ava pointed out.

Emma frowned, "But maybe we can take that string off so he can swim better. We can at least try, can't we?"

The other two shrugged, and Kacey replied, "Sure, let's try to get him on shore and see what we can do."

The girls ran to the end of the bridge and climbed down the sandy slope to the water. The sea turtle was floundering along the edge, trying to turn around.

The girls kicked off their sandals and waded into the warm water. The shallow water had a soft, sandy bottom. The sea turtle was easy to catch in its handicapped condition. They lifted it carefully by its belly and brought it up on the shore. Its dark brown and green shell was about the size of a trash can lid, and it had greenish skin with dark brown spots on its head and flippers.

"This is fishing line!" Ava cried, touching the stiff, white line that was wrapped around the turtle's front flipper.

"And look! It's coming out of its mouth!" Emma cried.

Ava said, "He must have swallowed a hook! He needs to have that removed!"

"But how?" Kacey asked, "He needs a veterinarian to do this."

"I don't know. Let's take the turtle with us and find a vet to help him."

The girls carried the heavy turtle up to the bridge and placed it on a grassy area away from the road.

"Maybe we should get a big box to put it in so it will be more comfortable in the car," Emma suggested.

"I'll go get one from the restaurant!" Kacey volunteered. She dashed off to the restaurant while the other two kept an eye on the turtle.

"I hope he'll be okay," Emma said, "I hate to see animals get hurt."

"Me too," Ava agreed. She took out her phone and looked up veterinarians in Cocoa Beach.

"It looks like the closest vet is in Cocoa, over there on the other side of Merritt Island. I'll call to see if they're open."

She called the vet's office, but it was closed.

"Great! Now what?" Emma asked in a worried tone.

"There must be some number to call for injured marine animals. I'll do a search."

Ava looked on her cell phone while Emma sat next to the turtle, petting its smooth head.

"Don't worry, buddy, we'll get you all fixed up and then see that you get back to your sea home. Any luck, Ava?"

"Well, there is a number for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation emergency rescue. I'll try that."

While she was trying that number, Kacey came back carrying a large cardboard box with the words "Georgia-Pacific Paper Products" printed on the front.

"I think this will be big enough," she said.

Emma told her that Ava was trying to find a vet for the turtle. While Ava talked to someone on the phone, Emma and Kacey lifted the turtle and carefully placed it into the large box.

"Where are we going to put this huge box?" Emma asked.

"We'll have to put it into the back seat. I think there'll be enough room."

Ava finished talking on the phone and hung up.

"Well, they said the best thing to do would be to take it to the animal rescue center at Sea World in Orlando. It's right off of route 528, which is the route we take back to our hotel."

"Great! We can drop it off there on the way. I hope they're open."

"The conservation officer gave me their number. I'll call them now."

"Okay. Let's get this turtle in the car," Kacey said.

Emma asked, "Will it be okay out of the water?"

"Sure," Kacey replied, "Turtles are amphibians, so it's not going to be harmed by being out of the water."

The girls placed the large box on the back seat and Emma squeezed onto the seat next to it.

As Ava headed across the bridge over the Banana River, the sun was slipping down to the horizon, lighting the sky in orange and pink with lavender clouds scattered overhead.

"What a day this has been!" Kacey remarked as she checked her texts. She had one from her boyfriend Josh, and another from her dad. His just said, "Call me when you get time. I'm fine, but want to talk."

"Hmm.. I guess Dad just needs to hear my voice to know I'm safe," she said, smiling, "I'll call him later after he has dinner."

While Ava drove, Emma kept an eye on the turtle who had stopped trying to paddle its way out of the box. She was glad that he had stopped moving, but wondered if it was a sign that the turtle was dying.

"Hurry up!" Emma said, "I think he's getting worse!"

"Emma, I don't think I should go any faster or we could get a ticket!" Ava replied.

They drove for nearly half an hour at top speed but ran into traffic as they approached Orlando, and had to slow down.

"Watch for the Sea World exit as we get closer," Ava told Kacey.

The sun went down and the highway lights went on, illuminating the signs at each exit. The GPS system on the dash board told them that the road to Sea World was their next exit. Following the instructions, they turned left off the exit ramp and soon saw the main entrance for Sea World.

"Keep going straight," Kacey told her, watching the map on her phone, "The animal rescue center is farther down."

They passed two more entrances before they found the one they wanted, and pulled in. A guard at the gate asked if he could help.

"We found this sea turtle in the Banana River. He's got fishing line coming out of his mouth, and his flippers are tangled in it."

The security guard nodded, "I'll call ahead and let them know you're coming. Pull up to the door under that covered entrance to your right."

Ava drove the car up to the entrance. It reminded her of the entrance to a hospital emergency unit. As soon as she turned off the engine, two veterinary technicians dressed in blue Sea World T-shirts hurried out to greet them. They were both college-aged teens, and they introduced themselves as Amanda and Jim.

The girls showed them the sea turtle, and they examined its mouth.

"It may have a fish hook in its mouth. We'll take a look at him and get all this fishing line removed."

"Can we come inside?" Emma pleaded, "We drove him all the way from Cocoa Beach."

Amanda smiled, "Sure, but you'll have to park the car over there in the lot. This area is just for dropping off animals."

The girls helped the technicians to get the box out of the car, and Ava parked over in a nearby lot. The technicians told the girls to take the turtle into an examination room. There, a young woman wearing green scrubs

stepped forward and introduced herself. She had short, wavy dark hair and a pleasant smile.

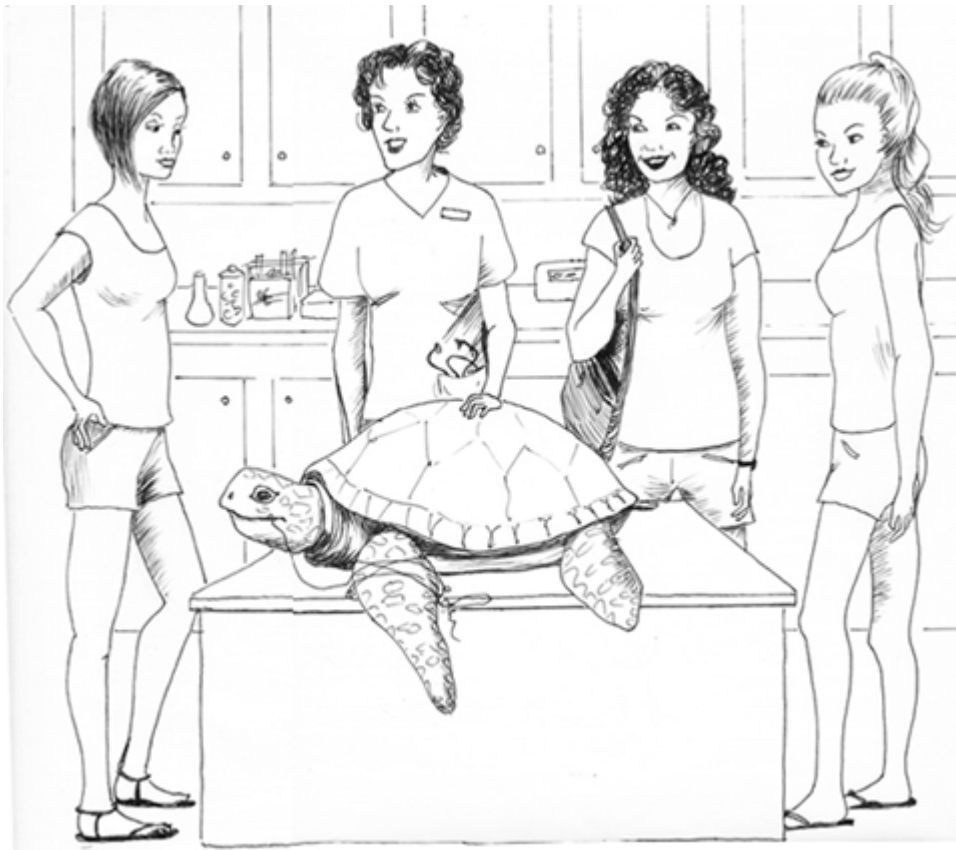
"Hi, I'm Dr. Cramer. Tell me how you found our friend here."

As the technicians lifted the turtle out onto the table, Ava, Emma and Kacey told her how they had found the turtle floundering in the Banana River under a bridge.

"We tried to find a vet who was closer, but when I called the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Center, they suggested that we bring him here," Ava replied.

"Well, I'm very glad you did," said Dr. Cramer as she looked inside the turtle's mouth.

"I'll have to do an X-ray to see where that line goes. In the meantime, I'll cut these lines around his flippers. Please get the X-ray machine ready," she told the technicians.





The girls stepped out of the way and watched as the doctor cut away the fishing line and the technicians rolled the X-ray machine to the table.

After the X-rays were taken, the doctor looked at them on a computer screen.

"It's a fish hook all right, lodged in its throat."

"Oh, how awful!" Emma cried, "Can you get it out?"

"Yes, but we'll have to put him under anesthesia first. Let's get an I.V. started," she said to Amanda, and then told Jim, "Get everything ready for surgery."

Dr. Cramer looked at the girls. Seeing their concern, she smiled.

"Don't worry. The turtle seems to be in fairly good health, so I don't think the hook has been in there long. Getting it out early gives him an excellent chance of a speedy recovery."

The girls sighed with relief.

"Oh, great! We were worried that he might die," Kacey replied.

Emma asked, "Who would do such a thing to a helpless animal?"

"The turtle may have tried to eat the bait on the hook," Ava said.

Dr. Cramer replied, "But green sea turtles do not eat meat. They're herbivores."

"Maybe it thought it was eating a giant lump of sea weed, or something," Emma guessed.

Dr. Cramer explained, "It may have been feeding when it accidentally swallowed the hook and line. Sometimes fishermen cut their lines when they get tangled, leaving the hook on the end. Then it gets tangled in some weeds and later it's ingested by an animal feeding on the weeds. It's quite dangerous for marine animals."

"Do you get a lot of animals with fish hooks and lines in them?" Kacey asked.

"Yes, it's fairly common. Fortunately, you got this turtle here before he became too sick or unable to swim. He's going to be okay as soon as this hook is removed, but we'll keep him here for a few days to see how he swims and make sure he's healthy before we put him back into the sea."

"But he was found in the river," Emma pointed out.

"Yes, he probably drifted there, but he would be happier in the ocean. That's his natural habitat. Now, I must prepare for surgery, so I'll have to ask you to leave."

As the girls headed for the door, Emma asked,

"Can we come back tomorrow to see how he's doing?"

Dr. Cramer smiled, "Of course. Just call ahead first so I can tell the security guard at the gate to expect you. Here's my card."

She handed the girls a business card with her name and phone number on it. They all thanked her and the two technicians as they left.

Getting into the car, Ava said, "Well, we saved two lives today. Do you think we're done for the day?"

"I hope so!" Emma replied, "I'm starved. We'd better hurry back to the hotel or we'll be late for dinner!"

## Chapter Four

When they got back to their hotel suite, everything looked fresh and clean.

"Wow, this place looks great!" Emma exclaimed, "Talk about maid service, she even hung up our clothes in the closet!"

"Look, here's a note from our maid," Kacey said, reading a card from the table, "Welcome! I hope you will enjoy your stay. If you need anything, please call Housekeeping. Latanya"

"How nice. Maybe we'll get to meet her sometime," Emma replied.

"Let's get ready for dinner," Kacey suggested.

While waiting for Emma and Ava to finish getting ready for dinner, Kacey called her father.

"Kacey!" her father greeted, "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, sure Dad, why do you sound so worried?"

"I saw on the six o'clock news about what happened at Cocoa Beach today! I saw you and Ava jump off that pier! Did you hurt yourself?"

"Wait- what do you mean you saw me jump off the pier?"

"It was on the national news! Someone made a video of you and Ava rescuing that girl from a shark. Are you okay? Is the girl all right?"

"Wow! You're kidding! A video of us on the news? Oh, yeah, Dad, we're fine, and the girl is going to be okay, too. But if Ava hadn't scared that shark away, he probably would have drowned that girl. The shark kept pulling the girl down under the water. We just took her back to shore and gave her first aid for the bite on her leg. The medics came pretty quickly and took her to a hospital. That reminds me, I should call and see how she's doing...but I don't even know which hospital they took her to."

"On the news they reported that she was taken to Cape Canaveral Hospital, and that her name is Jennifer Banks, from Fort Wayne, Indiana. I think they said that she was in stable condition. But I must hear all the details about how this happened," her father said.

Kacey told him the details of how Ava spotted the girl drowning, and how they both jumped off the pier to save her after they tried unsuccessfully to get a lifeguard's attention. When she finished her story, he said,

"Well, I am grateful that no one was hurt, and the girl, Jennifer, will be all right. You were very brave to jump into the water from the pier. If there had been any rocks under that water, you both might have been killed."

"I know, Dad. But luckily, we were safe. The water was really deep where we jumped in. In fact, I'm not sure why the girl was out so far from the beach.

But everything worked out okay. But that's not the only life we saved today."

Kacey went on to tell him about saving the sea turtle and taking it to the emergency rescue center at Sea World. He was surprised to hear about another rescue and at the end of her tale, he said, "It sounds like you three have been very busy. Have you been enjoying yourselves?"

She assured him that they were having a great time, and told him about the surfing they did.

"Weren't you afraid of seeing more sharks?"

"Our instructor said it was really rare for a shark to be there this time of year, but the lifeguards kept a close eye out and promised to warn us if they saw any. We were really far from the place where the shark attacked, so we were fine. And, I think Ava scared off all the sharks!"

"Well, I hope the rest of your trip will be less dangerous and more fun. What are you planning to do tomorrow?"

"We plan on going to Sea World to check on our sea turtle, and then spend the whole day at Sea World until the fireworks show at dusk. There are lots of things to do there. Then we'll come back to the hotel and have a late dinner and maybe go for a swim. The pools at the hotel are heated and really nice, Dad!"

"That sounds wonderful. I'm glad to hear that. Do you like the hotel?"

"It's amazing! The manager greeted us when we checked in and gave us a beautiful two-bedroom suite. He also said we could order anything we want from room service or the restaurants. That reminds me...we have reservations for dinner, and I'd better get going or we'll be late."

"Thanks for calling, Kacey. I love you."

"I love you too, Dad. Bye!"

As they were taking the elevator down to the second floor of the hotel, Kacey told the girls that they had been on the evening news.

"See?" Emma said, "I told you that you'd be famous!"

"I can't believe it made the TV news back home," Kacey said. "When we get to our table, I'll find the video online and we can watch it."

Ava smirked, "I guess it must be a slow news day if we made headlines!"

Their dinner was prepared by one of the best chefs in town. Emma evaluated everything that they were served, and gave the chef her highest approval.

"Oh, I wish I could see the kitchen here. I bet it's really something!" she said.

When the waiter refilled their drinks, he smiled and said,

"Oh, and by the way, congratulations on saving that young girl. I saw it on the local news. You were both very brave!"

Kacey blushed and looked at her friends, saying, "Well, we all worked as a team."

The manager nodded, "That's good. I'm sure the parents of that girl are very grateful."

As he walked away, the girls laughed at the idea of being famous. Emma insisted that she didn't do anything to rescue the girl.

"Are you kidding?" Ava asked, "You're the one who told us to 'do something!'"

Emma nodded, "Yeah, I guess I did. And I held onto your stuff while you were in the water. And I did give you the pen for the tourniquet. So yeah, I guess I did help!"

Kacey smiled warmly at her and Ava nodded in agreement.

The girls ordered dessert and tasted each other's to sample all three, but they could barely finish eating them. The waiter gave them a copy of the bill and told them there was no charge. However, the girls left him a generous tip.

On the way back to their room, Kacey's phone rang. It was her boyfriend, Josh, who wanted to hear all about the rescue he had seen on the Internet. As Kacey was talking to him, both Ava's and Emma's phones rang as their boyfriends called asking the same thing.

Ava finally hung up and said to the others, "I don't think we're going to have time to swim tonight. We have a ton of texts and phone calls to answer."

"Yeah, and I'm tired out. Let's just stay in our room," Emma replied, and they headed into the elevator.

"I never thought being famous would be so much work!" Ava commented.

"Ow! Ow, that hurts!" Emma cried, tears springing to her eyes.

"Well, hold still!" Ava snapped, "I'm trying to be as gentle as I can."

Emma held her mouth closed and groaned in pain as Ava applied lotion to Emma's back to alleviate her sunburn pain. Emma had woken up in pain early that morning after a restless night's sleep. She was the first one up that morning, and was shocked by her red reflection in the mirror.

Kacey came over to take a look, and then made a face.

"Oooh! That's really red. I bet it hurts," she said.

"No kidding!" Emma replied, "Okay, Ava, that's enough! I can't take it anymore!"

"I'm finished, anyway," Ava said, closing the spray bottle, "If only you had used sun block yesterday, then--"

"Yeah, I know! I wouldn't have this sunburn. But I thought once I had a tan I wouldn't get a burn," Emma explained.

"Be sure to keep your skin covered today while we're at the park," Ava advised.

Kacey called Dr. Cramer at Sea World and told her that they would like to visit the sea turtle and asked about his condition.

"He went through surgery very well," Dr. Cramer reported, "We removed the hook and line, and sutured his esophagus. His throat is probably a little sore, so we're feeding him a liquid diet. He should be ready to go home in a few days."

"That's great news! Well, we'll see you later this morning."

"I'll let the guard at the gate know you're coming."

"Thanks," said Kacey, "Bye!"

The girls gathered their belongings and headed out for breakfast at the hotel café, which overlooked a large, bright blue lake. As they passed an open door across the hall from their room, they peeked inside. A maid was carrying an armful of towels to her cart.

"Good morning," she smiled.

Kacey noticed her name tag read, 'Latanya'.

"Hey, you're the one who left us that nice note yesterday. It's great to meet you," Kacey said, extending her hand. Latanya looked to be the same age as Kacey and her friends.

Latanya put the towels into a large laundry bag and wiped her damp hands on her uniform before shaking Kacey's hand.

"It's nice to meet you, too."

"I'm Kacey, and these are my friends, Emma and Ava."

Emma said, "Our room looked really nice when we came back yesterday. You even hung up our clothes. That's great service!"

Latanya smiled shyly, "Oh, you're welcome."

"It's nice meeting you," Kacey said, "We'll let you get back to work. Maybe we'll see you again sometime."

"I hope so. Thanks for stopping to introduce yourselves," Latanya said, and waved as they left.

"She seems really nice," Emma remarked, and the others agreed.

The girls climbed into the convertible and put the top down so they could enjoy the warm, sunny weather. As Kacey backed out of the parking space, she said, "Let's call Cape Canaveral Hospital and see how Jennifer Banks is doing."

Ava looked up the number and called the hospital. She spoke with someone who told her that the girl was in stable condition. Ava asked the person to let Jennifer know that the girls who rescued her had called and hoped she would

get well soon. After hanging up, Kacey mentioned that it would be nice to visit her, but they all agreed that the hospital was too far away for a personal visit this morning.

"Hey! Do you know what we should do?" Emma asked.

"What?"

"Let's stop at a florist's shop and send Jennifer a bouquet of balloons or something!"

Kacey said enthusiastically, "That's a great idea! Where's the nearest florist shop?"

Ava looked it up on her phone and found directions. In fifteen minutes, the girls were parking the car outside the florist shop in a long strip mall.

Once inside, the florist showed them all sorts of gifts they could send, including toys, fruit baskets, candy, balloons, and flowers. The girls decided on a large stuffed teddy bear holding a small box of candy and a single helium balloon that read, "Get Well Soon!" After paying for the gift, the florist assured them it would be delivered that afternoon to Jennifer at the hospital.

Soon after, Kacey was driving up to the gate at Sea World Rescue where a security guard smiled at them before checking their ID, and letting them pass. Kacey parked the car in the small lot next to the emergency rescue hospital, and the girls went inside.

Amanda, the veterinarian technician, led them to an outdoor area where there were large tanks and small pools. They followed her to a pool where the sea turtle was floating in salt water.

"Oh, he looks better already!" Emma declared.

"Well, he's a little groggy from the anesthesia, but he'll feel much better in a day or two."

The girls took turns gently stroking the turtle's head, and he didn't swim away in fear.

"Do you think he remembers us?" Emma asked.

Amanda shrugged, "I don't know. But he doesn't seem to be scared of you."

"Maybe he just knows somehow that we wanted to help him," Emma replied.

Ava said, "Actually, he's probably just too groggy to be afraid of us."

"Gee, we should have brought him some 'get well' balloons, too," Emma joked.

Kacey asked, "When you let him go, will you take him back to Banana River, near the bridge where we found him?"

"No, we have a better spot on Cape Canaveral, at the beach, where we release animals into the ocean," Amanda.

The girls thanked her for letting them visit, and waved goodbye to their sea turtle knowing they would probably not see him again.

They drove around to the main entrance of the park and parked their car in a huge lot among rows and rows of other cars. A park tram drove around picking up people and taking them from the lot to the main entrance. After purchasing their tickets, the girls looked at their maps and planned the activities they wanted to do at the park. Emma wanted to go shopping in all the gift shops, but Kacey and Ava convinced her to do that later when the lines to the rides became longer. So they headed for their first roller coaster ride, Manta.

The girls were excited as they climbed into their seats in a giant, blue manta ray coaster. The ride began with the seats lifting up backwards so the riders faced down. Slowly, they climbed upward, facing the ground as they climbed higher and higher. Suddenly, they fell in a fast nose-dive down head-first that made the girls scream in terror.

"I'm flying!" Ava screamed, but Kacey and Emma were screaming too loud to hear what she said.

The Manta took them back up and twisted them around and around in a 360 degree roll before speeding down toward a large pool of water.

"We're going to get soaked!" Ava screamed, feeling as if they were heading into the pool at a tremendous speed. But at the last minute they turned sideways and skimmed along the surface, sending a jet of water splashing over everyone. Everyone shrieked louder after getting splashed, and the Manta soared upward for a final twist and turn before it sped downward again. Finally, it began to slow down as it approached the loading platform.

The girls laughed hysterically as they got off the coaster and followed the crowd to the exit.

"That was amazing!" Kacey cried.

"I can't believe how fast we were going!" declared Emma.

"I felt like I was flying!" Ava exclaimed, "Especially when the seats went back and we were facing the ground!"

The girls hurried to the next coaster, Kraken, and got in line. Soon they were getting into their seats and heading up to the sky again. On this ride, their feet were left dangling, but their bodies remained upright. The coaster soared higher and then dived down toward the ground at an astounding speed. All the girls screamed in reaction to the speeding and twisting turns that brought them around a big circle, then down to the ground like a rocket. After a few more terrifying twists and turns, the coaster slowed as it approached the end of the ride.





After the roller coasters, the girls decided to go on the Wild Arctic simulator ride. The seats were on machines that lifted the audience up and moved them around while they watched a large screen. Their simulated helicopter flight took them on an Arctic expedition.

"This feels so real!" Emma declared to Kacey, "I really feel like I'm in a helicopter over the Arctic! It's even cold in here!"

After the ride, the girls all agreed that it had been a very realistic ride over the Arctic, and wanted to visit an attraction called 'Antarctica: Empire of the Penguins'. There they found themselves twisting and turning in large round pods through a colorful cavern of flashing lights and music. Next, they journeyed down under the sea, swimming with sea lions and penguins. Their ride ended by passing a huge colony of live penguins hopping over the snow-covered rocks and ice. The girls loved watching the penguins waddle and slide over the ice.

"That was great!" Kacey exclaimed as they walked away from the ride.

"Yeah! I really felt like I was really diving under the water! I never expected our seats to move like that!" Emma cried.

The girls checked the show schedule and decided to watch the marine animals show in the large stadium. Before going inside, they bought drinks and popcorn.

"Let's not sit in the splash zone," Ava suggested, "I've had enough of swimming with marine animals for this trip."

The girls found seats up higher where they could see the entire gigantic pool. Soon, the host came out to greet the audience. Two large jumbo screens displayed everything in the show. The girls all cheered and clapped for the animals, and screamed when they splashed down into the water, sending a huge shower over the bottom rows of people below them.

"I loved that!" Kacey exclaimed as they left the stadium. "How cool it must be to work with those animals every day. They are so amazing!"

"It was pretty incredible all right," Ava agreed.

"Let's get some lunch. It's almost one o'clock!" Emma reminded them.

The girls had lunch at Mango Joe's where they were able to find healthy foods with tropical flavors. Leaving the restaurant, they visited the Stingray Lagoon where they could feed and touch the stingrays as they swam by. After interacting with the stingrays, Kacey suggested that they visit the Shark Encounter.

"Haven't you two had enough of sharks at Cocoa Beach?" Emma asked.

"These sharks won't bite," Ava assured her, "Come on, it'll be fun!"

They went into the tunnel and viewed the sharks as they swam around past the thick glass walls.

"Do you see the one that was at Cocoa Beach that you scared off?" Emma teased.

Ava nodded, "Yeah, I think it was that one with the bruised nose," she pointed. Kacey laughed.

"Don't get too close to the glass. You might scare him off again," Emma said.

The girls viewed the sharks for a while and learned some interesting facts about them from the displays on the tunnel walls.

In the afternoon, they got on the Journey to Atlantis ride and at the end, their car shot down into the large lagoon, soaking everyone to the skin. They all screamed and laughed at each other as they climbed out soaking wet, and then headed to view some of the wildlife in the park.

"This way we can dry off in the sun," Kacey suggested.

The girls spent the rest of the day going on more rides, exploring the unique gift shops, and viewing sea mammals. By evening, they were tired and hungry.

They decided to eat dinner at the park, and found a Tex-Mex restaurant called the Seafire Inn. Hungry after their active day, they ordered lots of different dishes and shared them. After dinner they went back to ride Kraken and Manta again, and enjoyed the view from the top of the Sky Tower.

After the sun slipped down to the horizon, they found a place to watch the fireworks show. The girls were thrilled by the sounds of colorful lights bursting high above, showering over the park in brilliant neon colors.

"That was great!" Ava cried after the show ended. The girls headed back to the parking lot.

"What a fantastic place to visit. I never realized there were so many fun things to do here," Emma remarked.

"I'm glad we came," Kacey agreed, "Remember, we promised the guys that we would wait until they got here to go to Disney World with us. So what should we do tomorrow?"

Kacey replied, "I saw an ad on TV for an awesome shopping mall not far from here."

Ava nodded, "Great, let's do that!"

## Chapter Five

The next morning, the girls decided to eat breakfast in their room. After ordering from room service, they sat out on the balcony, enjoying the bright, warm sunshine and watching people walk around the hotel grounds as they kept in touch with friends on their phones.

A little while later, Kacey decided to get something to drink, so she left the room and headed for the soft drink machine near the elevator.

As she walked down the hallway, Kacey heard someone shouting in one of the rooms. She noticed that a maid's cart was in the hallway ahead, and the door to a guest room was open beside it. As she drew closer, she could hear a woman's voice shouting, "You must have taken it! Where is it?"

Another voice, crying and sobbing, insisted, "I didn't take it! I swear!"

"Well, it was right here this morning! I'm calling Housekeeping right now to report this."

"But I swear I didn't take it!"

"Get out! Get out of my room this instant!" the woman shouted.

Kacey watched as the maid ran into the hall and down to the elevators. She was sobbing with her hands hiding her face. She pushed an elevator button and cried as she waited.

Kacey came closer to the elevators and noticed that the maid was Latanya, who they met yesterday.

"Latanya?" she asked softly, "Are you all right?"

"Oh!" Latanya cried, looking embarrassed. "Yes, yes, I'm fine."

"What happened back there? I heard that woman shouting at you."

"It's nothing," she sobbed, "I'm sorry. Please don't report me!"

"I'm not going to report you, I want to help you," Kacey said, "What happened?"

Latanya looked frightened as she cried, shaking her head, and Kacey was concerned.

"Do you want to come to our room and wash your face or something?"

"She's going to report me," Latanya said, "She says I stole her diamond ring, but I didn't! I swear, I didn't!"

Kacey put her arm around her, saying, "I'm sure there must be some mistake. Maybe the woman forgot what she did with the ring. Maybe she'll find it in her room."

Latanya sobbed, "If I lose my job, I won't be able to go to college in the fall! And no one will want to hire me ever again!"

Kacey shook her head, "Let's not jump to conclusions. There's a good chance that everything will be okay. Why don't we go see the manager together so he can hear your side of the story first?"

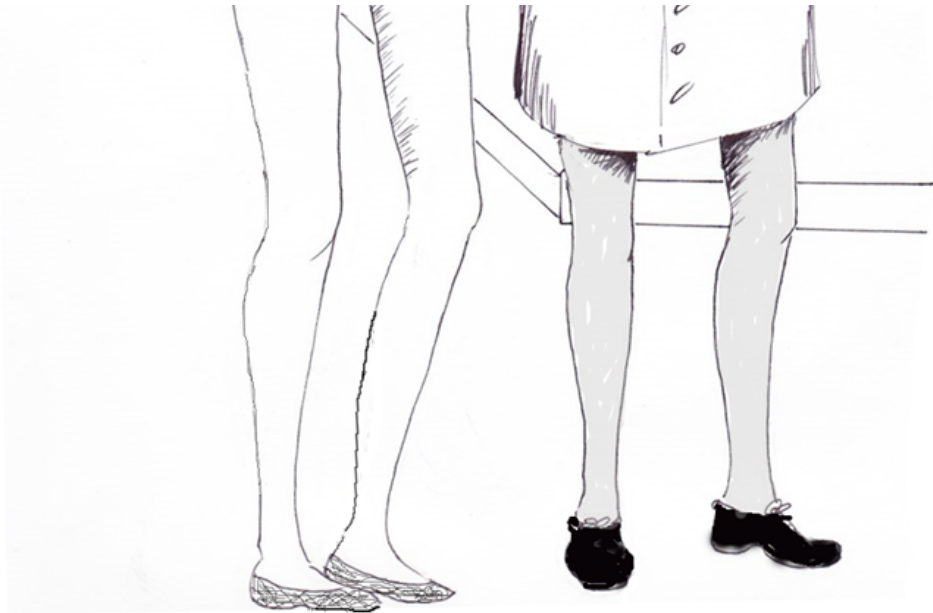
Latanya shook her head, "He won't see me. Only the head housekeeper will, and she'll fire me."

Kacey put her arm around Latanya's shoulder.

"I'm sure they will investigate to find the ring first. I know the manager a little, so if we go to him together, I think he'll listen to us. Come on, I'll take you to see him."

The elevator bell rang and the stainless steel doors slid open. They got into the elevator and took it down to the lobby.





At the reception desk, Kacey found out where the manager's office was located and asked to see him. When Mr. Robertson came out to the front desk, he saw Latanya looking forlorn, and he became concerned. He had welcomed Kacey and her friends when they arrived, and knew that Kacey was a family member of the Carlsons, who owned the hotel.

"Is everything all right, Miss Carlson?"

Kacey asked, "May we speak to you in private, please?"

"Of course. Come this way," he replied.

The girls followed him down to the end of the reception desk and through a door. The manager's office was elegantly furnished with large, comfortable leather chairs, and a big desk. Mr. Robertson sat down behind the desk and told the girls to be seated.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your morning," Kacey began, "But I thought that Latanya should get to tell you her side of the story first."

Mr. Robertson looked at the maid and asked, "Latanya? What happened?"

Latanya looked unsure about speaking, but Kacey gave her an encouraging nod.

"Well, Mr. Robertson, I was cleaning rooms up on my floor this morning when a woman came out of 212 and started shouting that she had been robbed. I went to see her, and she said that a diamond ring was missing from her room. She told me that I must have taken it because I have a key. But I didn't take her ring, I swear I didn't!"

Mr. Robertson made a note of the room number and said, "I'll take care of this, Latanya. You go back to work. I'll come up to see you later."

Latanya nodded, "Yes, sir."

As they stood up to leave, Kacey said, "I'm sure there must have been some kind of mistake. Latanya has been doing such a great job on our room. I can't imagine that she'd do such a thing."

Mr. Robertson nodded, "Thank you, Miss Carlson. We'll have Security investigate this at once. There's no need for you to be concerned with it."

"Well, I just wanted to help, that's all."

"I appreciate that, but we'll take care of everything. And please, accept my humble apologies that you had to witness this."

"Oh, no apologies are needed, Mr. Robertson. I heard the woman shouting and saw Latanya crying, and I asked her to tell me what happened. I convinced her to let me bring her down to see you, and to let you know that she didn't take anything from that woman."

"Thank you again, Miss Carlson," he said, seeing them to the door.

Latanya and Kacey went back to the elevator and up to the second floor. Kacey wanted to say something to relieve Latanya's distress.

Kacey asked her, "You mentioned that you're going to school in the fall. Where are you going?"

"Well," Latanya answered quietly, "I had hoped to go to Valderra Community College, but if I lose my job, I may not have enough money. I have only been in the U.S. since January. I come from Haiti. I came to find work and earn money so I can go to school here. I have to pay high tuition because I'm not a state resident until I am here for a full year, so that's why I have to save my money. My family is very poor, and they're depending on me to help support them when I graduate. I hope to bring my younger brothers and sisters here and support them while they are going to college."

"Well, I am sure this will all blow over quickly and you'll keep your job."

The elevator bell rang and the doors slid open. They stepped out and Latanya said, "Thank you for helping me. I don't know many people here."

It's great to meet someone nice like you."

"Well, I'm sure that it will all work out okay. I'll keep you in my prayers," Kacey said.

"Thank you!" Latanya said with a little smile, "That means a lot. You can call me Tanya, by the way. That's what my family and friends call me back home. Well, I'd better get back to work now."

"Okay, Tanya. I hope I see you again later. If you need any help, please come to see me or leave a message on our room phone," Kacey said as they waved goodbye.

After Tanya left, Kacey bought some soft drinks and returned to her room.

As she entered, Emma and Ava were seated at a table and eating breakfast.

"What took you so long?" Emma asked, "Your waffles are getting cold!"

Kacey told them about the incident, and they listened intently.

"Wow, that's awful!" Ava remarked.

"Yeah, poor Tanya! Do you think she'll be fired?"

Kacey shrugged, "I hope not. Hotel Security is going to investigate the matter. I hope they find the ring so Tanya will be cleared."

"Me, too," Emma agreed, "I'd hate to see her miss out on going to college because of this."

"Yeah, and it's got to be tough for her being new to this country," Ava pointed out.

"Yeah, I know," Kacey agreed, "I wish there were something I could do to help."

"Maybe they'll find the ring and everything will be okay," Ava said.

"Yeah, I hope so," Kacey agreed, but she was thinking about how Tanya wanted to help her younger brothers and sisters to go to college. She silently said a little prayer for Tanya, asking God to help her.

The girls left the hotel by mid-morning and headed for the largest shopping mall in town. They spent the day going from store to store, trying on clothes and buying clothes and gifts for friends and family. They found an Asian restaurant in the mall that looked inviting. After lunch, they shopped for another two hours and then headed back to their hotel to go for a swim.



There were two huge pools at the hotel, complete with tropical gardens, waterfalls, and two smaller, shallow pools for the kids. They had fun going down the twisting water slides and splashing into the water. After swimming, they lay on chaise lounges in the sun to dry off.

"I'm getting hungry! Where can we get a snack?" Emma asked, sitting up on her beach chair.

Ava pointed to a thatched-roof cabana to one side.

"Why not try the Snack Shack? And bring us some lemonade and some grapes or something, too," she said.

Emma nodded and left to get the snacks while Ava and Kacey continued sunbathing.

"Is this seat taken?" a man's voice asked.

The girls looked up to find a handsome young man staring down at them. He had a bright smile and dark eyes.

"I'm afraid so," Kacey answered, "Our friend just went to get something."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that," he answered in a foreign accent. "My name is Juan," he added, holding out his hand to shake.

Ava shook it and smiled.

"Hi! Nice to meet you. I'm Ava and this is Kacey."

They shook hands also, and then Juan continued, "I just arrived here from Puerto Rico. This hotel is really beautiful, yes?"

"Oh, it's great," Ava admitted.

"I can find a table for the four of us if you ladies would like to join me," he suggested, his bright white teeth gleaming in his tan face.

Kacey said, "Oh, thanks, but we're fine here. Our friend should be back any minute and then we'll be going back to our room."

Juan nodded, "Okay. Well, maybe some other time."

"Yeah, sure," Ava replied politely. He gave them a wave and left.

Ava turned to Kacey, asking, "Was he just being polite, do you think, or trying to pick up one of us?"

She grinned, "Let's give him the benefit of the doubt and say he's just being polite."

Ava nodded, "Well, if I didn't already have Rick as my boyfriend, I might have liked to spend some time with Juan. He seems nice."

"And he's cute!" Kacey added.

Emma returned with their snacks of drinks and fresh fruit. She sat back down on her own beach chair and dug into her ice cream sundae.

"An ice cream sundae?" Ava asked incredulously.

"Sure, why not?" Emma mumbled with her mouth full. "It'll cool me off."

"Yeah, but we'll probably be eating dinner in a couple of hours. If you want to cool off, jump in the pool!"

She glanced at the scintillating blue water and shook her head.

"No thanks."

Ava rolled her eyes at Kacey, who just smiled. After their snacks, the girls decided to go back to their room for a while.

As they were changing clothes, Emma went through her carry-on luggage, looking for a top to wear, and noticed that her camera was missing. She looked in her beach bag, in her purse, the closet, and chest of drawers.

She found Kacey in the bathroom fixing her hair, and asked her, "Did you see my camera?"

"No," Kacey said, shaking her head, "When did you use it last?"

"Well, I know I brought it with me in my luggage, but it's not there."

She asked Ava the same question, and Ava replied, "No. But why did you bring a camera? You've got a cell phone!"

Emma tilted her head to one side, "I know, but my camera takes better pictures. It's got a better zoom lens and a sharper focus. And it takes better pictures in dim light. But I can't find it anywhere."

Ava joined her in the search.

As Kacey was putting on her make-up, she searched her make-up bag for her necklace, and couldn't find it.

She went through all her bags, then started looking in drawers.

"We already checked all the drawers," Ava said.

"What?" asked Kacey.

"The camera's not in the drawers. We already looked," Ava explained.

"But I'm not looking for that. I'm trying to find my necklace...you know, the gold cross on a chain that Aunt Mary gave me last fall?"

"It's missing too?" Ava asked as she stared intently at Kacey.

"Maybe I dropped it somewhere," Kacey said as she went down on her knees and searched under the beds.

The girls went through everything in their rooms, including the bedding, but couldn't find the camera or the necklace.

Ava stood in the center of the room with her hands on her hips and announced,

"I think we've been robbed!"

## Chapter Six

Fifteen minutes later there was a knock on the door, and Kacey answered it.

A stocky man with dark brown hair and eyes stood before her.

"I'm Chief of Hotel Security, Miss," he announced, holding up his I.D. Kacey examined the photo identification and decided it looked authentic.

"Come in, Mr. Rivers, and thanks for coming so quickly after I called."

"You reported to the front desk manager that some things are missing from your room?" he asked.

"Yes, a necklace and a camera."

"Could you describe these items, please?" he asked. After Kacey and Emma each gave a description of their items, he asked, "And when did you notice that they were gone?"

"This afternoon, about five-thirty, while we were getting ready to go to dinner."

"When was the last time you saw the items?" Chief Rivers asked.

"Well," Emma replied, "I haven't really thought about my camera since we arrived here on Saturday."

"But I wore my necklace this morning and took it off to go swimming this afternoon."

Chief Rivers nodded and asked, "And you've searched the room thoroughly?"

"Yes!" Emma replied enthusiastically. "We've looked through everything in the whole suite and can't find either of these things."

Chief Rivers turned to Ava, asking, "Have you looked to see if you are missing anything?"

"Yes, but I didn't bring a camera or jewelry, except my earrings, and I've kept them on all day."

"What about cash or credit cards?"

The girls admitted that they hadn't checked their wallets and went to get them.

"My cash and cards are all here in my wallet," Ava reported.

"So are mine," Emma agreed, but Kacey frowned as she looked in her wallet.

"The last time I checked there was about fifty-eight dollars here, but now my wallet's empty!"

"When did you last check it?" Chief Rivers asked.

"Just before we left the mall this afternoon," she answered.

"And have you had your wallet with you all afternoon?"

"Ah, no. Actually, I left my purse here in the room while we were at the pool."

Chief Rivers asked the other two girls if they had left their wallets in the room.

"No, I took my purse with me to the pool," Ava reported, and Emma said the same thing.

"When were you at the pool?" he asked them.

"From about four, or a little earlier than that until after five," Kacey replied.

Chief Rivers nodded, "Well, someone may have come in while you were at the pool."

"But who could get into our room besides the hotel staff?" asked Kacey.

Chief Rivers shrugged and admitted, "I have no idea at this point, but we will conduct a thorough investigation to find out who did this. We'll file a police report so your items and cash will be returned if the thief is apprehended. I'll keep you informed of our progress. In the meantime, I suggest that you keep all of your valuables in your room safe."

"Room safe? Where's that?" Emma asked.

"In your bedroom closet," he said, and showed them where it was and how to open and lock it with their own number combination.

"Thanks, Chief Rivers. We'll use the safe from now on," Kacey assured him.

Ava asked him, "Chief, have you found out what happened to that woman who lost her diamond ring?"

The Chief paused a moment, then replied, "We're still investigating that incident."

"Maybe this robbery is connected to it," Ava suggested.

The Chief looked uncomfortable, "Well, we'll keep that in mind, Miss."

"Was Latanya working today?" Ava asked.

"Who?"

"Latanya, the maid who was accused of taking the diamond ring."

"Er, no, she's on leave until the matter is settled," he told her.

Kacey said, "Then she couldn't be the one who's stealing things from the rooms. It must be someone else!"

Chief Rivers looked annoyed as he said, "We aren't sure that there have been any robberies yet. Sometimes people lose things and think they've been robbed. It happens all the time."

"Well, I know I put my necklace in my makeup case, and when I came back it wasn't there," Kacey pointed out.

Emma added, "And I know I packed my camera in my luggage, but now it's missing. How else could it have disappeared?"

The Chief stood up straight and said, "I promise that we will look into both incidents and keep a special watch on this floor. This is the only floor that has had any problems. We work very hard to make sure this hotel is safe and secure."

"I'm sure you do a wonderful job," Kacey said sincerely, "But sometimes people can be very sneaky."

"If this was a robbery, I assure you that whoever is doing this will be caught, and hopefully, your items will be returned," Chief Rivers told them.

He said goodbye and left the room.

"A room safe!" Emma declared, "I wish we'd known about that sooner!"

Ava picked up a leather-bound portfolio from the desk and looked inside.

"Yeah, well, it would've helped if we had read the hotel guide here where it has the information about the room safe and how to use it."

The girls groaned in disgust over their own failure.

"I sure hope I get my camera back. I've got some pictures of Dave and me on it that I don't want to lose," Emma said.

"And I feel terrible about losing the gold cross Aunt Mary gave me," Kacey said, "I wonder if I'll ever see it again."

"You might," Ava said, "If they catch the thief before he or she sells it for cash. Sometimes they try to sell the stuff online, so I'll search for it after dinner."

The girls felt sad over being robbed, but Ava suggested that they go to dinner and try to forget about the incident. They decided to eat at one of the hotel restaurants, and were able to get a table at Chez Maurice, a French restaurant that featured excellent food and live music in the evenings.

The restaurant was not yet crowded, and they were given a table near a window overlooking the lake. The girls discussed the menu, with Emma explaining the meanings of some of the French foods.

"I always knew our high school French classes would come in handy someday," Ava teased her.

"Well, I don't remember much about high school French, but I know about cooking," Emma said.

While waiting for their food, the girls chatted and checked their messages. Friends from home were curious about their rescue adventures and wanted to hear more details.

After dinner, the girls saw three young men sit down at the table next to them. The girls noticed that the three good-looking young men were speaking in Spanish. Finally, one of them called over to their table,

"Kacey! Ava! Hello!"

Kacey and Ava took a closer look and recognized the young man named Juan, who they had met at the pool. They waved back and said 'hello'. Juan said something to his friends, and then got up from the table and walked over to them.

"Hello again!" he greeted them. Kacey introduced Juan to Emma and they exchanged greetings.

"Would you girls like to join us for a drink?" Juan asked. The girls looked at the young men and then at each other. Kacey said, "Thanks, but I have to get back to our room and call my boyfriend."

"Oh, I'm very sad to hear that. What about you, Ava and Emma?"

The girls smiled but also said they had boyfriends who were waiting for their calls.

Juan shrugged and said, "Well, I'm sorry to hear that. We'll be here for the rest of the evening, so maybe after you call your boyfriends you can come back down, si? There will be music and dancing at nine o'clock. We'll be happy to dance with you since your boyfriends are not here."

"Thanks, anyway, Juan. We're pretty tired, so I don't think we'll be back tonight."

He nodded and walked back to his own table.

The girls left their table and headed back toward their room. On the way, Emma said,

"Maybe we should have stayed for just one dance...just to be polite."

"I thought you and Dave were like practically engaged or something," Ava replied.

"Well, you don't see any ring on my finger, do you? Maybe if he heard that I'd been out dancing with three handsome guys, he'd appreciate me

more.”

Kacey laughed, “Or maybe he’d be really mad and break up with you.”

“Don’t you care about Dave?” asked Ava.

“Of course I do! It’s just that...well,” Emma admitted, “I guess I’m a little angry that he’s not coming down here on Thursday with Josh and Rick.”

Kacey replied, “But he said he couldn’t get time off from work to join them.”

They entered the elevator and the doors closed silently.

“I know. I guess I’m wondering how hard he tried to get time off. Maybe it was just an excuse to not come down here and be with me,” Emma admitted sadly.

Kacey felt bad for her friend, and put her arm around her shoulder.

“Hey, don’t think like that. Dave cares a lot about you, and you know it.”

Emma brushed away a tear as she said, “Yeah, I guess so.”

Ava said cheerfully, “Of course he loves you! He’s always hanging around your house when he’s not working, isn’t he?”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean that he’s in love or anything,” Emma pointed out.

Kacey said, “Why not give him a call when we get back? The sound of his voice will cheer you right up.”

Emma nodded, “Yeah, okay.”

When they got back inside their room, Emma dialed Dave’s number and it went to his voice mail. She left him a message and then sent him a text. After waiting twenty minutes for a reply, Emma began feeling sad and thought that maybe Dave was getting tired of her after all.

The next morning as the girls were headed to have breakfast at the hotel, they passed Latanya as they exited the elevator.

"Hey! Tanya! You're back!" Kacey greeted her.

Tanya looked up and smiled, "Oh, hello, Kacey. It's good to see you again. But I'm afraid I'm not here to work. The housekeeper called me to say she doesn't need me anymore. I am here to pick up my last paycheck and return my uniform and I.D.. I've been laid off."

"Laid off?" Kacey asked, "You mean, fired?"

"Well, not quite as bad as that, but I still don't have a job."



"That's awful!" Kacey declared, "But once they find the real thief, maybe you'll get hired back."

Ava said, "Maybe you can get hired at another hotel, now that you have experience."

Tanya nodded, "Yes, today I'm going to each of the hotels in the area looking for work."

"I hope you find something soon," Emma said.

"Me Too," Tanya nodded sadly.

Ava said, "Did you hear that our room was robbed yesterday while we were at the pool?"

Tanya's eyes widened, "No! What happened?"

The girls told her all the details and Kacey said, "We told Mr. Rivers that you couldn't have been involved since you were not working here yesterday. I hope they catch whoever is doing this and that your name will be cleared soon. Hey, do you have a cell phone? I'd like to keep in touch," Kacey said.

"Sure!" Tanya replied, and the two girls exchanged phone numbers.

"I'll let you know if we find out anything about the robberies."

"Yes! Please do! I hope they catch the robbers soon," Tanya said hopefully.

"Yeah! We'll keep in touch. Good luck on finding another job! Bye, Tanya!" Kacey said, waving as they left her.

After Tanya disappeared down a hallway, Emma said, "Poor Tanya! It's awful that she's lost her job over something she didn't even do! It's so unfair!"

Kacey nodded, "I know the hotel has to protect its guests, so they can't take any chances that Tanya might be involved. But there must be something we can do to help."

The others agreed. They arrived at the cafe and were seated immediately. Emma and Kacey picked up their menus, but Ava sat deep in thought.

After a while, Ava said, "I just remembered something I learned in my Criminal Investigations class."

Kacey and Emma put their menus down and asked what she meant.

"I remember something about crimes being repeated if the heist was successful. Like a bank robbery, for instance. The robbers will pull the same job but at a different bank."

Emma asked, "So you think bank robbers robbed our room?"

Ava frowned, "No, of course not! What I meant was that whoever robbed our room will probably use the same method to rob other rooms or other hotels. We just have to figure out how they're doing it."

Kacey asked, "How do we do that?"

"We look for clues and common factors," Ava continued, "We look at all the details on each case, and then we compare them to see how they're similar. We look for a pattern. Once we can figure out the pattern, we can determine where their next robbery will be."

Kacey shrugged, "I don't think Mr. Rivers would appreciate us getting involved in his investigation."

"We can do our own investigation," Ava said, and asked, "Where was the room where that diamond ring went missing?"

Kacey thought a moment, and then replied, "I think it was the second room on the right at the end of the hall from our room."

"Well, why don't we stop by there after breakfast and talk to the woman who lost the ring? We can get the details straight from her without asking Mr. Rivers for help."

Emma asked, "Will that be enough information to figure out who's robbing the rooms?"

Ava shrugged, "Maybe not. But maybe there have been other robberies that we don't know about."

Emma asked, "What about other hotels? Shouldn't we ask them, too?"

Ava replied, "We can ask, but do you really think they would admit it if they did have a robbery? Most hotel managers like to keep that secret. It's bad for business."

"Yeah, I guess so. What about police reports?" Kacey suggested.

"Good idea," Ava nodded, taking out her cell phone. "There must be a website where they file those reports for public access. I'll check while you two order. Get me two scrambled eggs, coffee, and whole wheat toast."

Kacey and Emma ordered breakfast while Ava searched the Internet for police reports. By the time their breakfast arrived, Ava found a website by the local police where all local crimes were reported. After scanning through them, she declared,

"Here's something! A man reported that an i-Pad was stolen from his car in the parking lot of this hotel! It happened the night before yesterday. His name was George Winters. I wonder if he's still staying here."

Kacey said, "I can probably find out at the front desk after we finish breakfast."

As soon as their meal was done, the girls headed to the front desk and waited to speak to one of the receptionists. Kacey spoke to a young woman named Jennifer.

"We'd like to know what room George Winters is in, please."

Jennifer smiled and said, "For privacy, we don't give out room numbers of our guests. I'm sorry."

"Oh, it's okay. I'm Kacey Carlson, and my uncle owns the hotel. We just want to talk to Mr. Winters."

"Oh, I see," Jennifer replied, "Perhaps I can give him your message and have him call you if he is interested."

"Yes, please. My cell number is 765-987-3211. Please tell him I want to talk to him about his missing i-Pad, and ask him to call me any time."

Jennifer promised that she would relay the message immediately. The girls thanked her and headed back to their floor to find the room where the ring was reported stolen. After the elevator doors opened, Kacey led her friends down the hall toward the room. She stopped in front of 212 and said, "I think it was this room here."

Kacey knocked and waited for someone to answer. Finally, a woman's voice asked,

"Who is it?"

"My name is Kacey Carlson. I was here yesterday after your room was robbed. Our room was robbed, too, and we wanted to talk to you about it."

The chain rattled behind the door and it opened, revealing a stocky, older woman with blonde hair.

"What do you want to know?" she asked suspiciously.

"We were wondering if you could tell us approximately when you think the ring might have been stolen," Ava said.

"Well, I'm not sure, but I noticed it was gone after I came back to my room after breakfast. I went downstairs to the café to have breakfast, and when I came back here to put on my jewelry, I noticed it was gone. I looked everywhere for it, but it wasn't in this room."

"About what time was that?" Ava asked her.

"Hmm, about ten o'clock, I think."

"And you're sure the ring was in your room before that?" Ava inquired.

"Yes, of course! I remembered I had left it on the counter next to the sink when I went to wash my hands before I left my room. When I came back to get it, it was gone."

Ava asked her, "Did you tell anyone that you were going down for breakfast?"

"No. I'm here alone, so I didn't tell anyone. You said your room was robbed, too. What did they take?"

Emma replied, "My camera, her gold necklace and some cash."

The woman shook her head and said, "Well, I guess this place isn't as secure as I thought it would be. I still have two more days to stay here, and then I'm leaving and never coming back here again!"

Kacey said, "I hope you get your ring back. If you think of anything that might help us figure out who's doing this, please let us know. We're in room 220, just down the hall."

The woman nodded in agreement as they thanked her and left.

As they walked back to the elevators, Emma said, "Gee, Ava, you sounded just like a real detective back there!"

Ava smiled, and Kacey added, "Yeah. You're like a professional already!"

"Yeah, well, I guess my college classes are starting to pay off," Ava replied.

"You are going to be one awesome detective by the time you graduate!" Kacey commented.

## Chapter Seven

The girls wanted to find out about how the sea turtle was progressing, so they called Dr. Cramer at Sea World Rescue to find out.

“He’s doing great!” Dr. Cramer assured Kacey, “In fact, we are planning on releasing him on Friday this week as long as he continues to get better.”

“I’m so glad to hear that,” Kacey replied.

“Oh, and I should congratulate you also on your other rescue,” said Dr. Cramer, “We heard about it yesterday when one of our technicians saw it on the Internet. You girls are real heroes for doing two rescues in one day. That has to be a record!”

“Oh, thanks. We were glad we could help that girl. I heard on the news that she’s being released from the hospital this Friday, too,” Kacey responded.

Dr. Cramer thanked Kacey and her friends again before the call ended. Kacey was sharing her news with Emma and Ava when the room phone rang, and Ava picked it up.

“Oh, hello, Mr. Winters. I’m Ava Cruz, and I’m here at the hotel with my two friends, Kacey Carlson and Emma Santos. We wanted to talk to you after we heard that your car was broken into and an i-Pad was stolen. We also had some things robbed from our room, and we wondered if the two cases might be connected. Would you mind answering a couple of questions about the robbery?”

Kacey and Emma stood next to Ava so they could hear Mr. Winters as he said, “No, I don’t mind.”

Ava began, “I was wondering approximately what time your i-Pad was stolen from your car.”

“Ah, it was about five-thirty in the afternoon. I was on my way to meet someone, but I decided to get something to eat before I left. I thought my back pack would be safe for a while, so I left it on the back seat of my car, and I locked the car. Then when I came back about twenty minutes later, it was gone. I had a brand new i-Pad inside it. The police said it looked like someone had used a tool to unlock my car and get the back pack out.”

“Was anything else taken, or anything missing from your room?” Ava asked.

“No, just my back pack,” he answered.

“I’m sorry to hear that. I hope you get it back,” Ava said.

“Me too,” Mr. Winters replied.

“Well, thanks for talking with us, Mr. Winters. I guess that’s all I wanted to know. But wait... what restaurant did you go to when the robbery happened?”

He replied, “The hotel café on the first floor. I like it there because the service is quick and the food is not too expensive.”

“I know the place,” Ava told him, “The food is good there, too. Well, thanks Mr. Winters. Good bye.”

After she hanged the phone up, Kacey asked, “Well, do you think there’s a connection between that robbery and ours?”

“Maybe. He was away at dinner when his car was robbed, and the woman in 212 was at breakfast when her room was robbed. Those are the only similarities between those two cases that I can see.”

Kacey paced around the room thinking for a minute, and then asked, “Did that woman in 212 say which restaurant she went to for breakfast?”

Emma spoke up, “She went to the café downstairs...the same place we had our breakfast this morning. I remember her saying that.”

“Why would you remember that?” Ava asked.

Emma shrugged, “I don’t know, but anything to do with food always sticks in my memory. I guess that’s why I became a chef.”

“A sous-chef, you mean,” Ava reminded her.

“Well, yeah, a sous-chef now, but someday I’ll be head chef, and when I am, you’ll be glad you know me!”

Ava and Kacey laughed, and then Kacey said, “So two of the robberies happened when the guests were eating at the café. But our robbery happened when we were at the pool, so there really isn’t a pattern there.”

“Ah, but there is, my dear Watson!” Ava said with a gleam in her eye.

“Who’s Watson?” Emma asked.

Ava said, “He was Sherlock Holmes’ partner. You know who Sherlock Holmes was, don’t you?”

“Of course I do! He was a famous detective in London back in the horse and buggy days,” Emma replied curtly.

“A famous fictional detective,” Ava corrected her, “But even Sherlock would have noted the similarity in all three cases.”

Kacey grinned and teased her, “Okay, Sherlock, what’s the connection?”

Ava replied, “All three cases are similar in the respect that they happened on hotel property while the rooms were empty.”

Emma cried, “Oh, big deal! That’s obvious! Who’s going to rob a room when somebody’s in there?”

“It’s still an important clue,” Ava insisted, “And that means there is certainly some kind of connection. I wonder if the locks on the doors were forced during the robberies in 212 and here, or if the robber used a room key.”

“What difference would that make?” Kacey asked.

“If they were forced open, then anyone could have done the crime. But if a key were used-“

“Then only someone who had a hotel master key could get in,” Kacey interjected.

“Right! And that would narrow down our list of suspects to people who have access to a master key.”

Emma said, “That means it’s probably somebody who works here!”

“Yeah, right,” Ava replied, and asked Kacey, “Who has a master key here at the hotel?”

Kacey shrugged, “I don’t know. The manager, Mr. Robinson, didn’t seem to want to discuss the robbery in 212 with me. He’s keeping things pretty close to himself.”

“We need someone who works here who’ll tell us- Hey! What about-“

“Tanya!” Emma and Kacey cried simultaneously.

Kacey nodded and went for her phone. Ava went to the hotel room door and opened it. She crouched down and inspected the lock to see if any scratch marks were evident, or if the lock looked as if it had been pried open.

Soon Kacey was on the phone talking to Tanya. She asked her about the master keys which could be used to open any room in the hotel.

“Well, I think Security guys all have them, and the manager, Mr. Robinson. The maids have keys that will only open the rooms on their section of the floor that they clean. I can’t really think of anyone else.”

“Thanks, Tanya. We’ve been trying to figure out who robbed our room and 212, and we think it may be someone with a master key. We’ll keep you informed of our progress. We want to help you get your job back so you can go to college. We know how much that means to you and your family.”

“Thanks! I really appreciate your help!” she replied warmly.

“You’re welcome. See you soon!” Kacey promised and ended the call.

When Kacey told Ava and Emma what Tanya had said, Ava repeated thoughtfully, "Security, Mr. Robinson, and the maids who clean this floor. Well, it's a start."

"You can do this, Ava. You'll have this case solved before the Security guys will!" Kacey said.

Emma added, "Yeah, but what if it's one of the Security guys who is doing the robberies?"

The girls spent the rest of the day enjoying the attractions at Universal Resort. Being big Harry Potter fans, they visited the Harry Potter areas first and rode on a coaster called Dragon Challenge, then the Flight of the Hippogriff, and finally, Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey. The girls screamed at the top of their lungs when the coasters soared high up into the sky and then spiraled down toward the ground at a tremendous speed.

After the rides they visited each of the quaint little shops in Hogsmeade, while sampling unique treats like chocolate frogs and pumpkin juice. They ate lunch at the large, mystical restaurant before taking the Hogwort's Express train to Daigon Alley. The girls were thrilled to see the characters from the Harry Potter series interacting with the guests on the ride at Gringott's Bank. When the girls left the exit, Emma burst out, "That was totally awesome!"

"It really was!" Kacey agreed.

Ava commented, "I'm so glad we decided to come here on Spring Break instead of going to a boring old beach. Tomorrow the guys will come and we'll go to Disney World and go surfing with them, too."

The girls spent the rest of the day exploring the shops and alleys of the magical world. Emma bought a magical wand and used it to make the shop windows come alive. The girls were amazed at the things they saw. Afterward, they had dinner at one of the restaurants and went on many more roller coaster and thrill rides before finding a good spot to watch the fireworks show. They were disappointed when it ended, but excited.

"I've never seen so many beautiful fireworks!" Kacey remarked.

"Yeah, and it's not even the Fourth of July. I bet on that holiday they have a pretty spectacular fire works show here," said Emma.

"I can only imagine!" Ava agreed.

"Let's go back to the hotel. We can still go for a swim since the pools are open until eleven p.m.," Kacey suggested.



"Great idea!" Ava replied, "I need to work off those chocolate frogs and pumpkin juice!"

## Chapter Eight

The next morning, the girls had breakfast in the café and talked about the robberies.

"I haven't seen anything that looks suspicious since we reported our robbery to Mr. Rivers," Ava said, "What about you two?"

"No, I haven't seen anything," Kacey admitted and Emma agreed.

Ava went online to look at the police reports, but found nothing new reported for their area.

"Well, maybe whoever it was has left the hotel for good," Kacey suggested.

"Maybe," Ava agreed, "But I still can't figure out how they got into the rooms or how they knew the rooms would be empty."

"You'll figure it out," Kacey smiled, "You're a detective, remember? And even if the robber has left the hotel, we still have to prove that Tanya is innocent so she can get her job back."

The girls finished eating and the waitress brought their bill. She smiled at them and asked,

"Would you like this put on your room card or would you like to pay for it here?"

"Well, actually, we are supposed to have our meals free," Kacey replied, "If you talk to Mr. Robinson, he'll explain everything."

The waitress looked surprised, "Oh, okay. I'll just write your room number on here and write 'no charge' on this."

She took out a pen and Emma said, "We're in 220."

The waitress nodded and wrote their room number on the bill and added 'no charge - Mr. Robinson' at the bottom. The girls gave her a generous tip.

"Oh, thank you!" she beamed.

As the girls were leaving, Ava turned and went back to ask the waitress something.

"Pardon me, but I was wondering. When people charge their meals to their room card, do you always write the room number on it?"

"Yes," she nodded, "And then they sign the bill to confirm the amount that is charged to their hotel bill."

"Hmm...thanks," Ava said before she joined her friends.

Kacey asked, "What was that all about?"

Ava shrugged, "I'm just trying to put pieces together and come up with a theory about how the rooms are being robbed."

"Okay, Sherlock. While you're working on that, what are we doing today?" asked Emma.

"We have to pick up the guys at the airport at one o'clock, so we should leave here by twelve fifteen to make sure we have enough time to find a parking space," Kacey replied.

"That only gives us about two and a half hours," Ava said, "Why don't we just hang out here until then?"

"We can work on our tans!" Emma suggested, "Let's go to the lake. They have a sandy beach there!"

Kacey remembered that the hotel backed up to a small lake with a sandy beach.

"Great idea!"

On the way to the beach, Kacey's phone rang. It was Tanya.

"Oh, hi, Tanya! How are you doing?"

"Not very good, I'm afraid."

"Oh, what happened?"

Tanya told her about her unsuccessful attempts to find another job.

"And the last hotel manager said that he would have to call my old boss to find out about my job performance. Once they tell him that I am a robbery suspect, he'll never hire me, and neither will anyone else!"

"Oh, Tanya! I'm so sorry! This must be so frustrating for you! But Tanya, I have faith in you and faith that God has a plan for your life. If you trust in Him, he'll help you through this."

"I tried to pray last night, but I don't know what to say," Tanya replied.

"Just ask God to guide you in your search for a job. Ask him to place you in a job where you can be helpful to other people and do His work. He knows that you are saving your money for college education. Thank Him for the opportunity to come here to the U.S. and study. Tell God that you believe He will help you."

On the other end, she could hear Tanya sniffing, as if she were crying.

"Okay," Tanya replied, "I'll do that."

"And if you need anything in the meantime...a place to stay or some meals, we can help you. I'm sure the others wouldn't mind if you came and stayed with us for a few days."

"That's very thoughtful of you," Tanya said, "But I have my rent paid for the rest of this month, and I have enough groceries to last me a couple of weeks."

"You might find another job soon," Kacey said, "Don't give up trying. Keep in touch and let me know how it's going, okay?"

"Okay," Tanya agreed, "Has there been any progress on the robbery?"

Kacey told her everything that they had done, and that she was confident that the real robber would soon be found.

"Well, thank you for helping to clear my name. Maybe once the thief is caught I can come back to my old job. I really liked working there."

"I'm sure we'll catch him, and I'll be sure to talk to Mr. Robinson about getting you back to work here as soon as possible."

"Thank you, Kacey! You're a real friend!"

Kacey said goodbye and ended the call. She closed her eyes and said a silent prayer for Tanya, asking God to help her and to help them solve the robbery soon.

Twenty minutes later, the girls left their suite and headed to the lake. They followed the signs to the beach on the stone path that wound around through tropical gardens and palm trees. The path was bordered by colorful broad-leafed plants and huge-leafed banana trees.

Finally, the beach appeared, populated by hotel guests.

"Hey! This is really cool!" Emma cried, "What a beautiful lake!"

"It's a lot bigger than I thought it would be," Ava said.

They found a place near the shore to spread out their blanket and towels. After applying sun screen, they lay out on the blanket, soaking in the sun's bright rays. A group of children played in the water and two couples played volleyball in the sand. The beach was much less crowded than the one at the Cocoa Beach pier.

"Hey! Kacey! Ava!" someone called.

They looked up and saw Juan waving to them. He looked bronzed and healthy as he approached the girls. He was wearing shorts and a bright T-shirt. They said hello and introduced him to Emma.

"I haven't seen you girls around lately," he commented, sitting on the sand next to them.

"Well, we've been pretty busy," Kacey said.

"Yeah? That's great."

"What have you been doing?" Kacey asked.

"Oh, just hanging out around the hotel...playing some tennis, hanging around the pools, you know. We like to go out at night to the clubs. They have lots of clubs around here. Have you been to any yet?"

"No, we're waiting until our boyfriends get here this afternoon," Kacey explained, hoping Juan would get the message.

"Oh," he nodded in understanding, then took out his phone.

"Excuse me, I need to take a call. I'll see you around later!" he said, walking away and talking on his phone.

Ava and Emma called 'goodbye' to him as they left.

The girls stayed a while longer and then waded into the water, spraying each other and laughing. Afterward, they headed back to their room.

As they stepped off the elevator, they heard someone knocking on one of the doors at the opposite end of the hall. They looked to see a young man carrying a tray. He knocked on a door again and said, "Room service."

The girls turned away and headed in the opposite direction toward their room. While Kacey was unlocking the door, Ava looked down the hall and noticed that the room service guy was gone.

"Hey, that room service guy is gone," Ava remarked. The other two girls looked down the hall and Kacey said, "He's probably inside the room and getting a tip."

"Yeah, probably," Ava agreed.

"Boy, you sure are suspicious!" Emma remarked, "Poor Rick!"

"What do you mean, 'Poor Rick'? I don't suspect him of anything...yet!"

The girls laughed and decided to get dressed and get ready to leave for the airport.

The girls found a parking spot in the multi-story parking garage and took the glass elevator down to the tunnel that ran under the road next to the airport. They used the escalator to ride up into the main terminal of the airport.

It was crowded with tourists and travelers rushing to and fro. The airline ticket counters were packed with travelers creeping back and forth between roped lines. Airline agents directed people to get in the right lines and answered their questions.

The girls found the arriving flights listed on the large electronic board and checked the gate number for the boys' arrival.

"Over a hundred gates!" Emma remarked, "I hope we find the right one!"

"We can only wait at the areas where they come through security," Kacey told her, "And since they're arriving at gate 129, we have to go to Area B."

"Area B is this way," Ava said, leading them to a long, wide corridor. There was a walking escalator, and they hopped on so they could enjoy the sights while moving down the corridor.

"This airport is one huge shopping mall," Kacey said, "I think it's even bigger than the airport in Boston!"

"It's a lot more modern, and prettier, too," Emma replied.

The girls passed many stores and walked through the huge food court to continue their journey through the next corridor. More stores lined the wide corridors, tempting shoppers to step inside. The girls finally reached the next large area.

"Gates 99 through 129, over there," Ava said, reading the signs. The girls crossed the large open lobby and arrived at an area among palm trees and water fountains where other people were waiting. Two glass elevators overlooked the huge atrium as they rose up to the top floor of the hotel above them. Waves of passengers came through the security exit, and the girls waited anxiously for their friends to arrive.

Ava's face grew a mischievous grin as she said, "Hey, let's play a joke on the guys!"

Kacey and Emma looked at her.

"What do you mean?"

"When the guys come out, we'll let them get a look at us, but then we'll pretend we don't see them and walk away. We'll keep hiding until they find us! Come on, it'll be fun!"

A few minutes later, the guys came through the door, pulling luggage and waving to the girls.

The girls pretended not to see them and turned away. They could hear the guys calling their names, but acted as if they couldn't hear them in the surrounding crowd. The girls quickly headed for the elevators and got inside. As the guys were racing to catch up with them, the doors slid shut.

"Oh no!" Josh cried, "Now what'll we do?"

"Let's call them," Rick said and dialed Ava's number. The call went to her voice mail, so he left a message for her to call him immediately.

Josh tried to reach Kacey and got the same result.

"Well, should we wait here or go back to the exit?" Josh asked.

"Let's take the elevator down. Maybe we'll find them down on the main level."

They pushed the elevator button and waited. When the doors opened, they stepped inside.

"Surprise!" the girls yelled. They had been hiding in the corners behind the door.

"What?" Josh exclaimed. By the looks on their faces, he knew the girls had been fooling him and Rick.

"You're going to regret this!" Josh teased.

"Did you see us coming through the exit?" Rick asked.

"Of course we did!" Kacey laughed.

The guys laughed and admitted it was a pretty good joke.

Kacey said, "Well, it was Ava's idea! How was your flight?"

"It was great. We had a direct flight and got here in a little over two hours," Rick said.

"Yeah, and no seat-kickers," Josh added. The girls laughed and then told them they had parked in the parking garage. They talked as they headed back down the escalator, through the tunnel under the road between the airport and the garage, and up a glass elevator again into the parking garage. After putting their luggage into the trunk, Kacey suggested that they check into the guys' hotel first and then go to their own hotel for lunch.

Josh turned to Emma, "Sorry that Dave couldn't come. His boss said he had to work this weekend."

Emma shrugged, "Yeah, I know. That's okay."

Kacey looked at her and saw that Emma looked a little down.

"Hey, we'll still have fun, Emma. Tomorrow we're all going to Disney World!"

"And surfing the day after!" added Ava.

The guys said they were looking forward to it. The top was down on the convertible and the sun was shining brightly as they left the garage. Kacey drove the guys to their hotel which was not far from where the girls were staying. After checking in, the guys left their luggage in their room and unpacked their swim suits. Kacey drove everyone back to the resort where the girls were staying.

"This place is beautiful!" Josh remarked as they pulled up to the hotel ten minutes later.

"Yeah, it's pretty cool, except for the robberies," Ava replied.

"Robberies?" they asked.

"Yeah. We'll tell you all about it," Kacey said.

They went to the café for lunch and after placing their orders, the girls told them all about the robberies.

"Ava is trying to solve the case." Kacey said, "And I think she will."

"Maybe we can help," Rick said, "Who do you think is robbing rooms?"

"Well, I think it's somebody who works here because the lock wasn't forced on our door. Somebody used a key card, and the only people with access to those are employees."

"Yeah," Emma interjected, "And that only includes Security, Housekeeping, and the manager."

"But in a hotel this size, that could mean a lot of people," Rick said.

Ava nodded, "Yeah. Hey, Kacey, how many rooms are in this hotel?"

Kacey replied, "About six hundred, I think."

"Okay, so if each maid has to clean fifteen rooms a day, let's say, then divide that into six hundred..." Ava did some mental math and said, "That's forty maids a day!"

Kacey asked, "But didn't Mr. Rivers say that the robberies have all taken place on our floor?"

"Right! I wonder how many rooms are on our floor..." Ava ventured.

"I saw on the signs outside the elevator that the room numbers go from two hundred to two-fifty," Emma told them.

Josh said, "So that means three or four maids work on each floor to clean fifty rooms."

"That certainly narrows it down," Kacey said, "But who wants to stay in the hotel all day following the maids around to see if they're stealing? We came down here to have a little fun."

"Yeah," they all replied.

"If we only had a security camera-" Kacey began.

"We do!" Ava said suddenly, "The hotel Security must have cameras on every hallway! If they recorded something happening on the day of our robbery, then we can watch it!"

"Great idea, Ava, but do you think Mr. Rivers will let us see them?" Kacey asked.

"Well, seeing how your uncle is the owner of this place, I think he might," Ava said with a grin on her face.



After lunch, the group decided to go for a swim at the hotel pool while Kacey and Ava talked with Mr. Rivers. Emma, Josh, and Rick headed toward the pool as Kacey and Ava found the Security office. Ava knocked on the door, and then tried the door.

"It's unlocked," she said, and pushed it open slowly.

A young receptionist sat behind a desk, typing on her computer. When the girls approached her desk, she smiled, asking, "How can I help you?"

Kacey said, "We're staying in room 220, and a few days ago we reported a robbery to Mr. Rivers. We'd like to ask him a question. Is he available?"

The secretary picked up her phone and said to them, "Let me see if he's available."

After speaking to Mr. Rivers, the secretary told them to go into his office.

The girls felt a little nervous approaching Mr. Rivers, but he smiled at them and asked them to take seats, and asked how they were doing.

"We're fine, thanks," Kacey replied, "But we were wondering if you have learned anything new about the robbery in our room."

"We're still investigating," he told them, "I will let you know as soon as anything develops on this case."

Ava asked, "I was wondering if the security cameras in the hallways record any activity."

Mr. Rivers nodded, "Yes, they do."

"And I wanted to know if anything showed up on them while we were out of the room during the robbery."

Mr. Rivers leaned forward and said, "Of course, we've looked at them several times and saw nothing suspicious at all."

"It might be a good idea to let us see the recordings of when we were out of the room. We might see someone we recognize," Ava said.

Mr. Rivers frowned, "Why? Do you suspect someone?"

"No, not specifically," Ava admitted, "But it doesn't hurt to try. Could we see the recording?"

Mr. Rivers was about to speak, but then he looked at Kacey, who tried her best to look hopeful. She smiled and wondered if he was recalling that her uncle owned the hotel.

"The hotel prefers to keep our guests' activities confidential. I'm sure you understand," he said politely.

"But when a crime has been committed," Ava replied, "Isn't it more important to find the perpetrator? Besides, anything we see on the recording will remain absolutely confidential."

Kacey said, "I understand your need to protect the hotel guests. I certainly don't want anything bad to get out about my uncle's hotel, and we're just as anxious to clear up this robbery as quickly and quietly as you are. We want to help in every way we can."

Mr. Rivers thought for a moment and said, "All right. I'll show you the recording, but you must promise not to tell anyone else what you see. Hotels are sometimes meeting places for secret affairs, if you know what I mean."

Ava smiled, "We certainly do, and our lips are sealed!"

Mr. Rivers led them through another door, into a dark room where another security officer sat at a computer before a wall of security monitors.

"Wow!" Ava exclaimed, "This is quite a system!"

Mr. Rivers grinned, "Yes, it is. We can see every floor inside this hotel, all the restaurants, the lobby, the pools, tennis courts, beaches, and parking lots."

Mr. Rivers asked the security officer to pull up the images from the day the girls' room was robbed. He nodded and searched for the files on his computer. Soon, he had the recordings playing on one of the monitors.

"This is from about three o'clock until the time you returned," Mr. Rivers said. The computer operator sped up the recording to make it go faster. The girls watched the screen and saw themselves and Emma heading out to the pool, carrying their towels and beach bags. There was no other activity at first, then a young woman with two children passed through the hall on her way to the elevators. Next, an older man passed by going in the opposite direction, away from their room. As the time and date stamp approached four-thirty, the girls noticed someone coming from the elevator towards their room, carrying a tray.

The young man with the tray was wearing a hotel uniform: a short jacket and black pants with a white shirt and bow tie. He stopped in front of room 220 and knocked. Then he used a key card to unlock the door.

"Look!" Kacey exclaimed, "Someone's going into our room!"

"It's just a waiter from Room Service," Mr. Rivers said.

"But we never ordered room service that afternoon," Kacey said.

"Stop the recording!" Mr. Rivers ordered, "And run it back again slowly to see if we can get a look at his face."

The security officer tapped on the keys and replayed the scene frame by frame, but the young man in the video never looked up. Only the top of his head and his profile could be seen.

"Take a print of him...the best view you can get, and then copy it and send it to me immediately," Mr. Rivers told the officer.

"Do you recognize this man?" Mr. Rivers asked.

"No. Doesn't he work here at the hotel?" Kacey asked.

"We'll find out. Did you order any room service at all during the day of the robbery?"

The girls thought a moment and then Kacey said, "Yes, we did order breakfast that day. It came to our room and we ate it before going out."

"Did you order anything else later in the day? Extra towels or something for the mini-bar?" Mr. Rivers asked.

"No," they replied, shaking their heads. Ava continued, "We went to Sea World, then came back in the afternoon to change and go for a swim at the pool."

"Are you sure that the missing items were in your room before you went to the pool?" he asked.

Kacey nodded, saying, "I took off my necklace before I went to the pool, and when I came back, it was gone, along with the cash in my wallet."

"So the robbery must have happened during the time of this video," Mr. Rivers concluded.

"Yes," Ava replied, "And it looks like we have a suspect."

Mr. Rivers looked at the girls and said, "I apologize. I assumed someone had ordered something to be delivered. I should have asked you about it sooner."

Kacey and Ava smiled. Kacey said, "That's okay. At least we now have a lead."

"Would it be possible for me to have a copy of that photo sent to me?" asked Ava, "I can keep my eye open for this guy and let you know if I see him. If he works here at the hotel, I might see him again."

"Of course," Mr. Rivers nodded, "Where would you like it sent?"

"You can text it to me," Ava replied and gave him her number.

As the girls left his office, Ava asked him, "Would it be all right if I called you tomorrow to find out if you located this man?"

"Why don't I give you a call as soon as I find out if he works here or not? I have your cell number."

"Great! Thanks!" Ava smiled and shook his hand.

After leaving the office, Kacey turned to Ava and said, "Way to go, Sherlock! You're cracking this case!"

## Chapter Nine

The girls joined the others at the pool and told them about their progress.

Rick said, "Hey, you might end up catching this guy and getting your stuff back before you go home on Sunday!"

"That would be great," Ava said, "But finding this guy won't be easy since he kept his face away from the security cameras. All we have is a profile from the top."

"It's a start," Emma said.

They spent the afternoon at the pool, and then the girls took Josh and Rick on a tour of the hotel and the beach. They played some volleyball and then went back to the girls' room to cool off.

As they sat around drinking soft drinks and chatting, they talked about their plans for the weekend.

"Tomorrow is Thursday," Rick said, "So let's go to Disney World and spend the day there. Then Friday we can go to the beach and do a little surfing."

"You might want to take lessons first," Emma said, "These girls are pretty good on their surf boards."

"Really?" Josh said dubiously, "I think we'll do fine. It's a lot like snowboarding, so I don't need a lesson. How about you, Rick?"

"Nah! I can handle it."

"All right then," Emma declared, "We'll have a surfing contest to see who's the best. The first surfer to get up on the board and ride it into the shallow water without falling is the winner."

"You're on!" Rick exclaimed.

Josh asked, "What do I get when I win?"

Everyone laughed and Rick insisted, "You mean, when *I* win!"

Emma exclaimed, "The winner gets free ice cream at our favorite burger place!"

Ava received the photo of the young man as promised, and showed it to Emma.

"Does he look familiar?" Ava asked her.

Emma studied the photo and frowned.

"It's hard to tell. You can't really see his face in this picture. He does look a little familiar, though. Maybe I've seen him around the hotel somewhere."

Ava nodded, "Yeah, that's what I thought. I'll ask around at the restaurant tonight to see if anyone knows him.

The girls changed their clothes and took the guys to dinner at one of the hotel restaurants. After they finished eating, Ava showed the photo to a few waitresses, but none of them recognized the young man.

After dinner, the group drove to Disney Springs to stroll through the streets and visit the shops and restaurants that featured live music. They decided to go bowling at the bowling alley there, and had fun competing with each other. Rick and Ava had the highest scores, and were deemed the winners.

As the group strolled by a camera shop, Ava went to look in the shop window.

"Hey! I just had an idea! We should ask Tanya if she knows the guy in the security photo. Maybe she has seen him around the hotel."

"Good idea," Kacey agreed. She looked at her watch and said, "Why don't we call her now? That is, if you guys don't mind."

Rick and Josh shrugged and agreed that was a good idea.

Kacey called Tanya, who was at her apartment watching TV.

"Sure, you can come over here now," Tanya said. She gave them the directions.

They drove to the apartment and knocked on her door.

Tanya opened the door, smiling with pleasure at the sight of her new friends.

After introductions were made for Rick and Josh, Ava took out her phone and showed the photo of the suspect to Tanya.

"Do you recognize this guy?" she asked.

Tanya studied the photo carefully, and said, "I think he looks familiar, but I don't remember his name or anything. Why do you ask?"

"This was taken from the security camera in the hallway. He was seen going into our room at the time of the robbery. No one has been able to identify him yet."

"Wow! You found a suspect? That's great!"

Ava nodded, "Although it's frustrating that we didn't get a better photo of him. I think he knew about the security cameras and avoided showing his face."

"That's too bad," Tanya said.

The group thanked Tanya and promised to let her know if they learned anything more. As they headed back to the car, Ava shook her head.

"Someone has to know this guy. But who? I've already asked several people in Housekeeping and down in the restaurants. He's like a ghost."

Rick got inside the car and Ava slid in next to him.

He said, "You know, there's a good chance he doesn't work at the hotel at all."

Emma leaned over to ask, "Then how did he get a waiter's uniform?"

"Good question," Ava replied, looking at Rick.

"You need to think like a thief to catch one," Rick said smugly.

Ava reluctantly agreed, and the group headed back to their hotel.

"Disney Springs was really fun!" Ava commented later in the evening as she got into bed.

"Yeah!" Emma replied, "Too bad Dave wasn't here to enjoy it. I'm sending him a photo of us bowling together to show him what he's missing."

"Aren't you being a little hard on Dave? I mean, he has to work, and his boss wouldn't let him have the time off," Ava said.

"Yeah, I know. But I'm still mad at him for not coming, even if it's not his fault. I know it's stupid, but I just can't help it," Emma admitted.

"Well, maybe he'll call tomorrow or something."

"Yeah, maybe," Emma said doubtfully, and turned out the light.

## Chapter Ten

The next morning, the girls picked up Josh and Rick from their hotel and headed out to Disney World. On the way, they discussed which park they would like to see first.

"I read that first thing in the morning, Epcot is not as crowded as the other parks. Let's start there," Kacey suggested.

Everyone agreed. They parked in one of the gigantic parking lots and took the tram to the park entrance. Soon they were looking over maps and deciding where to go first.

"Let's start at the World Showcase and work our way back to the entrance," Rick suggested, and the group followed his idea.

Everyone enjoyed walking around the park and looking through the international attractions through the areas representing countries from all over the world. In the Canadian area, they saw a wonderful movie about the beautiful Canadian territories, and walked under waterfalls cascading from a towering canyon wall. In the area of France, they stopped to savor some French pastry and coffee. They shopped in the exotic Moroccan markets and bought chocolates in a shop in Germany. Afterward, they enjoyed a movie in the American pavilion and stopped to have lunch there.

In the area featuring Japanese culture, a group of Japanese drummers performed to the delight of the crowds. After browsing through the stores and displays of Japanese artifacts, they headed over to China where they experienced its beautiful scenery and culture. From there, they climbed onto the scenic boat ride through the Gran Fiesta Tour of Mexico.

After leaving the World Showcase, the group entered Future World and got in line to drive the race cars on the Test Track. As they were whizzing around the track, Emma shouted,

"I feel like we're going five hundred miles an hour!"

"It's not really that fast," Kacey assured her, "But it's still incredible!"

As they exited the ride, the friends all agreed that it was one of the best rides at the park. Next, they walked over to The Land pavilion to ride on Soarin', the hang-glider attraction. The simulator gave them the experience of flying over the countryside and oceans.

"I loved that ride!" Kacey exclaimed as they left the pavilion.

"I really felt like I was flying!" Emma declared.



The group toured the Living Seas and then crossed through the park to view Mission Space. By the middle of the afternoon, they completed their tour and headed back to their car.

"Next: The Magic Kingdom!" Emma announced.

The five friends drove to the Magic Kingdom and hopped onto a train that took them to Frontier Land, where they got off to ride Thunder Mountain, a wild roller-coaster ride through a mountain mine. The girls screamed loudly all through the ride as the two guys yelled and laughed at their screams. After the ride, they walked to the Pirates of the Caribbean and climbed into the boats for the adventure ride.

The group next decided on riding down Splash Mountain, a tall drop from a high mountain peak down into a pool of water. As soon as their boat hit the water, huge sprays of cold water shot into the air and fell like torrential rain.

"I'm totally soaked!" Emma declared, shaking water off of her arms as they left the ride.

"Don't worry, you'll dry off quickly in this warm, sunny weather," Ava assured her.

They crossed the center of the park, stopping for ice cream, before getting in line for Space Mountain, a dark and thrilling roller coaster ride.

After leaving Tomorrowland, the friends walked through Fantasyland and rode on another roller coaster and several other rides.

They doubled back through the park to Liberty Square to go into the Haunted Mansion. The ride was both spooky and fun, and when they left, all agreed that it had been one of their favorites.

"Gee," Emma said, "I wish I had time to go on all the rides. Even the ones for the little kids look like fun."

"You'd probably have to spend a week at each park to find enough time to do everything," Kacey replied.

After a couple more hours of going on rides and viewing the attractions, the group decided it was time for dinner. They found the Be Our Guest Restaurant in Fantasyland offered a wide variety of foods and plenty of seating.

"It feels good to sit down after all that walking," Emma remarked.

"I know what you mean," Kacey agreed.

Emma poured ketchup on her french fries and said, "I sure wish Dave had come. He would've loved this place."

Ava spoke up, "Maybe you two can come back here again someday."

Emma frowned and looked forlorn. She shrugged her shoulders, but didn't reply.

During dinner, the group chatted and caught up on their messages. Afterward, they finished their meal and wandered down Main Street, stopping to browse through the shops and take photos of each other.

That evening, the friends all decided to go for a swim in one of the heated pools at their hotel. Rick and Josh took turns doing dives into the deep end to impress the girls. Then they pulled the girls into the pool when they weren't expecting it, causing them to shriek in surprise. After horsing around in the water for an hour, Ava got out to get a towel and dry off. She walked over to the towel cart and picked up a towel. As she was walking back and drying off, she passed a couple sitting in lounge chairs beside the pool. Something caught her eye and she stopped. She looked behind her and then stepped back to see what had drawn her attention.

A young man was seated on the lounge chair talking to a young lady. He didn't notice Ava behind him, looking down on his head from the side.

To herself, Ava declared, "I know that profile!"

## Chapter Eleven

Ava took out her cell phone and found the photo of the suspect. The young man's profile was identical to the guy on the lounge chair. Slowly, she walked around to the side of the chair to see the man's face. When she saw him, she didn't recognize him, but turned around and opened her camera on her cell phone. She pretended to be taking a selfie, but she aimed the camera at the young man's face and snapped his photo.

Quickly, Ava found Kacey, who was in the deep end.

"Come here! Quick!" Ava called her.

Kacey swam over to the side of the pool. Ava showed her the photo of the young man she had just photographed.

"Does this guy look familiar?" she asked Kacey.

Kacey took the phone and studied the man's face.

"Yeah, but... I can't remember where I saw him or who he is. But he does look really familiar."

"I know! I'm sure we've met him somewhere--" Ava began.

"Wait!" Kacey interrupted, "Wasn't he one of the guys at Juan's table the night we had dinner at the hotel? Remember, Juan came over to us and asked us to join him and his friends?"

"Yeah! That's where I saw him!" Ava agreed, and lowered her voice.

"Don't look now, but he's here at the pool, sitting over by the towel cart, next to the girl in the yellow swim suit. Just kinda look casual, like you're glancing around."

Kacey did a slow, casual glance in the young man's direction, and turned back to Ava.

"Yeah, so what about it? He's probably a guest here staying with Juan and the other guy."

Ava's eyes burned with excitement, "Yeah, but when I went past him to get a towel, I recognized his profile from the security photo. He's the mystery man who entered our room! I'm positive!"

"You mean the guy who robbed our stuff?" Kacey whispered hoarsely, "But he was wearing a waiter's uniform in the security photo. What's he doing here at the pool?"

"Either he is a waiter, or he pretended to be one so he could get into our room!"

"But how? Where did he get a key card to unlock the door?" Kacey asked.

"I haven't figured that out yet. But I will!" Ava assured her.

"Should we call Security?" Kacey asked.

Ava looked over at the young man and replied, "We don't have any real proof yet. If the security photo had shown his full face, then we might have something more than my personal hunch."

"What can we do?" Kacey asked.

"We can keep an eye on him...follow him, and see what he does."

Kacey nodded and went back into the water while Ava took a seat on a lounge chair opposite the chair where her suspect was sitting. She pretended to be interested in her cell phone, but she kept her eyes on him every moment.

After twenty minutes, the suspect and his girlfriend got up and started putting on their sandals.

Ava stood up and did the same. She told Rick that she needed to go back to her room for a little while, but would be back soon.

Ava watched the couple exit the pool area and go into the hotel then she followed.

The couple stepped into a waiting elevator. Just as it was about to close, Ava stepped inside. She glanced at the buttons and noticed the one for the second floor was lit. She reached over and punched number three.

The doors closed quietly and the three people stood in the elevator in silence. The young couple was still holding hands, and the young man leaned over to kiss his girlfriend's cheek. She smiled back at him. Neither of them paid any attention to Ava, who stood in the corner.

The doors slid open on the second floor and they exited the elevator.

Ava stuck her foot into the elevator track so she could watch the couple as they walked down the hallway. Peering out the door, she saw them turn left at the corner, heading down a hallway.

As soon as they were out of sight, Ava stepped out of the elevator and walked quietly to the corner where the couple had disappeared.

The couple was halfway down the hall when they stopped at a door on their right. Ava counted the number of doors on the hallway to where they stood. As they turned to enter the room, Ava pulled back and out of their sight. When she heard the door close, she walked down the hallway, counting the doors, to their door and leaned close to it.

Through the doorway she could hear a young man and a girl talking in Spanish. She understood a little of what they had said, but heard the girl say that she would be back in a minute. Ava noted the room number, and then hurried down the hallway toward the corner. She heard a door close, but it was not the door to their room. It must have been the bathroom door inside their room. Ava turned around to take one last look down the deserted hallway, and then returned to the pool.

When she saw her friends, she told them that the couple had gone into room 241.

"That's good to know, Ava," said Rick, "But we still don't have any proof that he's your thief."

With a frown, she nodded, "I know."

"Well, maybe we'll think of something. Let's dry off and go get something to drink," Kacey suggested.

The next morning, the girls picked up the guys from their hotel and drove them to Cocoa Beach. The girls pointed out the hamburger stand where they rescued the turtle. They parked in a lot near the Cocoa Beach Pier, and headed to a shack where they could rent surf boards.

Emma found a spot to lie out on the sand and watch the surfers.

"I'll be the official judge," she told them, "Remember, the first person who rides the waves all the way to the shore is the winner."

"How do you know we can trust you?" Rick teased her.

"You'll just have to rely on my good character," Emma replied, "I promise to be totally fair."

The guys laughed and made comments that it would just be a contest between the two of them. Kacey warned, "You two haven't had any lessons. We have, so just watch out."

Josh and Rick laughed.

"Just watch us and try to keep up!" Josh yelled as he ran toward the beach with his board.

The others followed and were soon splashing in the shallow waves curling toward the shore. The wind was up and the waves out near the end of the pier were nearly six feet. The foursome paddled out to the end of the pier where other surfers were just getting up on their boards.

Kacey shouted over the wind to Josh, "Do you know how to get up on the board?"

"Hey!" Ava yelled back, "No helping the guys! This is a contest, remember?"

Kacey laughed, "Okay!"

Kacey found her wave and remembered how to get up on the board. She took her time and did each step carefully. To her surprise, she was surfing on her first try.

She looked over at the others. Ava was up on her board, too, looking confident. Rick was kneeling on his board, trying to stand. He slipped off and fell in as his board bobbed up into the air. Josh kept falling off his board

whenever he tried to stand. Kacey and Ava laughed and then focused on their surfing.

A huge wave came from Kacey's left side and tilted her off balance. She fell off the board and landed with a splash. Ava kept on going.

Another surfer suddenly steered into Ava. He tried to turn away at the last moment, but he fell off his board and pushed Ava off balance. She fell and dived under the water. As she came up through the wave, the other surfer was grabbing his board.

"Sorry!" he yelled. Ava noted he was no more than fourteen, so she just nodded and swam to retrieve her board.

She and Kacey paddled back out toward the end of the pier.

"Look! Rick is up on his board!" Ava cried.

Kacey watched as Rick tried to balance himself on the crest of the wave, but lost his balance and fell. The girls both laughed in fun. Josh was still trying to catch a wave and get on his board.

"Come on!" Ava cried, "Let's beat these guys first, then we'll teach them how to surf."

"Okay!" Kacey responded enthusiastically.

The two girls were able to find good waves and get up on their boards again. This time they both rode in together, waving at the guys as they surfed past. Both Rick and Josh stopped to watch them.

Kacey crouched to keep her balance and so far she was keeping up with Ava, who was surfing like a pro. As they neared the shore, it became more crowded with surfers and swimmers, and the girls had to steer around them. Kacey veered right to avoid hitting someone and lost her balance. She fell in just as Ava was nearing the the shore, but she too fell off her board just a short distance away.



Emma stood up and cheered, waving her arms. She ran to the water to meet the girls and yelled out, "Ava, you're in first place, and Kacey is a close second!"

"Whoo-hoo!" Ava cheered and looked behind her to find the guys.

Josh was up on his board, but instantly fell off. Rick was just getting on again. He tilted the board and slid off as the board popped up into the air.

The girls stood on the shore together and laughed until their sides hurt.

"They haven't got a clue!" Emma cried.

"And they bragged so much about not needing any lessons!" Kacey exclaimed.

"Right!" Ava asked, "Should we go give them a hand?"

Kacey nodded, "Yeah, why not? Come on!"

The girls paddled out to where the guys were trying to get up on their boards and informed them that Ava had won and Kacey came in a close second.

"Oh, sure! Rub it in!" Josh teased, "Okay, I give up. It's not as easy as I thought it would be!"

"You want some help?" Kacey asked.

"Sure!" he replied with a grin.

Kacey gave Josh instructions while Ava helped Rick. Once they learned how to get up on the boards properly, the guys were able to keep their balance. They made short runs at first, but soon got the hang of it and were able to keep up with the girls.

After two hours of surfing, the couples decided to check in with Emma and get something to eat.

They walked up to the pier and found a counter service restaurant with picnic tables. They all sat together eating and watching the other surfers.

"Man, this weather is great!" Josh commented, feeling the sun and the wind on his face.

"The water's a little chilly," Kacey commented.

Rick stuffed a french fry in his mouth and replied, "I think it's perfect. If it were any warmer, you'd feel like a tea bag!"

Everyone laughed and then finished lunch. They walked around on the pier looking at the various things for sale. The girls showed them where they had jumped off the pier to save the girl who was caught by a shark.

"Let's go back and do some more surfing. We still have another hour left on our surf board rentals," Rick said. Everyone agreed and headed back to the beach.

After another hour of surfing, the group returned their surf boards and hiked back to their convertible.

"You guys did really great out there!" Kacey commented.

"Yeah, once you taught us how to do it, we were fine. Thanks for the lessons," Josh said as he kissed Kacey.

"Yeah, me too," Rick echoed and kissed Ava.

Emma sighed, "Okay, enough with the kissing. Let's get back to the hotel."

The girls laughed and Kacey started the car. Soon they were heading back to Lake Buena Vista. On the way, they stopped and bought ice cream for Ava and for themselves.

The guys promised to take the girls out to a nice restaurant for dinner, so they all went back to their hotels to change clothes and get ready. At six o'clock, the girls arrived at the hotel where the guys were staying. Kacey pulled up in front of the lobby and Ava got out of the car to find them. Josh came through the door and waved to her, then went back in to get Rick.



As the girls sat in the car waiting, Ava suddenly said, "Emma! Look who's coming to dinner!"

Emma looked up from her cell phone at Ava, asking, "What?"

"Look!" Ava pointed.

Emma looked toward the lobby entrance and saw Rick, Josh, and her boyfriend, Dave.

"Dave!" Emma cried, "What's he doing here?"

"Hi!" Dave called, waving his arm. Emma jumped out of the car and ran to meet him.

He picked her up and whirled her around in a hug.

"Dave! I thought you couldn't come!" she cried.

"I convinced my boss to let me off early today so I could fly down here and be with you."

"But we're going home on Sunday!" Emma declared.

"I know," he shrugged, "I wanted to be with you so much, but I couldn't get time off work. I hope you understand."

Emma hugged and kissed him, "I do! And I forgive you!"

"Thanks!" he said, sounding relieved.

"Come on, guys, we'll be late for dinner!" Josh reminded them, and everyone squeezed into the convertible.

Once they were at their table at the restaurant, they ordered dinner, and then Dave asked the girls about their rescue of the girl attacked by a shark. They gave him all of the details, and Emma told him about the sea turtle rescue.

"Gee, it sounds like you've really had some adventure!" he replied.

"And then our room was robbed!" Emma told him.

After Emma finished relating the whole story, Ava said, "The saddest thing is that we haven't caught the guys who robbed the hotel, and we're going home on Sunday. That only gives us one more day to find them so Tanya can get her job back, and hopefully we can get our stuff back. We also want to help Tanya get her job back."

"There must be something we can do," Kacey said.

"We need to catch them in the act of robbing a room," Ava explained, "but how can we do that with only one day left?"

Soon their meals arrived, and the conversation turned to food. But Kacey was still thinking about Tanya, and how she had promised to help her get her job back. Mr. Robertson would not likely hire her back until the robbers were caught. If only they could catch the robbers in the act of taking something...

When dinner was over, Dave asked Emma to go for a walk with him out on the beach near the hotel. The others stayed in to talk some more about the

robbery.

Dave led her out to the beach where they stood watching the colorful sunset. He had his arm around her shoulders, and she snuggled against him.

"It's so beautiful here," she said, "I really hate to leave on Sunday."

"Yeah, it's really nice," he said. They were both quiet for a while, and then he reached into his pocket and brought out something.

"Emma, I've got a special present for you."

She grinned and looked into his eyes.

"You do? I love presents, but it's not my birthday yet-"

"I know. But I didn't want to wait another six months for your birthday to give this to you."

He handed her a small box, and she guessed it was large enough to hold a pair of expensive earrings.

"Oh, Dave, you're so sweet! I didn't get anything for you-"

"Open it," he said.

She opened the box and found a diamond ring. Emma's heart stopped as she realized what was happening, and she gasped in shock. Chills ran through her whole body.

Dave smiled at her, asking, "Emma, will you marry me?"

Her jaw dropped and she couldn't speak.

## Chapter Twelve

When she finally could breathe again, she cried, "Oh, Dave! Of course I'll marry you!"

He hugged and kissed her, and then took the ring out of the box and slid it onto her finger.

"We've been going together since high school," he said, "And now I'll be graduating from college in six weeks, and I'll be working full time. Mr. Gregson offered me a full time job at the engineering firm. That's why I couldn't just take off from work this week. He had asked me to work over Spring Break several weeks ago, and I told him I would, so I couldn't go back on my word. Then yesterday he called me into his office and asked if I'd like to work full time after I graduate in May."

"Oh, Dave! That's wonderful!"

"Yeah, it's really great news. I'll be able to save a lot of money between graduation and our wedding. Oh, by the way, when would you like to get married?"

Emma's first reply was, "Right away!" but then she laughed. "I know that's not going to happen, so why don't we plan on getting married next year in June? That gives us plenty of time to plan the wedding, save up our money, and find a place to live."

"That sounds like a good idea," Dave agreed.

The couple lingered on the beach a little while longer, and then finally decided to go inside and tell the others their exciting news.

They found the others at the table talking.

"Well, we thought we'd have to leave without you," Josh teased.

Kacey noticed a special twinkle in their eyes and asked, "So, how was the beach?"

Emma smiled and said, "You won't believe what I found on the beach!"

She held up her hand so they could see the ring on her finger.

The girls cried out in surprise and jumped up to hug Emma while Josh and Rick pumped Dave's hand and congratulated him. Emma showed off her ring proudly, and Ava said,

"You'd better not let that ring out of your sight back at the hotel or it might get robbed!"

"Don't worry, I'm never taking it off!" Emma promised.

Kacey suddenly jumped up and exclaimed, "That's it! I've got it!"

"Got what?" Josh asked.

"That's how we'll catch the robbers! Emma's ring is the perfect bait!"

Emma covered her hand, "Oh, no! You're not getting this ring off my finger to use as bait!"

Kacey shook her head, "Don't worry, we won't need to. All we need to do is make sure Juan and his friends know that you have the ring. Then somehow we'll let them know that you've left it in the hotel room, like maybe while swimming at the pool. Then you guys can hide inside our room. If the robbers come in looking for the ring, you can catch them!"

Ava nodded, "That just might work. But we'd better let Security know what we're doing so they can take them into custody until the police arrive."

"But what if we're wrong and it's not Juan and his friends who are robbing things?" Emma asked.

Kacey shrugged, "Then no harm is done. At least we can try."

"Yeah!" Ava agreed, "We need to plan this out carefully so we don't let them slip away."

"Let's go back to our hotel and work out the details," Kacey said.

The next morning, the three girls went to breakfast in the café as usual. They hoped to find Juan there with his friends, but the guys were not in sight.

"What will we do now?" Emma asked.

"Just stick with the plan. Juan could have friends working in the café, remember?"

"Okay," Emma agreed.

They looked over the menus until a waitress arrived.

"May I take your order now?" she asked.

Kacey and Ava ordered first. When it was Emma's turn, she closed her menu and said,

"I don't think I can eat a thing! I'm just too excited!"

"Oh, Emma!" Kacey interjected, "I know! Getting that diamond ring last night must have been quite a shock!"

"You're not kidding! But you know my Dave...full of surprises! I never expected him to propose to me!"

The waitress smiled, "Oh, you got engaged last night?"

"Yes! Right on the beach at the restaurant where we had dinner!"

"Congratulations," said the waitress.

"Thanks! I only wish I could wear the ring! He bought it a size too large, and I'm afraid I might lose it, so I'm keeping it in my room until I can take it to a jeweler to have it fitted for me."

Ava chimed in, "You sure wouldn't want to lose that rock! It must have cost a fortune!"

Emma shrugged, "Oh, well, I'm sure it wasn't a fortune for Dave. After all, his father has promised him a full time job after graduation at his firm. He'll probably become the vice president in no time!"

Kacey asked, "How much does that diamond weigh?"

"Three and a half carats!" Emma gushed.

"Wow!" the waitress exclaimed with wide eyes.

"You're going to need muscles to haul that thing around," Ava said, "You'd better eat something to keep up your strength!"

Emma laughed, "Oh, I guess I should. I think I'll have the blueberry pancakes."

"Thank you," the waitress replied, "And congratulations!"

The girls thanked her and waited until she was far away before talking.

"Well, one seed has been planted," Kacey said.

"Yeah, if she's involved, maybe she'll tell Juan about the ring." She looked at Emma and smiled, "Boy, you really laid it on thick...three and a half carats?"

"Well, we want to tempt them, don't we?"

She looked down at her hand. She had turned the ring around so the diamond was hidden and had kept her left hand under the table.

"You know, I don't care that my real diamond is only half a carat. I still love it. I wouldn't even care if it were a fake!"

"It's beautiful, Emma," Kacey said, "And I'm sure you're very happy that Dave proposed."

"Yeah. When he didn't come here on Spring Break, I got to thinking maybe he was tired of me and had someone else he was dating."

Ava shook her head, "Dave is crazy about you, Emma! Didn't I tell you that?"

The food arrived shortly after and the girls ate while keeping an eye on the waiters and waitresses.

"I don't see anything suspicious going on," Kacey remarked.

"Neither do I," Ava agreed. She was paying more attention to the staff members than her own meal, and was the last to finish. She looked at her watch and said,

"We still have half an hour to kill. Let's walk around to see if we can spot Juan or his friends."

The girls agreed and they soon left the café and headed toward the pool.

The pool area was not busy, and there was no sign of Juan or his friends. They walked down to the beach and found only a few people there. Ava

checked her watch again and then said, "It's almost time. Let's head back."

The girls were soon in their hotel room.

The room looked empty, but Ava announced, "It's only us. Any luck?"

The three guys came out of their hiding places and shook their heads.

"No, nothing yet, but it's early," Josh said, "Now it's the girls' turn to wait."

"I'm starved. Let's go eat breakfast!" Dave announced. Before he and the guys left, Dave and Emma hugged each other and kissed. Rick and Josh left and Dave followed soon after.

"So now what?" Emma asked Ava.

"We get ready to go hang out at the pool and look for Juan. He always seems to be there."

The girls changed into their bathing suits and waited until the guys came back. Then the girls left to go to the pool while the guys stayed in the room to wait for the robbers. Tossing a roll of duct tape into the air and catching it several times, Dave asked,

"Do you think this plan is going to work?" he asked his friends.

They shrugged, "Who knows. Until someone comes up with a better plan, it's all we've got."

Down at the pool, the girls found three empty lounge chairs and sat down. There was no sign of Juan, so they took their time putting on sun block and talking about their plan.

The girls waited by the pool for almost an hour. Twice Ava walked down to the beach and around the hotel looking for any sign of Juan. Kacey went for a swim while Emma read a magazine.

When Ava returned, Kacey asked, "Did you see him?"

Ava shook her head, "Nope. Maybe he checked out."

"I certainly hope not," Kacey said, "Today's our last day to catch him."

Emma said, "I feel bad for Dave. He flew all the way down here and his only day with us is going to be spent hiding up in our room!"

Ava nodded and said, "Maybe we can try to leave Juan a message at the front desk just to find out if he's still here."

"Good idea," Kacey said, "I'll go do that while you two stay here."

Kacey dried off and wrapped a towel around herself. She headed toward the front desk inside the lobby.

The desk clerk smiled and asked, "May I help you?"

"Yeah, I was hoping to see a friend before I leave tomorrow, but I don't even know if he's still here at the hotel. Can you tell me if he's checked out? I only

know his first name is Juan and he's from Puerto Rico. He's a young guy...about my age, with dark hair and brown eyes. Have you seen him?"

The desk clerk smiled, "Not that I remember, but I'll check the registration for anyone named Juan."

She pulled up a file on her computer and began searching Juan's name. After a few minutes, she shook her head.

"I'm sorry, but there's no one registered here by that name. Could he be staying with someone else under a different name?"

Kacey shrugged, "Maybe. Well, thanks for trying."

"You're welcome. Have a great day!" the clerk replied.

Back at the pool, Emma and Ava were looking tired and hot.

Kacey told them what she had learned from the desk clerk.

Emma said sarcastically, "Great! So he may not even be here at all. He and his friends may be miles away already."

Kacey looked at her watch and said, "Let's wait another half hour. If he doesn't show up, we'll call off the whole thing."

The others agreed and sat down to wait. More and more people came down to the pool. Young people frolicked in the water while their parents kept an eye on them. Kacey kept looking at her watch. After thirty minutes, she said, "I guess he's not coming. Let's go back to the room. There's no sense in wasting our last day hanging around the hotel."

The others agreed and everyone left, heading back to the hotel. Kacey was really sad that she couldn't catch the robbers and get Tanya's job back for her. She had prayed about it last night and again this morning, but nothing had happened.

'God's plan is best,' she told herself. She had learned long ago from her father that if things weren't going as she had planned, it was because God had a better plan in mind.

As they were entering the hotel, someone was just coming out of the elevator. They almost bumped into him before they realized it was Juan.

"Juan!" Kacey exclaimed, "What a surprise!"

"Yeah," Ava said, "We thought you had left and gone back to Puerto Rico."

He gave a bright smile, "Oh, no...not yet."

"We leave tomorrow," Emma volunteered. As Juan was looking at Kacey, Emma turned her ring around her finger and hid her left hand behind her.

"Well, have a great trip home," he said, "Did you have a good time here?"

"Yeah, it was awesome! We were just headed for the pool. Want to go with us?" Kacey asked.

"Sure!" he agreed and followed the girls back out to the pool. Ava lagged behind and sent a text message to Rick saying that Juan was with them.

They found four chairs together and sat down by the pool.

"So tell me," Juan said, "What did you like best about your vacation here?"

"Well, the theme parks were amazing," Kacey said.

"And so was the surfing," Ava added.

"And my favorite thing," Emma said with a smile, "Was getting engaged!"

"You did?" Juan exclaimed, "That's great!" His eyes searched for her hand and she noticed.

"Oh, I didn't bring my ring down to the pool because I don't want to lose it. It's a little too large, so I'm taking it to a jeweler this afternoon to have it resized."

"Yeah, you wouldn't want to lose that rock!" Ava said.

"I'll say!" Kacey agreed, "What does it weigh? Like two carats?"

Emma grinned, "No, three and a half carats! But Dave can afford it now that he's going to be working at his father's firm. He comes from a wealthy family."

"Wow," Juan remarked, "You are very lucky. I hope you put the ring into the safe in your closet."

"Oh, is there a safe in there? I didn't know," Emma replied, "No, I just put it under my pillow after the maid cleaned our room this morning. I'm sure it will be fine there."

"Hey, Juan, how about a swim?" Ava asked him.

He looked at his watch, "Oh, no, I'm afraid I can't. But you girls stay and enjoy yourselves. It's your last day. Have fun!"

"We will!" Kacey promised, and said to Ava, "I think I'll go swimming, too."

"I'm going to lie here and soak up the sun for another hour or two," Emma said.

"Well, if I don't see you girls again, have a good trip home. It was nice meeting you," Juan said. They all said their goodbyes and watched him leave.

After he was gone, Kacey asked, "Do you think he bought it?"

Ava said, "I don't know, but we'll soon find out."

Juan headed into the hotel while texting someone to meet him on the second floor. Soon, he was stepping out of the elevator and into the hallway. He nodded to his friend, Carlos, and asked, "Did you get the room number?"

"Yeah, it's the same one we hit earlier this week. Do you think we should still go in there?"

"Of course! All three girls are down at the pool. But we'll have to work fast. She put a diamond ring under her pillow. We'll check the beds first."



Carlos was wearing a short, gold waiter's jacket and carrying a tray. They found room 221 and knocked. Carlos announced, "Room service."

When no one answered, he used a key card and opened the door. The room was empty. Carlos and Juan went inside and began looking under the pillows of each bed.

Suddenly, Juan called out, "Got it!"

He held up a small box from a jeweler.

Carlos hurried to his side and said, "Open it!"

Juan opened the box and found a small note inside that read, "Surprise!"

They exchanged puzzled looks.

"Not what you expected, was it?" a voice asked. The two robbers spun around to find themselves facing Josh and Rick, who had been hiding in the bathroom.

Carlos dropped the box, and Juan held his hands out, saying, "We were just delivering a room service order."

"We didn't order any room service. And you went right to the beds and started looking for the ring. You thought it was there," Josh said.

"No, that's not true!" Juan pleaded, "We weren't looking for a ring!"

"It sure looked that way," Rick said, "Should we play it back again and see how it looks?"

Dave stepped out from the closet holding up his cell phone.

"I got the whole thing on video. I think I'll post it on You Tube right now," he said.

"No!" Juan cried. He and Carlos made a rush for the door, but Rick and Josh stopped them. They grabbed both guys and forced them onto the ground with Dave's help. Dave tied them up with duct tape and taped their mouths.

Dave picked up his phone and called Mr. Rivers.

"Mr. Rivers, we've got your robbers! Caught them red-handed here in room 220, and it's on video, too!"

"I'll be right there!" Mr. Rivers replied.



Dave called Emma and told her the news.

"They caught them!" Emma exclaimed to her friends, "Juan and another guy came into our room, and they caught them!"

"That's great! Let's go!" Ava replied and they hurried back into the hotel.

By the time the girls got to their room, the door was open and Mr. Rivers was there along with two uniformed security men. They took Juan and Carlos out of the room while Mr. Rivers stayed to speak to the group. The two robbers scowled at the girls, and Emma stuck out her tongue at Juan.

When they were gone, Mr. Rivers smiled at Kacey and her friends.

"That was quite a clever trap. I didn't think it would work, but it did!"

Ava nodded, "Once I saw Juan's friend at the pool, I thought he looked familiar. He's the same one who's in your security video."

"Yes, and I'm going to interview them both before the police get here. They may have others who are involved in this," Mr. Rivers said.

"I think it may involve someone in the café or one of the restaurants," Ava said, "Because they had to get a master key to get into the rooms."

Mr. Rivers nodded, "Well, I'll find out what they know, and I'll call you later. Thank you, all of you, for catching these two."

"You're welcome," Ava replied.

Dave asked Mr. Rivers for his cell number so he could send him the video of the robbery.

"Mr. Rivers?" Kacey asked.

"Yes?"

"Now that we have the robbers, is there any way you can help Latanya get her job back? She was wrongly accused. She had nothing to do with the robberies."

He smiled, and said, "After I finish my investigation today, I'll talk to the manager, Mr. Robinson, about that."

"Thanks!" Kacey smiled.

Emma asked, "And when can we get our stuff back?"

Mr. Rivers replied, "If they have sold the items already, then we might not be able to get them back, but we'll try. We'll certainly see that you are reimbursed for the items. Excuse me, but I've got to go now. The police will be at my office any minute."

The door closed and the three couples all congratulated each other with hugs and kisses.

"Case closed!" Ava declared.

"Does this mean we can go eat lunch now? Cause I'm starving!" said Dave.

"You're beginning to sound just like Emma!" Kacey said, and everyone laughed.

"Hey, after lunch, let's go to the beach and do some surfing!" Josh suggested.

The next morning, the girls got up early to pack their things and get ready to leave the hotel. They planned to pick up the guys from their hotel and go to the airport together. As they were heading down to the lobby, Ava's phone rang.

"It's Mr. Rivers!" she announced before answering it. She listened intently and the other two girls waited patiently until the call was over. Ava thanked Mr. Rivers and hung up.

"Mr. Rivers said the two guys confessed once they got to the police station and were booked. They had another guy who worked in the café as a bus boy, named Sam, working with them. He got his hands on a master key and the room service jacket, and he examined the receipts at the café to find out the room numbers of people who were in the café eating. He texted the room numbers to the other two guys to let them know where to look for stuff. And all the stuff they stole is still in the trunk of Juan's car. Mr. Rivers said the police took the car and its contents as evidence until the trial."

"Great! That means we'll get our things back!" Emma exclaimed.

"Yeah," Ava continued, "None of the three guys was staying here as a guest. Only Sam worked here at the café. The other two just came here and hung out waiting for tips on which rooms to rob. All three of them had planned to leave the hotel tonight and take their stuff down to Miami to sell it. That's where they're really from."

"Wow, we caught them just in time!" Kacey declared, "Let's go tell the guys!"

An hour later, their convertible was parked outside the hotel entrance. The guys loaded the luggage into the trunk and then someone called out to them.

"Kacey! Ava!"

Kacey turned to find Tanya running towards them. They hugged each other.

"Thank you so much!" Tanya cried, "Mr. Robertson called me this morning and told me that you caught the robbers! He said I can come back to work here-with a raise!"

"That's great!" Kacey cried, and gave her another hug.

"Thank you, all of you," said Tanya, wiping tears from her eyes, "I was almost ready to give up everything...on ever finding another job and my dreams of going to college. Then I remembered what you told me, Kacey...that I needed to show my faith and thank God for the blessings he has given me, and to trust Him. And it all worked out!"

Kacey smiled, "I was praying for you, too, Tanya. God always answers our prayers."

Tanya nodded and gave her another hug.

"Thank you so much, Kacey! I'll never forget you!"

"You're welcome! Let's keep in touch. I want to come back here and attend your graduation!"

"That would be awesome!" Tanya cried.

The girls waved goodbye to Tanya as they drove away.

Ava turned to Kacey, saying "I'm so glad she got her job back."

Kacey just smiled.

"I knew it would all work out. God has never let me down yet."

"Amen to that!" Ava replied.

The End

I hope you enjoyed this story and will read more of Kacey's adventures. All of the Kacey and Fiends adventures are free downloads at

[www.smashwords.com](http://www.smashwords.com). Just search for C. Fennessy. Kacey and her friends are featured in *The Ghost of Castle Isle* and *Kacey and Friends at Camp Wildwood*.