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BEVERLY,  
RIGHT  
HERE

*Beverly,  
Right Here*



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Right Here*

Kate DiCamillo



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For *Andrea Tompa*



# *One*

Buddy died, and Beverly buried him, and then she set off toward Lake Clara. She went the back way, through the orange groves. When she cut out onto Palmetto Lane, she saw her cousin Joe Travis Joy standing out in front of his mother's house.

Joe Travis was nineteen years old. He had red hair and a tiny little red beard and a red Camaro, and a job roofing houses in Tamaray Beach.

Beverly didn't like him all that much.

“Hey,” said Joe Travis when he saw Beverly.

“I thought you moved to Tamaray,” said Beverly.

“I did. I’m visiting is all.”

“When are you going back?” she said.

“Now,” said Joe Travis.

Beverly thought, *Buddy is dead — my dog is dead. They can’t make me stay. I’m not staying. No one can make me stay.*

And so she left.

“What are you going to Tamaray for?” said Joe Travis. “You got friends there or something?”

They were in the red Camaro. They were on the highway.

Beverly didn’t answer Joe Travis. Instead, she stared at the green-haired troll hanging from the rearview mirror. She thought how the troll looked almost exactly like Joe Travis except that its hair was the wrong color and it didn’t have a beard. Also, it seemed friendlier.

Joe Travis said, “Do you like ZZ Top?”

Beverly shrugged.

“You want a cigarette?” said Joe Travis.

“No,” said Beverly.

“Suit yourself.” Joe Travis lit a cigarette, and Beverly rolled down the window.

“Hey,” said Joe Travis. “I got the AC on.”

Beverly leaned her face into the hot air coming through the open window. She said nothing.

They went the whole way to Tamaray Beach with one window down and the air-conditioning on full blast. Joe Travis smoked six cigarettes and ate one strip of beef jerky. In between the cigarettes and the beef jerky, he tapped his fingers on the steering wheel.

The little troll rocked back and forth—blown about by gusts of air-conditioning and wind, smiling an idiotic smile.

Why were trolls always smiling, anyway?

Every troll Beverly had ever seen had a gigantic smile plastered on its face for absolutely no good reason.

When they got to the city limits, Beverly said, “You can let me out anywhere.”

“Well, where are you headed?” said Joe Travis.  
“I’ll take you there.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” said Beverly. “Let me out.”

“You don’t got to be so secretive. Just tell me where you’re going and I’ll drop you off.”

“No,” said Beverly.

“Dang it!” said Joe Travis. He slapped his hand on the steering wheel. “You always did think that you was better than everybody else on God’s green earth.”

“No, I didn’t,” said Beverly.

“Same as your mother,” said Joe Travis.

“Ha,” said Beverly.

“You ain’t,” said Joe Travis. “Neither one of you is any better. You ain’t better at all. I don’t care how many beauty contests your mama won back in the day.” He stomped on the brakes. He pulled over to the side of the road.

“Get out,” said Joe Travis.

“Thanks for the ride,” said Beverly.

“Don’t you thank me,” said Joe Travis.

“Okay,” said Beverly. “Well, anyway—thanks.”

She got out of the Camaro and slammed the door and started walking down A1A in the opposite direction of Joe Travis Joy.

It was hot.

It was August.

It was 1979.

Beverly Tapinski was fourteen years old.

## *Two*

She had run away from home plenty of times, but that was when she was just a kid.

It wasn't running away this time, she figured. It was leaving.

She had left.

Beverly walked down the side of A1A. She had on an old pair of flip-flops, and it didn't take long for her feet to start hurting. Cars went zooming past her, leaving behind hot gusts of metallic air.

She saw a sign with a pink seahorse painted on it. She stopped. She stared at the seahorse. He was

smiling and chubby-cheeked. There were a lot of little bubbles coming out of his mouth, and then one big bubble that had the words SEAHORSE COURT, AN RV COMMUNITY written inside of it.

Past the sign, there was a ground-up seashell drive that led to a bunch of trailers. A woman was standing in front of a pink trailer holding a hose, spraying a sad bunch of flowers.

The woman raised her hand and waved. “Howdy, howdy!” she shouted.

“Right,” said Beverly. “Howdy.”

She started walking again. She looked down at her feet. “Howdy,” she said to them. “Howdy.”

She would get a job.

That’s what she would do.

How hard could it be to get a job? Joe Travis had done it.

After the Seahorse Court, there was a motel called the Seaside End and then there was a restaurant called Mr. C’s.

MR. C’S IS YOUR LUNCH SPOT! said the sign. WE COOK YOU ALL THE FISH IN THE C!

Beverly hated fish.

She walked across the blacktop parking lot. It was almost entirely empty. She went up to the restaurant and opened the door.

It was cool and dark inside. It smelled like grease. And also fish.

“Party of one?” said a girl with a lot of blond hair. She was wearing a name tag that said *Welcome to Mr. C’s! I’m Freddie.*

From somewhere in the darkness, off to the left, there came the ping and hum of a video game.

“I’m looking for a job,” said Beverly.

“Here?” said Freddie.

“Is there a job here?”

“Mr. Denby!” shouted Freddie. “Hey, someone out here wants a job. Who knows why.”

Beverly looked to the right, past Freddie. She could see a dining room with blue chairs and blue tablecloths, and a big window that looked out on the ocean. The brightness of the room, the blueness of it, hurt her eyes.

She remembered, suddenly, that Buddy was dead.

And then she wished she hadn’t remembered.

“Forget it,” she said out loud.

“Forget what?” said Freddie. “We’re getting ready to close, anyway. This is just a lunch restaurant.” And then she shouted again, “Mr. Denby! Hey, Mr. Denby!” She rolled her eyes. “I guess I have to do everything around here.”

She walked off down the dark hallway. A minute later, she was back. A man with a mustache was walking behind her. There was a red crease on the man’s forehead, and he had on a gigantic tie imprinted with little yellow fish.

“This is Mr. Denby,” said Freddie. “He was asleep. Can you believe it?”

Mr. Denby blinked.

“He had his head down on the desk and everything,” said Freddie. “He was snoring.”

“I was not snoring,” said Mr. Denby. “I was not sleeping. I was resting my eyes. Paperwork is hard on the eyes. Freddie says that you want a job.”

“Yes,” said Beverly.

“Well, we do need someone to bus tables. I’ll have to interview you, I suppose.”

“What’s your name?” said Freddie.

“Beverly,” said Beverly.

“I’ll get right on it, Mr. Denby,” said Freddie.

“You’ll get right on what?” said Mr. Denby. He rubbed at the red mark on his forehead.

“You spell Beverly with a B, right?” said Freddie.

“Right,” said Beverly.

“Follow me,” said Mr. Denby.

The video game pinged and chortled. Mr. Denby headed down the dark hallway.

Beverly wasn’t a big fan of following people.

But Buddy was dead.

What mattered now?

Not much.

Nothing really.

She followed Mr. Denby.

## Three

The office smelled like fish and cigarette smoke. It had a big desk and three metal filing cabinets. The desk was piled high with stacks of paper. There was a fan balanced on one of the stacks.

“There’s a lot of work to do around here,” said Mr. Denby. He waved his hand in the general direction of the desk. “As you can see.”

Beverly nodded.

“So I need someone with a good, strong work ethic,” said Mr. Denby. “I need someone who believes in getting things done.”

He reached out and turned on the fan.

The top layer of papers blew off the desk.

“Shoot,” said Mr. Denby. “Do you see what I’m talking about here?” He turned the fan off and moved it to the floor. The papers fluttered and sighed. Mr. Denby sat down at the desk. He folded his hands.

“Sit down,” he said. He nodded in the direction of an orange plastic chair. Beverly sat down.

Mr. Denby looked at her. “Let’s see,” he said. “Have you ever worked in a restaurant before?”

“No,” said Beverly.

“Do you like fish?”

“Not really,” said Beverly.

Mr. Denby sighed.

“I have three kids,” he said. “Three girls. They’re in Pennsylvania. With their mother.”

Beverly nodded.

“It’s a tragedy, having kids,” said Mr. Denby. “Don’t let anybody tell you any different.” He stared at his hands. “What happens with kids is you want to protect them, and you can’t figure out how to do

it, and it drives you crazy. It drives you right out of your head. It keeps you up nights.”

“Uh-huh,” said Beverly.

She doubted that her mother had ever stayed up at night thinking about how she could protect anybody.

“How old are you?” said Mr. Denby.

“Sixteen,” said Beverly.

Mr. Denby put his head down on the desk. And then he lifted it and looked at her. “Sixteen,” he said. “I can’t stand it.” He put his head back down.

Freddie came into the office.

Mr. Denby raised his head again.

“Freddie,” he said, “how old are you?”

“Why do we have to keep talking about this?” said Freddie. “I’m a high-school graduate. I walked across the stage and everything. Besides, you shouldn’t talk to ladies about their age. It’s rude. Here,” she said.

She handed Beverly a name tag that said *Welcome to Mr. C’s*. Underneath that was a piece of tape with white letters that said *I’m Beverly*.

“Wow,” said Beverly. “Thanks a lot.”

“Making name tags is something that I’m just naturally good at,” said Freddie. “Plus, I like using that little machine. It’s like a wheel. You just find the right letter on the wheel, and you punch it down hard, *wham*, and a letter appears. It’s like magic.”

Mr. Denby said, “Margaret, Alice, and Anne. Those are the names of my girls. Someday one of them will go into a restaurant and lie to a man about how old she is. It makes me sad. But what can I do? What am I expected to do? I’ve got a business to run here. I’ve got mouths to feed. You can start tomorrow.”

“But she’s not waiting tables, right?”

“No, Freddie,” said Mr. Denby. “She’s not waiting tables. She’ll bus tables. Have you ever bused tables, Beverly Anne?”

“No,” said Beverly. “And my name is Beverly. Just Beverly.”

“Right,” said Mr. Denby.

“Anyone can bus tables,” said Freddie. “Anyone can learn how to do that. It’s not like it’s a skill or anything.”

“Great,” said Beverly.

“It’s not fun here,” said Freddie. “You have to have a dream and work to keep it alive because it’s not any fun at all doing this job.”

“No one said it would be fun,” said Mr. Denby. “It’s a fish restaurant. Not an amusement park.”

“Okay, well,” said Freddie, “I’m only warning her.”

“Good-bye, Freddie,” said Mr. Denby.

“I’m telling you: you have to have a dream,” said Freddie. She opened her eyes very wide.

“Good-bye, Freddie,” said Mr. Denby again. He stood up.

Beverly stood up, too. “Thank you, I guess,” she said.

“Sure,” said Mr. Denby. He held out his hand. Beverly shook it.

“Come in at ten tomorrow,” said Mr. Denby. “There’s a lot to do. There’s paperwork to fill out.”

“Don’t worry,” said Freddie as Beverly was pushing open the door to leave Mr. C’s. “He’ll never find the paperwork. He can’t find anything in that office. You can work here the rest of your life,

and you'll never have to fill out any paperwork.”

“I'm not going to work here the rest of my life,” said Beverly.

“Ha-ha,” said Freddie. “Tell me another joke. Better yet, tell that joke to Charles and Doris in the kitchen. This is the end of the road unless you have a dream.”

Beverly opened the door.

Outside, the sun was so bright that it almost knocked her off her feet.

## *Four*

So she had a job.

It didn't make her feel that much better.

She walked down A1A. She tried not to look behind her because the thing about Buddy was that he had always been behind her, and now he wasn't.

Up ahead, past Mr. C's, there was a phone booth. Beverly looked at it, glittering and flashing in the sun. She had the idiotic thought that what she should do was call Buddy.

Buddy.

Who was a dog.

Who had been a dog.

Buddy.

Who was dead.

She went up to the phone booth and pushed on the door and went inside. It felt like stepping into a tall, narrow oven.

Beverly pulled the door shut.

Her mother answered on the first ring.

She didn't sound too drunk.

"It's me," said Beverly.

"Where are you?" said her mother.

"It doesn't matter," said Beverly.

She heard the snick of a lighter. She heard her mother inhale.

"I just wanted to let you know that I'm okay," said Beverly.

"You're okay? That's what you called to tell me? That you're okay?"

"Yeah."

"Whoop-de-do," said her mother. "You're okay."

Beverly leaned her head against the glass of the phone booth. “I got a job,” she said.

“Anyone can get a job,” said her mother. “I’ve had a job my whole life, and you can see how much good it’s done me. Where are you?”

Beverly said nothing.

“Fine,” said her mother. “Don’t tell me.”

“I just wanted to let you know that I’m okay,” said Beverly.

She hung up the phone.

She closed her eyes. She kept her head against the oven-door warmth of the glass. She could hear the cars going down A1A, and underneath that, there was the sound of the ocean — bright, hopeful, relentless.

Sweat was running down her face.

She kept her eyes closed for what seemed like a long time. When she opened them and lifted her head, she saw words glinting in the glass above her.

She read the words out loud: “In a crooked little house by a crooked little sea.”

It was like the beginning of a story.

*In a crooked little house by a crooked little sea.*

She reached up and touched the words. Someone had scratched the letters into the glass with something sharp.

Beverly thought about Raymie.

Raymie was her best friend.

Raymie would like these words.

But Raymie — constant, reliable Raymie, Raymie who had never failed her — wasn't here, was she?

She was back there, back where Beverly's old life was.

Back where Buddy's grave was.

Beverly traced her finger slowly over the words.

How could a sea be crooked?

That was stupid.

She stood up straight. She opened the door to the phone booth. She started walking down A1A again, back the way she had come. She walked past Mr. C's.

She walked past the Seaside End Motel.

She walked to the Seahorse Court. The woman was still standing out in front of her pink trailer. She was still watering her stupid flowers.

She saw Beverly. She waved. “Howdy, howdy!” she shouted.

The woman was like something that would spring out of a cuckoo clock, shouting her stupid greeting on the hour and the half hour.

Beverly sighed. She turned down the seashell path and walked toward the pink trailer.

She couldn’t say why.

“Howdy,” she said when she was closer to the woman.

And then she said it again.

“Howdy.”

## *Five*

Hold up and let me turn off this hose,” said the woman. “And then we can visit proper.”

“I’m not visiting,” said Beverly.

“Just let me turn this off,” said the woman. She bent over and struggled with the spigot. “Well, shoot,” she said. “My hands are so messed up with this arthritis that every little thing is hard to do sometimes.”

“I’ll do it,” said Beverly. “Move out of the way.”

The woman stood up, and Beverly bent over and turned the handle on the spigot.

“There you go,” said the woman. She clapped her hands. “Easy as pie.” She smiled. Her face was creased with wrinkles, and she had on a big pair of glasses that made her eyes look huge. She stared up at Beverly. She blinked.

“Now,” said the woman. She blinked again. She looked like a baby owl. “I wonder who you belong to.”

“What?” said Beverly.

“Who are your kin?” asked the woman.

Beverly shrugged.

“You don’t have kin?”

Beverly shrugged again.

Joe Travis Joy was kin, she supposed. And there were all the cousins on her mother’s side of the family. And her uncle.

And there was her mother, of course.

Even though Beverly didn’t really feel like she was related to her mother.

And there was her father, who had been gone since she was seven years old.

She had a dog. Or she used to have a dog.

She had friends.

Well, one friend—Raymie.

Her other friend—Louisiana—had left and was in Georgia now.

It stunk, how people left.

“I don’t have any kin,” said Beverly.

She stared at the old lady. Either her hair was crooked or she was wearing a wig.

“Everybody has kin,” said the woman in a very solemn voice.

Beverly was hungry and tired. She thought that she would like to sit down.

She felt as if she had traveled a long way.

Even though Tamaray Beach wasn’t really that far from Lister.

She wished, suddenly, that she had gone farther.

“Listen to me,” said the woman. She looked up at Beverly. Her glasses glinted in the late-afternoon light. “I think you’re hungry. Now, am I right? Are you hungry?”

“Yes,” said Beverly.

She was hungry.

The world got very quiet. There was no sound except for the ocean crashing and muttering.

It would be nice if the ocean would shut up for just a few minutes.

“You didn’t tell me your name,” said the woman.

Beverly looked down and saw that she had the name tag from Mr. C’s in her hand. She held it up like it proved something.

“What’s that?” said the woman. She leaned in closer. She squinted. “Bee-verl,” she said. “Your name is Bee-verl?”

“It’s Beverly. I just got a job.”

“Over at Mr. C’s?”

“Yes.”

“Well, good for you. Although they do fry their fish half to death over there. I’m Iola. Iola Jenkins.”

“Okay,” said Beverly.

“Let me ask you something, Bee-verl.”

“It’s Beverly.”

“I know it,” said Iola. “I’m just joshing you. Now, here is what I need to know. Can you drive a car?”

“Yes,” said Beverly.

“Well, now,” said Iola. She cleared her throat.

“Here is another question. Do you enjoy playing bingo?”

“Bingo?” said Beverly.

“Never mind,” said Iola. “Don’t pay me no mind. Why don’t you come on inside, and I will make you a sandwich?”

Beverly put the name tag in the pocket of her jeans. She followed Iola up a flight of crooked wooden stairs.

*In a crooked little house by a crooked little sea.*

“Now, you like tuna fish, don’t you?” said Iola from up ahead of her.

What was it with people and fish?

“Sure,” said Beverly.

“Good,” said Iola. “I make the best tuna melt you will ever have in your life.”

“Oh, boy,” said Beverly. “I can’t wait.”

## *Six*

The thing about the Pontiac,” said Iola when Beverly was sitting across from her at the tiny little table in the tiny little kitchen, “is that I promised my children I would not drive it. I signed a piece of paper, a — thingamajig.”

“A contract?” said Beverly.

“That’s it,” said Iola.

Beverly picked up her sandwich and took a bite. It tasted like fish, but it also tasted good. Iola had toasted the bread and melted cheese on top of

the tuna, and the sandwich was warm in Beverly's hands.

For some reason, she felt like she might cry.

She took another bite.

"I signed a contract," said Iola. "That's exactly what I did. It was Tommy Junior who made me do it. He's a lawyer. He had me sign it, and it says that I will not, under any circumstances, drive the Pontiac until further notice. Or some such."

"Why?" said Beverly.

"Why what?" said Iola. She blinked. Up close, her eyes looked even bigger and owlier.

"Why did he make you sign a contract?"

"Pshaw," said Iola. She waved a hand through the air. "It wasn't nothing much. I mixed up the reverse and the forward is all. I ended up driving the Pontiac into Bleeker's Insurance. I knocked a few bricks off the building—that's all, a few bricks. But my land! You would have thought that I had knocked the whole building down the way everyone went on about it.

"You know, those insurance companies deal with catastrophes all the time, and this was not a

catastrophe. No, it was not—it was a few bricks. Ten, at most. And the front of the Pontiac got crumpled up some. It still runs! It’s a wonderful car, and it still runs. But I can’t drive it because I promised I wouldn’t. Me, not driving! Why, I’ve been driving practically my whole life.”

“I’ve been driving since I was in fourth grade,” said Beverly.

“Fourth grade?” said Iola. She blinked.

“My uncle taught me. My mother was drunk all the time, and so he figured it was a good idea for me to know how to drive.”

“For heaven’s sake,” said Iola.

Beverly shrugged. “All I’m saying is that I’m a good driver.”

“The Pontiac is very large,” said Iola. “It’s a large car.”

“It doesn’t matter what size the stupid car is,” said Beverly. “I can drive it.”

When Beverly was done eating, they went outside to the carport.

The Pontiac was huge and olive-colored. Its front end was smashed in.

“Are you sure it still runs?” said Beverly.

“It runs,” said Iola. “And I tell you what. I should just get in there and start it up and drive on out of here and go to the VFW on my own. I don’t care about the contract. I don’t! I’m happy to lie to the children. They lied to me all the time, growing up.

“But here is the truth: I’m afraid. I’m afraid of my own capabilities. I mean to say that I am afraid I’ve mislocated my capabilities.” Iola sighed. “What it comes down to is that I don’t know if I trust myself anymore.”

“Give me the keys,” said Beverly.

Iola went into the trailer and came back with the keys and a big black purse. Beverly got in the driver’s seat, and Iola got in the passenger seat.

The Pontiac started right up.

Beverly backed it out of the carport.

“Well,” said Iola, “you’re good at backing up.”

“I’m good at going forward, too,” said Beverly. She put the Pontiac in drive, and they went down the little seashell road of the trailer park and out onto A1A.

Beverly smiled. She looked over at Iola. She was smiling, too. Her black purse was balanced in her lap.

Beverly went faster.

“Oh, my,” said Iola. She put both hands on top of her purse. “Now, you have a driver’s license, don’t you?”

“Sure,” said Beverly. She was only a year away from her learner’s permit—less than a year, really. A learner’s permit was a license, wasn’t it?

She put her foot down on the gas. They went faster still.

This was what Beverly wanted—what she always wanted. To get away. To get away as fast as she could. To stay away.

*Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds.*

That was a line from a poem they had memorized in school.

Beverly didn’t think the poem was that great, but she loved the words about the surly bonds, about slipping them. Those words made sense to her.

Iola cleared her throat. Beverly thought that she was going to tell her to slow down.

Instead Iola said, “Who do you belong to, child?”

“No one,” said Beverly.

“Well, I don’t believe that,” said Iola.

“It’s true,” said Beverly.

“Where are you living?”

“None of your business,” said Beverly.

But where was she living? She hadn’t thought about that at all.

“When you get as old as me,” said Iola, “everything is your business. How about I make you a deal?”

“I don’t want to make a deal,” said Beverly.

“The deal is you can stay with me. You can drive me to bingo at the VFW. And to the grocery store. We can help each other out until you’re ready to go back to where you belong.”

“You don’t even know me,” said Beverly.

“I do not,” said Iola.

“I could be a criminal.”

“Are you?” said Iola.

Beverly shrugged.

“My husband always did say that I was a fool

for trusting people. He said, ‘Iola, you would trust the devil to sell you a pair of dancing shoes.’”

“Why would the devil be selling shoes?” said Beverly.

“The devil gets up to all sorts of nonsense,” said Iola. “That’s why he’s the devil. But still—people got to go on their instincts sometimes, don’t they? We got to trust each other in the end. Don’t you think?”

Beverly could think of all kinds of reasons not to trust.

People leave—that was one of the reasons.

People pretend to care, but they don’t, really—that was another one.

Dogs die, and your friends help you to put them in the ground.

That was a big one, right there.

“You can stay with me,” said Iola. She reached over and patted Beverly’s arm. “We will help each other out. We’ll trust each other.”

## *Seven*

They stopped and got chocolate milkshakes at a place called Sandcastle Sweets, and when they came back to the Seahorse Court, it was dusk and a purple gloom was settling over everything.

Iola gave Beverly a nightgown to sleep in—one with pink flowers and lace at the collar.

Beverly thought that she would rather die than put it on.

And then she put it on.

She was making all kinds of questionable decisions: working at a fish restaurant, eating tuna melts, wearing flowered nightgowns.

“Do you know how to play gin rummy?” said Iola.

“Sure,” said Beverly.

They went out to the small porch at the back of the trailer. There was a wicker couch out there, and a wicker chair and a little glass table.

Iola put a bowl of peanuts on the table, and then she dealt the cards.

“Don’t hold back just because I’m an old woman and can’t stand the thought of losing,” she said.

“Why would I hold back?” said Beverly.

It was full dark outside.

A streetlight clicked on, and the little porch became a yellow island.

Beverly thought, *I have left home to wear a flowered nightgown and sit on a little tiny porch in a trailer park and play cards with an old lady. This is stupid.*

But where she had been had never truly felt like home.

Still, it was where Buddy was buried—out underneath the orange trees in the backyard. Beverly had dug the grave herself, crying the whole time and promising herself that once she stopped crying, she would never start again.

Putting dirt on top of his body—covering him up, sending him away without her—was the hardest thing she had ever done.

Raymie had come over to the house and stood with her in the backyard. She put dirt on top of Buddy's body, too.

“Buddy,” Raymie kept saying. “Buddy, Buddy.” She was crying. “How are we going to survive without him?” she asked. “He was the Dog of Our Hearts. That's what Louisiana always called him. Remember? How are we going to live without him?”

Beverly didn't know. She felt mad at Raymie for even asking the question.

“We should say some poetry,” Raymie had said when they were done covering Buddy up.

Poetry seemed beside the point.

But Beverly had said the words she knew, the words she had been made to memorize, the ones about slipping the surly bonds.

And then Raymie had left, still crying, and Beverly had set off to Lake Clara, and, somehow, she had ended up here.

“What are you thinking about?” said Iola.

“Nothing,” said Beverly.

“It’s your turn,” said Iola.

Beverly drew a card.

“Looka here,” said Iola. “Here comes His Majesty, King Nod.”

A fat gray cat stepped out onto the porch. He looked to the left and then to the right, and then he came running and jumped into Beverly’s lap.

“Would you ever look at that?” said Iola. “Nod doesn’t care much for people. He has truly only ever liked other cats. There used to be a Wynken cat and a Blynken cat, but they are both gone. And now Nod is left all alone.”

“I don’t like cats,” said Beverly. She gave Nod a push, but he stayed where he was, purring.

“Listen,” said Iola. “You can hear him. He sounds like a happy motor. Ain’t that something? It’s like he’s been waiting on you to show up.”

“Right,” said Beverly.

The cat stayed in Beverly’s lap until the last card game, and then right before Beverly won, Nod leaped up and left the porch with his tail high in the air.

Iola stood. She said, “Now, this here can be your room. This whole porch can be yours. I’ll get you some linens.”

She left and came back with flowered sheets and a flowered pillowcase, and a yellow towel and washcloth. Iola unfolded the sheets and spread them over the cushions of the couch.

“I can do that,” said Beverly.

Iola tucked the sheets into the cushions. “I’m sure you can, darling. But right now, I’m taking care of you.”

When she was done, Iola left the porch and turned off the light. “Good night,” she said. “Sleep tight; don’t let the bedbugs bite. And remember, tomorrow is bingo at the VFW.”

“Oh, boy,” said Beverly. “I can’t wait.”

She lay down on the couch. She pulled the top sheet up to her chin. It smelled like soap.

Bugs were hitting the louvers of the porch. She could hear the ocean breathing in and out.

Buddy was in the ground.

And Beverly was here. In Tamaray Beach. In a crooked little house by a crooked little sea. Wearing a flowered nightgown.

She would write to Raymie.

That’s what she would do.

Tomorrow, she would ask Iola for a piece of paper and an envelope and a stamp, and she would write to Raymie and tell her about Mr. C’s and about the phone booth words. She would tell her about driving the Pontiac. She would tell her about Iola and Nod.

She would say that she didn’t know how they were going to live without Buddy. She would say that she didn’t understand how they were going to survive, either.

Right before she fell asleep, Beverly saw Buddy’s grave, the black emptiness of it. And then, sometime

in the middle of the night, she woke up to Iola standing over her. She didn't have her glasses on. Or her wig. The top of her head was fuzzy. She looked like a baby chicken. She was standing there in the half-dark, and then she was gone.

Later still, the cat came in and curled up on top of Beverly's hair and started purring.

"Get off," said Beverly. She pushed at him, but all he did was purr louder.

Somewhere outside, a cricket was singing.

The cat purred. The cricket sang. The ocean muttered.

"Good grief," said Beverly.

She stopped pushing at the cat.

She gave in.

## *Eight*

In the morning, Iola cooked Beverly an egg, sunny-side up. She made her toast. She cut the toast in half and buttered it. Beverly looked down at the blue plate with the toast and the egg on it, and the sentence that came into her head was “You can’t make me stay.”

She was getting ready to say those words out loud to Iola—you can’t make me stay—when Iola said, “Remember, tonight is bingo at the VFW.”

“You told me already,” said Beverly.

“I’m reminding you is all. You play for money, and that makes it exciting. You could win as much as fifty dollars.”

“Oh, boy,” said Beverly.

Nod was up on top of the refrigerator with his back to them. His tail was hanging down, twitching back and forth like a metronome. He was staring at the wall very intently.

“What were you doing standing over me last night?” said Beverly.

“I wasn’t standing over you, darling,” said Iola.

“Yes, you were,” said Beverly.

“You were dreaming.”

“I was not,” said Beverly.

Nod hopped down off the refrigerator and up onto the table.

“Shoo,” said Iola. She waved her hand in the direction of the cat, but he just sat there, staring at Beverly and her egg.

The radio was on, playing a mournful orchestrated version of some Beatles song.

“I got an idea,” said Iola. She sat down at the

table across from Beverly. “Why don’t you and me trust each other like we said we would.”

“I never said I would trust you,” said Beverly.

“You didn’t say you wouldn’t,” said Iola. She smiled.

And that was how they left things.

Beverly put on her same clothes from the day before. She pinned her name tag on her shirt. Iola said, “Good luck, Bee-verl!” and Beverly walked down the ground-up seashell road of the Seahorse Court and up to A1A. She walked past the Seaside End. She walked across the parking lot of Mr. C’s and pulled on the door of the restaurant.

It was locked.

She had to knock on the door for a long time before Freddie came and opened it.

“We’re closed,” said Freddie. And then she said, “Oh, it’s you. I forgot about you.” She narrowed her eyes. “Weren’t you wearing exactly the same outfit yesterday?”

“It’s not an outfit,” said Beverly. “And so what if I was?”

Mr. Denby came out of the office. He was wearing another big tie. This one had a single blue fish on it.

Mr. Denby pointed a finger at Beverly. "You look familiar," he said.

"You hired her," said Freddie. "Yesterday. She's busing tables. She's not waiting tables. She's busing them. And she has on the same clothes that she had on yesterday, which seems kind of gross if you ask me."

Mr. Denby snapped his fingers. "You're Beverly Anne," he said.

"Right," said Beverly. "I'm Beverly Anne."

"Let's get you an apron," said Mr. Denby.

The apron was long and green. It had a big C on the front of it. Mr. Denby put the apron over Beverly's head, and then tied it in the back. She could hear him humming. His breath came out in small gusts that smelled like toothpaste and fish.

"There you go," said Mr. Denby. He patted her on the shoulder. "You're all set. Freddie will show you the ropes. I'm going to head to the office and give my girls a call and wish them a happy Monday."