

I started packing my bags into my army green suitcase. I didn't have many friends because my father and I were always moving around different parts of the country. We usually moved to a town on the coast because my dad studied sea life needed to be near the ocean to work. The last time I had seen my mother was when I was two years old. She had left my father and I alone.

I grabbed my suitcase and wheeled it out of the small apartment my father and I had been living in for 5 months. The apartment was small and outdated; it didn't even have a washing machine. Every other time we had moved, we packed up our bags into the old station wagon and drove off. But my father had sold the station wagon just a week before.

"Dad... how are we going to get there?" I had asked when we were just standing outside the apartment ready to go.

"I didn't tell you? We are going to be living on my study boat for six months," he said staring off into the ocean. I didn't say anything, I just stood there. I didn't even take the news as a surprise, I knew this would happen one day.

We started walking towards the dock, our suitcases rolling behind us. As we got closer the air felt like it was getting cooler with every step. We walked out onto the old wooden dock. The boat was called The Sapphire Adventurer, I don't know why he named it that, I never really got what went on in his mind.

We hopped into "Old Sapphie" as he called it. The boat was pretty big. In the bottom he had set up two tiny bedrooms for us to sleep in. My bed was maybe even smaller than a twin size, and the only other things in the room was a small ceiling lamp and a dresser built into the wall. I sighed and then unpacked my things and neatly set them in the dresser. Then I shoved my suitcase under the bed. I walked back up to the deck of the boat. The ocean looked more blue than from on land, and the air smelled extremely salty.

"Hey Valery, did you get your bags unpacked?" my dad asked.

"yep," I said blandly and walked to the railing to look out into the deep blue ocean.

It had been weeks on the boat, and I was getting so bored. My dad always was studying to marine life, he never had any time to talk. I had read every book I brought within the first week, and now I had reread them each about three times. My life had gotten so boring I was sleeping about five hours more each night than I used to. My life was boring up until the day the storm came.

It started out just as boring as any other day, but then when I went up onto the deck of the

boat I was dark gray clouds swirling in the sky. I quickly ran down to my dad's study room.

"Dad? Is it normal for gray clouds to be swirling in the sky?" I asked even though I obviously knew it wasn't. My dad looked up from his work.

"What?!" was all he said and in a flash he was already up on the deck. "The weather map shows this storm to come in tomorrow night!" he said with a worried look on his face. I just stood there, I has no idea what was going to happen next.

"Grab a life jacket!" my dad ordered. So I did. The life jacket was the ugliest orange I had ever seen in my life. I felt like a maniac just wearing it.

"Good, now go into the storm shack over there!" He ordered pointing over to where what he called "the storm shack" was. So I walked over. The door was rusty and horribly hard to open, like it hadn't been used in ten years. When I finally got the door open I walked in and quickly shut the door again. It smelled like rotting fish mixed with rust, the smell felt like it was permanently damaging my nose.

I looked through the small window that was made of flexible plastic so if it broke it wouldn't kill me. Huge waves started to form in the ocean. A big one had got the deck of our boat filled with salty water. I could feel the boat starting to rock. I could hear the wind gusting against the small window, and I had almost totally forgotten about the horrible stench. A tear fell from my eye, I was terrified. Then suddenly the boat started rocking even harder, I could barely keep my balance in the tiny room I was standing in. Then I blacked out.

I must have been out for a long time, because when I woke up the sky was clear blue. I stood up in the tiny room, I felt a little dizzy so it was hard to keep balanced. I pushed on the door. It didn't budge. I pushed again, a little harder this time. The door still didn't move. Was I stuck in here? Why wouldn't the door move? I stepped back and threw myself toward the door, my elbow hitting the wall. My elbow throbbed. And the door still hadn't budged. I banged on the door, hoping somebody would hear me. Then I screamed, I was stuck in my dad's "storm shack".

After screaming I realized I had no idea where my dad was. I was still stuck, and my dad was lost. Great. A tear rolled down my face. I collapsed back into the floor. I just sat there holding my knees in close to my chest and cried.

I didn't know how long I had been in the room, but I was starving and the room was getting extremely hot. I needed to get out. I stood up. I felt disgusting with tears and sweat on my face. With all of my strength I charged at the door one last time. The door burst open and I fell out of the tiny room right onto my face. I just lay on the ground for a few minutes, my face was stinging. Then

I finally pulled myself up onto my feet. The air was humid. I took a few slow steps to the the deck of the boat. But when I got there, a huge hole lay in the center. What had happened? I remember my dad again. Where was he?

“Dad!” I yelled, but there was no answer. Only the sound of waves. I climbed down the ladder and walked onto the sand. There were palmettos around the sandy area I was standing. I just sat down and cried.

I had probably fallen asleep because I opened my eyes and the sunlight surrounded me. Then I realized there were people around me. Every one was in bathing suits and laughing. I shoot up. I was now fully alert. I contemplated going up and asking a stranger for help, but then I decided that wouldn’t be a good idea. They would probably make me go to a foster home. Then I remembered my mom. I hadn’t seen her for over 10 years and I had no idea where she was living. I only knew her name.

Quinn Costello. That was my mothers name. She never took my dads last name, so hers was different from mine. I remember her being short like me, but almost everything else about her I had forgotten. My dad had told me many stories about her but never did he tell me what she looked like.

I walked out of the beach area and into the small town. The buildings were painted bright colors. I could tell that the town was very touristy. Most of the shops sold souvenirs and tee-shirts with South Carolina flags and palmetto trees. I walked by a coffee shop called “Myrtle Beach Coffee” so I figured I was in Myrtle Beach. I needed to find a computer so I could at least find my mothers facebook page.

“Excuse me,” I said to a stranger walking by. But he just kept walking, nit even looking at me.

“Excuse me!” I said I little louder to another stranger walking by. She stopped in her tracks.

“Yeah,” she said smiling. She had gorgeous chestnut colored hair and wore black square framed glasses.

“Um... does this town have like a library or somewhere that has computers?” I asked shyly.

“The library does, but you need a card to get in,” she said. “I think there is also an old internet cafe... but it might have closed,” she added.

“Do you know where the internet cafe is?” I asked.

“Yeah, um...” she thought for a second and she added “If you walk to the end of this block,” she said pointing down the block, “Then take a left for a block then go right, it should be there,” she said.

“Okay, thank you so much!” I said to her smiling. Then I headed off in the direction she

pointed. I passed more souvenir shops and ice cream parlors filled with candy colored decorations. It was early afternoon, and the sun beat down in me so much I could feel my self getting sunburnt. I turned right onto N. Ocean Blvd. I looked down the street and saw it. Dollie's Internet Cafe. I ran towards it and opened the glass door that had the store hours printed on it.

Inside there was a middle aged man with dusty brown hair. He was wearing an old varsity jacket that looked about five sizes too small. He didn't look up when the bell rang as I inched my way in. We were the only people in the store except for the soft humming of the old iMacs sitting on tables scattered around the room.

"H-Hello," I said, I could tell my voice was a bit shaky. He finally looked up from his desk.

"How can I help you?" he said in the dullest most grumbly voice I had ever heard.

"I um... need to use the internet..." I said raising my eyebrows.

"For how long?" he mumbled.

"Well probably like ten minutes, maybe," I said.

"Okay, that with be \$5.25," he said looking away from me. I walked over to him and handed him some money that I had in my pocket. I only had a \$10 bill, so if I needed anything else I might be in trouble. Then he gave me back my change and without another word I was online.

I logged in to my facebook account and searched up "Quinn Costello" in the search box. 1 result. I clicked on her profile. Then I clicked on information. I knew that my mom was born in Harrington, Delaware. So it must be the right Quinn Costello. I read on, and found out that she was living in Athens, Georgia. How was I going to get there? I was whole state away and I definitely couldn't pay for a train ticket. I could take the bus, but it would take a while to get there, and I didn't even have enough money for that. I would have to hitch hike. No one ever hitch hiked anymore, but it was the only way I was going to get there. I wrote down her address and then logged off facebook. I stood up and walked back onto the streets of Myrtle Beach.

By now it was mid afternoon and the air was so hot you could see the heat rising from the asphalt. I walked down the street towards the highway. Luckily for me the highway was close to the the internet cafe. Not insanely close, but close enough to be able to walk. I could feel the sweat running down by back, but I knew I was getting close from the sounds of cars humming by.

I walked up the the edge of the highway. I felt like I was about to get ran over by the cars speeding past me. I put my hand out and made a thumbs up. I had seen so many old movies where they hitchhiked so I knew this was how to do it. Finally after about 10 minutes a car stopped. It was a navy blue Honda mini van.

“Can I help you?” said a middle aged lady in a southern accent after rolling down the window.

“Um... I’m going to Athens, Georgia, and I need I ride ‘cause I don’t have enough money for a bus,” I said a little nervous.

“Well we are going to Evans ,Georgia, and we can take you with us. But you’ll have to find another ride after that,” she said smiling.

“Oh thank you so much! That’s fine with me,” I said. Then she pressed a button and the door opened. Inside the car were six sleeping toddlers, probably all about four years old.

“So, where should I sit...?” I asked.

“Oh, well you can just squeeze in anywhere back there,” she said. I sounded so happy, maybe it was just her southern accent though. So I climbed into the car and sat down between a blonde little girl and a drooling toddler boy, moving the boys leg so I could fit into the space.

We had been driving for about a half hour when the toddlers started to wake up.

“Mommy, who is that?” the blonde little girl asked in a whiney voice.

“This is... Honey what was your name again?” she asked me.

“Valery,” I answered.

“This is Valery,” she told the toddlers, “and she is driving with us to grandma’s house!” she exclaimed.

I must have fallen asleep because I woke up to all the toddlers sleeping and crying. I felt my leg with my hand, it was all wet and slimy from one of the toddlers’ drool. I yawned.

“Oh good, you’re up!” Just in time. You need to get out cause we’re in Evans, Georgia!” she yelled.

“Okay! Thanks so much for the ride,” I said while climbing over the toddlers to exit the mini van.

“No problem, Sugar!” she yelled, and then drove off. And I was left alone again.

I stood near the road with my thumb up again. Every once in a while someone would pull over, but they would always be going away from Athens. But after hours of standing a red truck pulled up.

“Where you goin’ ma’am?” asked a middle aged man in an orange plaid shirt.

“Athens, Georgia,” I responded.

“Well alright, I’m driving right by there, I’ll drop ya off,” he said. His southern accent was stronger than the last lady’s. “Hop on in!” he said sounding enthusiastic.

“Thank you sir!” I said grinning at him. I was only a two hour drive but it seemed like forever. I was so close to seeing my mom, but I had no idea what I would say when I got there.

We drove through several towns on the way. The sun was now setting. My stomach growled and I realized how hungry I was.

“Almost there,” he said. I was smiling so hard my cheeks were hurting. “Where are you going?” he asked.

“I tink it’s called Summer View, it’s a neighborhood on the west side of town,” I said looking out the window.

“Alright,” he said keeping his eyes on the road. Then we were there. All the houses looked new. Then I saw it. 9740 West Wood Drive.

I walked up to the door and took a deep breath then knocked on the door. I heard bussling around insaid, and then the door opened. I froze. I didn’t know what to say. Finally I said “Quinn Costello?”

“Yes,” she said. I grinned. I was home.