



DOLPHIN DREAMS

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Avery

“You’re planning to wear *that*?”

“Yeah. Why?” I glanced down, hoping I hadn’t spilled something on my shorts or, worse, my favorite T-shirt.

My cousin Kady wrinkled her nose. “You’re twelve, not two,” she said. “Nobody wears big, baggy shirts with pictures of dolphins on them around here.”

Her older brother, Cameron, looked up from his cereal and laughed. “So speaketh the fashion princess,” he intoned. “Better change into your

best ball gown, Avery. Otherwise Kady won't be seen with you."

Kady rolled her eyes in Cam's general direction. Then she grabbed me by the wrist and dragged me toward the stairs. "You can borrow one of my shirts. But hurry. My friends are probably already there."

Soon we were in her room. Our room. Well, sort of, anyway.

I glanced at the air mattress crammed into the corner by Kady's overflowing closet, wondering how my life had turned upside down so suddenly.

Never mind—I knew exactly why. It was because my father had decided he didn't want to be married anymore. That was why Mom and I had moved halfway across the country to Southern California to stay with her sister's family.

Kady was only a year older than me—fourteen and a half months, we used to say when we were little. So that had seemed like a silver lining. At least if I had to leave everyone and everything I'd

ever known behind, I would have a built-in best friend in California.

Only it hadn't worked out that way at all.

"Here, try this." Kady tossed a wrinkled blouse at me. "It should fit okay."

The blouse was yellow with sparkles on the collar. When we were little, Kady would have made fun of a shirt like that. She used to be a tomboy, like me, who loved stuff like catching tadpoles in the creek and camping out in the backyard. And dolphin tees.

I touched the soft fabric of my shirt. So far, the only good thing about moving here was seeing real live dolphins in the Pacific. Cam had taken me to the beach last week, only a day or two after we'd arrived, as soon as he found out I liked them. We'd stayed there, perched on big, smooth rocks, until we finally spotted a pod playing out past the breakers.

It had been amazing. I'd held my breath as I watched them leap and spin, their wet gray skin

shining under the bright California sun. Dolphins have been my favorite animal for as long as I can remember, but the only place I'd ever seen one before that was in a big tank at the aquarium back home.

So I guess that was the real silver lining. Not Kady, but the dolphins, which Cam had assured me swam near that beach all the time. He knew, since it was his favorite surfing spot. All I had to do was walk the eight blocks to get there and I could watch them for hours if I wanted. For a second I thought about doing that right then instead of going to the mall with Kady and her friends.

But it was the first time Kady had invited me to do anything, and I was still hoping she'd turn back into my fun, friendly cousin from years ago. So I decided to go. Still, that didn't mean I had to do everything she said. "Thanks, but I think I'll keep this on," I told her, tugging down the hem of my T-shirt.

"You can't." She crossed her arms. "Seriously. It's like a major fashion faux pas."

I didn't know what that meant, and I didn't care. "Come on, let's go if we're going." I dropped the yellow blouse on her bed and headed for the door.

She muttered something I couldn't quite hear and followed. "Don't blame me if my friends make fun of you," she said as she pushed past me to lead the way downstairs.

Her friends didn't make fun of me. Mostly because they totally ignored me. We met them at the mall, which looked pretty much like every other mall I'd ever been to back home. It wasn't like the fancy outdoor palm tree-lined shopping centers down in LA that I'd seen on TV and in the movies. When I said that, Kady and the others all looked at me as if I had two heads and three noses.

So I kept pretty quiet after that, which wasn't like me. Normally I can talk about anything with anyone. I just couldn't think of anything to say to these girls who only seemed interested in boys and clothes and lip gloss and celebrity gossip. Weren't there any normal kids in California?