

Chapter 1

Willa Roberts parked her car at the top of the bluff. She got out. For a moment she stood quietly staring out across the ocean. Today the surf was smooth. Blue water mirrored blue sky. Gentle waves broke into creamy foam on the shore. Seagulls swooped overhead. Their cries broke the silence.

She thought about other times she'd stood here. Times when it was stormy. Or nights when the moon was full. She thought about the bloody battle that had been fought on the beach. It had been two hundred years ago.

She remembered things she'd seen. Sounds she'd heard there. They were strange sights and sounds she couldn't explain.

Willa shivered. She loved Wreckers Cove. But sometimes it was just a little too spooky.

Every time I stand on this bluff, I feel like I've gone back in time, Willa thought. *There's so much history here. Too bad it's about to be destroyed.*

She glared at the new sign. It had just been posted at the top of the bluff.

Welcome to Wreckers Cove
Future Site of the Wreckers Cove Resort
Another Project of Anderson Enterprises

Anderson Enterprises was the company owned by Roger Anderson. He was a local land developer. He claimed to have the town's best interests at heart. But Willa wasn't so sure. Her hometown was becoming nothing but a tourist trap.

Tomorrow morning the cove would change. Heavy equipment and noisy construction workers would be all over

this place. Within a few months, the resort would block the public view. Local people wouldn't be able to get down to the cove. Roger planned to keep the cove for his paying customers.

I sure hope the locals agree that it was worth it, Willa thought sadly.

The sound of laughter and shouts broke through her thoughts. She glanced over her shoulder. Two teens ran toward the path that led down to the beach. One of them was tall with dark hair. He was carrying a couple of boogie boards. Willa recognized him at once. He was Steve, Roger Anderson's son.

Running behind him was a smaller boy with blond hair. He was loaded down with towels, water bottles, and sunscreen. Willa had never seen him before. He must be a newcomer.

The tall boy plunged down the steep path. The blond-haired boy slowed and stopped. Anderson's sign had caught his attention.

“Hey, Steve,” he called out to his friend. “Why is this place called Wreckers Cove?”

Steve didn’t stop or glance back. “Who cares?” he yelled over his shoulder. “Maybe there used to be an auto wrecking yard here. Come on, Danny, the waves look perfect.”

Danny frowned. “An auto wrecking yard?” he said. “Right on the beach? That’s dumb!”

“And wrong,” Willa said. She couldn’t help herself. The history of this town was important to her. She didn’t often have a chance to talk about it.

Danny glanced at Willa, noticing her for the first time. “What do you mean?”

“The town of Wreckers Cove is named after this place,” Willa said. Then she smiled and introduced herself. “I happen to love history,” she added.

Danny smiled back. “Me too,” the boy said. He shook her hand. “But what does *wrecker* mean?” he asked.

She pointed down at the beach. “See how protected the cove looks?”

Danny nodded.

“It’s not really a safe place,” she said. “A few hundred yards out in the ocean, there’s a nasty reef. Steep rocks rise up under the water. Some of them are as sharp as sharks’ teeth.”

The boy frowned. “So?”

“The Wreckers were people who lived in this area two hundred years ago,” Willa said. “At one time they had been smugglers. Then they decided to stay here. They lured ships onto the reef. In those days the wooden ships easily broke up on the rocks. That’s where the word *wreckers* comes from. First the Wreckers wrecked the ships. Then they stole the cargo.”

“Wow!” Danny said. “So they were really like pirates.”

Willa nodded.

“Hey, Danny!” Steve was already on his boogie board. He sounded impatient.

Danny sighed. “I guess I’d better get down there,” he said. “But I’d really like to hear more about the Wreckers.”

“I’ll walk with you,” Willa said. “I love the beach this time of day.”

When they reached the sand, Danny spread out a towel. They sat down.

Steve hadn’t waited around. He was already paddling out to meet the waves.

“What kind of cargo did the smugglers get?” Danny asked.

“All kinds of things,” Willa said. “Silk and lace. Fine china. Gold coins.”

“What about the people on the ships? What happened to the sailors and the passengers?” he asked.

“Well, that’s the ugly part of our town’s history,” she said. “Some of the people drowned when the ships smashed on the rocks. But the Wreckers couldn’t afford to leave any witnesses. They made sure that any survivors never made it off the beach.”

Danny's eyes widened. "You mean they murdered the rest of the people?"

She nodded. "They sure did. The Wreckers murdered a lot of innocent people to cover up their crimes."

"Wow, what a story!" he said. "How long did this go on? Someone must have gotten suspicious after a while."

"Oh yes, there were plenty of complaints," Willa said. "But remember that news traveled slowly in those days. No Internet. No email. No cell phones."

Danny laughed.

"The governor finally realized there was a problem," Willa went on. "He sent the army to Wreckers Cove. The soldiers found stolen cargo hidden in people's homes and barns. Right here on this beach there was a bloody battle between the soldiers and the Wreckers."

"Who won?" he asked.

"The soldiers, of course," she said. "In

fact, most of the Wreckers were killed that day. People say that on stormy nights here at the cove, you can still hear their ghosts wailing and moaning.”