

LUCKY ROCKS

CHAPTER 1 EXCERPT

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Summary: From relentless pranks to monster fish, Kevin, Rudy, and Preech experience the summer of a lifetime.

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CHAPTER 1

If I didn't get a hook in the water soon, my head was going to explode. But there were two small problems—the little munchkin and a pile of chores.

My little sister, Milly, was four and did kooky things all the time. She made (and sometimes tasted) triple-decker mud pies and talked to dragonflies. Today, however, she was bent on getting entertained by me and my best friends, Preech and Rudy.

"We're working on something very important. Why don't you try to catch your shadow?" I pleaded.

"I tried Kevin, really really hard. But it's too slippery."

Milly pulled at my shirt and started singing something about a game of hopscotch or ring around the whatever, and I glanced at Preech and Rudy for help. They acted like they were focused on tying the fishing poles to their bikes. We'd geared up for fishing about a million times before, and it looked like the poles were secure enough to make a ride across Alaska.

"All right, all right, let's go find something to do. I'll meet you two in the house in a minute."

Preech nodded, "Ten-four, see you there." As he bent over to give Milly a high five, Rudy gave him a wedgie that lifted Preech so high his toes barely touched the ground.

I laughed and watched Preech chase Rudy into the house. He shook a fist at Rudy with one hand as he pulled his underwear out with the other.

I put Milly on my shoulders as we walked towards the flower bed surrounded by monkey grass. The begonias stood at attention like little soldiers, and the elephant ear plants had leaves as big as Milly. The names of the plants were burned into my brain because I was the "chosen one" to replant new ones each spring since they all died at some point every summer.

I'd get thrown around behind our six-hundred-year-old tiller to turn in new dirt, which made my teeth feel like they were rattling out of their sockets, then I'd put the plants into their new homes. I felt sad I was sending them to their death, but maybe our backyard was the place plants were sent to kick the bucket.

I didn't know what the big deal was about flowers and plants because they really didn't do anything. But aloe vera was different. It rubbed out a sunburn and took the sting out of my scorched fingers once when I accidentally held a firecracker too long.

"Hey look, there's one," I said as I set her down and pointed at the long green strands of grass.

"Mini-monkeys? Really?" Milly squealed as she bent over to get a closer look.

"Yep, that's why they call it monkey grass. He jumped into the shadows. Just sit as still as a stick, and they'll come back out in a few minutes."

"How little are they?" she whispered.

“As little as a roly poly, but they can see a penny on the moon and hear toilet paper tear five blocks away. So you gotta be real still and extra quiet.”

Some guilt crept up on me, but I pushed it aside because we had to get to the pond before it got too hot and the fish stopped biting. The guilt didn't stab me as hard as it did a few weeks ago, when as a joke, I taught her that “on purpose” meant “on accident.”

Man did she get in trouble for breaking mom's lamp on purpose.

“When'll the monkeys come back?”

“Just stay real still, and say your ABCs in your head ten times in a row. Then they should come out. Just stay still. And don't forget to breathe.”

I patted her on the head then backed up, watching her mouth her ABCs and bug her eyes out as she stared at the monkey grass.

Back at the house I opened the door to the laundry room and grabbed a wire coat hanger as I passed through. Rudy and Preech were in the den, ready for action. We eased down the hallway towards mom's door, until Rudy started giggling like a hyena.

I turned around to see him elbow Preech as he pointed at my sixth grade picture from last year. Both of my eyes were closed, and my mouth was half-opened. It was kind of funny, but the two of them laughed way too hard every time they looked at it.

It was good to see Rudy smile again. Things were getting ugly with his stepdad, Ted, and I swore to myself I would figure out a way to help him. After going fishing, of course.

Preech was as smart as most men I knew, and Rudy was almost as tall and had as much body hair as most men, and I was kind of left in the dust. I hoped there was some way I would catch up, but the call of a perfect fishing day scrambled my brain. We had to focus and make our getaway.

“Shh, don't you know moms hear through walls?”

“Sorry Buddy,” Preech whispered through his massive grin. “Why don't we just ask her if we can go fishin'?”

“Well, do you think the fish are bitin' right now, right this second?”

They both nodded.

“Do you think they will be bitin' in a few hours after all my chores get done?”

They both shook their heads.

“So we've gotta figure out a way to go fishin' when they're bitin'. Chores can wait. The fish won't. Hey, you guys are going to help me with the chores when we get back, right?”

“Oh, yeah, sure,” said Preech.

“Can't wait,” whispered Rudy.

Yeah right, I thought, but knew I could lure at least one of them back with a promise to play on my new Atari game after the chores were knocked out.

The fluffy new carpet cushioned my knees as I crouched down and put my head against mom's bedroom door. The color of the carpet was called avocado green and sea foam blue, something mom told me over and over because we needed to take care of it so it would “last a lifetime.” It looked

more like bluegill green and catfish blue to me, but my dad always said “a happy wife is a happy life” so he bought some for every room but the garage.

It was 1979, and my mom thought that soon we’d have hovercrafts instead of cars. Once that happened, she’d get carpet for the garage and her world would be complete.

“Okay guys, I watched her finish her second cup of coffee earlier. Once we hear the bathroom door close, it’s go time.”

It felt like a hundred days drug by until we finally heard the bathroom door click shut.

I silently counted on my fingers to ten, then straightened out the top of the coat hanger. I eased it into the hole on the lock of the bedroom door until the metallic pop told us the door was unlocked. We peeked inside and saw nothing, then tiptoed like ninjas across the room to the bathroom door.

I smiled and nodded at Preech and Rudy, then slipped the coat hanger into the lock.

The lock clicked open and we burst into the bathroom and found a very surprised mom on the commode.

“Can we go fishing? Please?! They’ve got to be biting!” We all talked at once, and it was deafening. Rudy and Preech had their eyes pinched shut so they wouldn’t see anything they didn’t want to.

“What? Get out of here! Go!” she shot back as she covered herself with her magazine.