



*SHE WAS* even prettier in person.

She wore her straight brown hair clipped up in a loose twist. A few stray strands fell against her long, elegant neck. Her clingy yoga clothes—a blue, low-cut long-sleeved T-shirt over cropped black pants—showed off a tight and curvy body. When she crossed the café, people couldn't help but check her out.

Some more obviously than others:

That hipster guy at the back table sitting in front of his laptop, rubbing his thumb back and forth over his stubbly soul patch; the skinny hipster girl with the peroxide pig-tails sitting next to the guy with the soul patch, scowling; the teenage boy busing tables; that father with the cute toddler twins and the very tired-looking wife.

And sitting on a stool by the window, an open notebook by her side, wearing an ugly brown knit hat and a bizarre pair of turquoise glasses, another girl, somewhere around the same age as the pretty brown-haired one.

If you knew Carly Finnegan and you happened to see her sitting on that stool by the window, watching the girl, you wouldn't suspect her of any wrongdoing. Certainly not anything criminal. If you knew Carly well enough to know that she no longer lived just ten but more like a hundred blocks away, you might wonder for a second what she was doing all the way downtown. But then if you knew her well enough to know where she lived and where she used to live, you'd also know that she had a seven-year-old half sister whose father still lived on Fourteenth Street. If you knew all this, you'd probably know or guess that the task of escorting Jess downtown to see her father sometimes fell on Carly's shoulders.

Which made it perfectly possible that she'd happen to stop in at the café where Taylor Deen, her ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend, was having coffee with her mother after the Saturday Salutations class at Studio Shakti across the street.

There was only one person in the city of New York who would find it odd for Carly and Taylor to be in the same café at the same time, and he was never up this early on a Saturday morning. Carly knew—she had checked and double-checked online—that Brian's band still played their regular Friday-night gig at Train. Which meant his head wouldn't have hit his pillow in Brooklyn until four a.m., and no way would he be on this side of the East River this side of noon.

Even if it was true that he was “totally whacked” for this new girl.

As unlikely as it was that Brian would appear that morning, Carly had still taken precautions. She’d stuffed the long, unruly red hair Brian claimed to love so much under a scratchy wool hat she found at the bottom of a Goodwill-destined bag in her mother’s closet and bought a cheap pair of funky turquoise reading glasses in the lowest available power. She felt pretty safe hiding in plain sight, sneaking surreptitious glances at his new girlfriend, scribbling in her notebook. Her stool by the window was carefully chosen for the view it offered of the entire café and its proximity to the door. If necessary, she could slip out and disappear in seconds.

All she had wanted was a glimpse, a clear look at the face that belonged to the name that was now paired with Brian’s. The three measly pictures she’d found online were worthless—one too old, the next too blurry, and the third nothing more than a thumbnail showing one eye, half a nose and all those perfect, white teeth.

Carly had gotten her glimpse earlier that morning. She’d staked out the Deen family’s brownstone until Taylor and her mother, Judith, emerged. She’d watched as the two of them walked arm in arm up the street and around the corner. But when they disappeared into the yoga studio, Carly realized that one glimpse wasn’t going to be enough. She

checked the schedule posted out front and returned an hour later, when the Saturday Salutations class ended. (FOR LEVELS 3 & 4 ONLY; MUST HAVE PERMISSION FROM SHAKTI TO ATTEND!) Carly hovered across the street, pretending to talk on her cell phone while keeping an eye on the mother-daughter pair as they mingled with the other yoga elites. When they crossed the street and entered Café Joe, she followed.

Carly knew what people would say if they knew what she was doing.

“That’s crazy.”

“That’s creepy.”

“That’s just sad.”

While she was sure she wasn’t the only dumped person ever to track down the new love interest of an ex, she knew she was flirting with danger. Her curiosity was turning into something else. Not to mention how much time she was wasting.

And so Carly promised herself that when Taylor and her mother left the café, she would, too. Whichever way they were walking, she’d walk in the other direction.

Without looking back.

After all, she had a life. She had friends.

She would put the past behind her and walk forward into the wide-open future.

But first, as long as she was there, she'd play Harriet the Spy a little while longer. Study this mother-daughter duo in their native habitat.

She put pen to paper and entered the following data:

*Time of arrival: approx. 10:08.*

*Apparel:*

*T.D.—Black wide-legged yoga pants. Blue long-sleeved shirt.*

*Long deep-red sweater.*

*J.D.—Tailored black coat (cashmere?), blue print scarf (silk?).*

From her perch Carly watched as Taylor bantered with the baristas, two guys and a girl. She could tell from the way Taylor stood with her arms casually resting on the chrome countertop, laughing while they pulled espresso shots and steamed milk, that she was a regular.

When Taylor crossed the room to join her mother at their table, a tall frothy something in each hand, she seemed oblivious to the eyes that followed her.

But Carly wondered whether she was truly oblivious. Was this one of those cases where you're so used to being looked at, you pretend not to notice?

For a while, all Taylor did was text while her mother read the *New York Times*. Carly watched her sitting there, smiling at her BlackBerry, thumbs flying over its little keyboard. She wondered if Brian was the recipient

and cringed when she remembered her last conversation with him, his threat to change his number.

Eventually Taylor put the BlackBerry aside. For most of the next hour, she sat there reading the paper and talking with her mother. Once in a while one of them would share something interesting, and they'd discuss. They worked on the crossword puzzle together until they gave up, laughing. People—other café regulars—stopped by their table, and there'd be more chatter, more laughter. At one point Taylor took a call on her BlackBerry, and instead of going outside for privacy, she kept interrupting the conversation to fill her mother in.

Apparently the sort of mother-daughter chumminess Carly thought existed only in small, made-for-TV towns lived in the heart of Greenwich Village.

From across the room Carly couldn't hear anything they were saying. But she could tell from their facial expressions and body language that this mother and daughter liked each other, enjoyed each other's company.

When a stool closer to their table opened up, she moved over. Now she could hear bits and pieces of the conversation. Carly kept up the pretense of intense angsty journaling while writing down what words she could make out.

She made two columns and put each one's words in the proper place.

JudithTaylor

dinner

seventeen

muscles (or mussels?)

Tuesday

your father

chocolate,

yes

I think so

last night

with Brian

Just when things were getting interesting, a guy sat down on the next stool and started making calls without the least effort to keep the volume down. First he called his mother to tell her he wouldn't be able to come by that morning as he had said he might. He was really sorry, but he was just too bogged down with work. Yeah. Uh-huh. The Something Something Case. Huge case. Huge. Boss needed him all day.

There was nothing remotely resembling work in front of this guy. Just a *Daily News* open to the sports page and a book called *Surfing Australia*. After he got off the phone with Mom, he called someone he greeted as "bruh" and made plans to shoot hoops in an hour.

When the lying, surfing, hoops-shooting bruh finally shut up and settled in to reading the sports section, Carly heard Judith say, "You won't forget about tonight."

She looked up to see Taylor standing, buttoning up

her deep-red sweater. “Of course not. What time are they coming?”

“Seven thirty. Want me to call and remind you?”

She shrugged. “I’m not going to be able to do anything once the sunlight’s gone.” She walked around the table and stood behind her mother with a hand on each shoulder. “But if it makes you feel better, sure, call me.” She leaned down. Judith smiled and closed her eyes as her daughter planted a kiss on her cheek.

Taylor stepped away and held out a hand. Her mother placed the long leather strap of a big, expensive, and complicated-looking camera on it. “Thanks,” Taylor said, slipping the strap over her neck and shoulder so it lay diagonally across the red sweater, between her breasts.

Carly really didn’t want to look at Taylor Deen’s breasts, but she found it impossible not to look, impossible not to compare.

They weren’t huge. Probably a B, same as her. But still they seemed fuller, rounder. Like everything else about this girl and this girl’s life—better than Carly’s.

As she stepped away from the table, her mother held out her coffee mug. “Honey, will you ask Bess to start another one for me on your way out?”

“Sure,” Taylor said, taking the mug. “Don’t forget my mat.” She tilted her head toward the Shakti Yoga bag slung over the back of her chair and headed toward the counter to talk to Bess.

*Wait! Carly wanted to say. You haven't finished your croissant. Come on. Hang out a little while longer.*

Carly stuffed her notebook in her messenger bag, grabbed her hoodie, and dashed for the door, slipping out while Taylor ordered her mother's refill.

Oh, she hadn't forgotten her promise. She still had every intention of walking the other way. To do that, of course, she'd need to know which way Taylor was going. So she stopped on the sidewalk and pretended to fiddle with the clasps on her bag while she waited. When Taylor still hadn't come out, Carly turned her back to the door and adjusted her ugly hat. Finally, from over her shoulder she heard the swish of the door opening. She took two long, slow breaths before turning back around to see Taylor heading down Fourth Street toward Washington Square. The red of her sweater stood out amidst the mostly-black-wearing denizens of Greenwich Village. She was moving fast, like she had somewhere to be. Like someone was expecting her.

Carly looked down at her feet. She was standing right between two sidewalk lines. If she turned to her left and walked up Fourth Street, she could get on the subway at Sixth Avenue and head uptown. She could spend her Saturday doing normal, healthy, constructive things, like finally tackling that essay she had to write for her one college application. Or she could work on her history paper about the Triangle Factory Fire. She was due at work at five, and work was always fun.

If she chose to turn right, she knew full well she'd be choosing trouble. She'd already spent enough time obsessing about Brian and then, after she heard there was someone new, tracking down every detail she could find about Taylor Deen and her semifamous Greenwich Village family.

It was time to stop. Carly knew that. *She had a life. She had friends.*

She raised her head, took a deep breath and a tentative half step left, toward the rest of her life. But then out of the corner of her eye she caught a glimpse of that red sweater, and she went the other way.