

# Prelude

Curtis McCoy was early for his ten o'clock meeting so he carried his coffee to a table by the window, where he could feel the watery April sun. It was a Saturday, Joe Coffee was crowded, and Brooklyn Heights was alive, women in running tights pushing strollers along Hicks Street, dog walkers congregating at the benches on Pineapple Street, families dashing to soccer games, swimming lessons, birthday parties down at Jane's Carousel.

At the next table, a mother sat with her two adult daughters, drinking from blue-and-white paper cups, peering at the same phone.

"Oh, here's one! This guy's profile says he likes running, making his own kimchi, and 'dismantling capitalism.'"

Curtis tried not to listen but couldn't help himself.

"Darley, he's twice my age. No. Do you even understand how the app works?"

The name Darley rang a bell, but Curtis couldn't quite place her. Brooklyn Heights was a small neighborhood, she was probably just someone he'd seen in line ordering sandwiches at Lassen, or someone he'd crossed paths with at the gym on Clark Street.

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“Fine, fine. Okay, this guy says, ‘Cis male vegan seeks fellow steward of the Earth. Never eat anything with a face. Except the rich.’”

“You can’t date a vegan. The footwear is ghastly!” the mother interrupted. “Give me that phone! Hmm. The whiffy here is terrible.”

“Mom, it’s pronounced ‘wai-fai.’”

Curtis risked a quick peek at the table. The three women were dressed in tennis whites, the mother a blonde with gold earrings and a notable array of rings on her fingers, the daughters both brunette, one lanky with straight hair cut to her shoulders, the other softer, with long wavy hair loosely tied in a knot. Curtis ducked his head back down and broke off a crumbly bite of poppyseed scone.

“‘Bi and nonmonogamous looking for a Commie Mommy to help me smash the patriarchy. Hit me up to go dancing!’ Am I having a stroke?” the older woman murmured. “I don’t understand a word of this.”

Curtis fought back a snicker.

“Mom, give me the phone.” The wavy-haired daughter snatched back the iPhone and tossed it in her bag.

With a start Curtis realized he knew her. It was Georgiana Stockton; she had been in his high school class at Henry Street ten years ago. He contemplated saying hello, but then it would be obvious he’d overheard their entire conversation.

“In my day, things were so much simpler,” Georgiana’s mother tutted. “You just went out with your deb ball escort or maybe your brother’s roommate from Princeton.”

“Right, Mom, but people my generation aren’t giant elitist snobs,” Georgiana said and rolled her eyes.

Curtis smiled to himself. He could imagine having the same exact conversation with his own mother, trying to explain why he wasn’t going to marry her friend’s daughter just because they owned

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adjoining properties on Martha's Vineyard. As Curtis watched Georgiana out of the corner of his eye, she suddenly jumped up from her chair.

“Oh, no! I left my Cartier bracelet in Lena's BMW and she's leaving soon for her grandmother's house in Southampton!”

Georgiana tossed her bag over her shoulder, grabbed her tennis racket off the floor, planted quick kisses on both her mother and sister, and clattered past Curtis to the door. As she swept by, her tennis racket banged Curtis's table, sloshing his coffee, dousing his poppyseed scone, and leaving him frowning in her wake.