

THE TINDER TRAP - *Leseprobe*

Portland High School, Portland, Maine, Monday, the first of October, and the final bell was ringing, the magic bell, the one that signaled the end of the school day and the start of the race for the best school bus seats.

Sarah and her best friend Joyce hurried across the school grounds and got in line. As soon as they got on their bus and found a seat, Sarah went on automatic pilot, taking out her Smartphone, opening Tinder and reading through the latest messages. When she came to Jason's, she began to giggle.

'Listen to this!' she said. *Hey! Where's your answer? How long are you going to keep me waiting?*

Joyce laughed. 'In other words, how *dare* you keep me waiting?' She shook her head. 'Hah! You don't even know the guy!'

Smiling, Sarah looked out the bus window. But not for long. The next thing she knew, her eyes were glued to her phone again. There was another message from Jason. *Hey, come on. You 'liked' me, didn't you? Don't you want to get to know me? Please don't cut me off like this!*

She closed her eyes and pictured him staring at her with a sad look on his face. She smiled, pleased that such an attractive man was so interested in her. Of course, it wasn't really her. For Tinder, she had changed her name and age. On Tinder, she was 'Party Princess', not Sarah, nineteen years old, not sixteen, and her photos for Tinder were all designed to make her look older.

Suddenly, a new message appeared: *Can't we get together.? At Starbucks for a cup of coffee? Have mercy on me! You're breaking my heart!*

'Hey! Look at this!' She showed Joyce the latest message.

Joyce nodded as she read it. When she finished she put on her best worried look and said, 'Poor Jason. You've got him down on his knees, begging to see you. Don't you feel sorry for him?'

'A little, maybe.'

Sarah examined the photos of Jason: Jason at the beach (Old Orchard Beach?), looking yummy in a bathing suit, tall and muscular, Jason in a suit and tie, looking serious and impressive, Jason jogging through the woods, his long legs shining in the sun and finally, Jason in an easy chair, watching TV, with a big smile on his face.

No doubt about it, he was a good-looking guy. And she liked the fact that he was into fitness. She also liked his tagline: *Magic carpet with room for two*. It didn't offer much information about him, but it did sound exciting.

Several minutes later, she said goodbye to Joyce, got off the bus and headed down the street. It was a ten-minute walk from the bus stop to her home. As usual, she had her phone in her hand, and was keeping a lookout for new messages. She had just turned a corner when she heard loud voices and looked up. What she saw shocked her. It was an elderly man surrounded by a group of teenage boys. The man looked frightened. When he saw Sarah, he called out to her, 'Help me! Help me!'

Her first reaction was to look away. She wanted to help but she didn't want to get hurt. Just as she turned to go, the man cried out again, 'Help! Please help!' The boys had pushed him up against a wall.

Sarah went over to them. 'Hey! Come on. Leave the old guy alone!' she said in a loud voice. When the boys turned to face her, the old man took advantage of the situation and slipped away.

The gang leader, stocky and with little pig-like eyes, looked her up and down. 'My, my, what a brave little girl!' he said, a twisted smile on his face. Suddenly, the smile was gone, replaced by a dark, cruel look. 'Why don't you just get the hell outta here before we beat the shit outta you!' he hissed.

Shocked, Sarah tried to speak but couldn't.

Suddenly, he noticed that she had a phone in her hand. 'Hey! You didn't take a photo of us, did you?'

She gave him a cold stare but said nothing.

'Hey, I'm talking to you! Did you take a photo of us or not?'

Again, she said nothing.

He reached for the phone, a fake smile on his face. 'Okay, sister, just hand over your phone and you won't get hurt.'

She held it behind her back and shook her head. 'Over my dead body,' she said in a shaky voice.

Without warning, he grabbed her arm and began twisting it. 'Give. Me. That. Damn. Phone. Now!'

She cried out in pain but held on to it.

'You'll be sorry for this!' he shouted and twisted her arm some more.

'Hey! What do you think you're doing?'

'Huh?' The leader of the gang turned around.

Facing him was a tall, powerfully-built boy, his dark eyes flashing with anger. 'Leave the girl alone,' he said calmly.