

DOUBLE-TAKE

It was the smell that had made her do the double-take. She had expected the familiar waft of java as she entered the coffee shop, but mixed in with the coffee aroma was a different scent, a somewhat stale but familiar body odor, compelling her to turn back to the entrance and look at the figure that had brushed by her on her way in.

Karen just caught a glimpse of the man as he left Arnold's Cuppa Java and turned left down the sidewalk of the strip shopping center. Hesitating only a moment, she retreated to the door to get a better look. She squinted at the trailing figure, examining his appearance, his clothing, height, weight. He certainly seemed the right size to be Darrell, about 5 foot 11 inches and an emaciated 130 pounds or so. His clothing was not exactly what she might expect, the jeans seemed too clean and it seemed odd that even he would be wearing jeans on such a hot day, especially with a long sleeve T-shirt. But what had her stumped was the hair. She could not remember if she had ever seen the back of Darrell's neck, in public at least. This man had a flattop crew-cut hairstyle with a beard that looked to be about 2 weeks of growth, instead of the trademark Darrell ponytail.

The man opened a store door down the block and disappeared from view. Karen re-entered Arnold's, bypassing the busy cashier where she would usually have stopped to place her order and making her way right to the espresso bar. Partially hidden behind the bar and the bank of espresso/cappuccino machines she found her feisty, diminutive daughter.

"Jenny – was that who I think it was?" Karen asked as she leaned over the counter, pressing up against the edge, ignorant of the dust of coffee grinds that would stain her satin blouse, in order to obtain some privacy in the conversation amid the noise of the shop.

"Who was who, Mom? Look, I have no time for riddles here." Jenny replied, tamping down the coffee in the filter and twisting the lever into the machine, like a car mechanic tightening a lug nut.

"Your father." Karen tried to rasp quietly.

"ORDERING!" interrupted a shout from the cashier, a huge 17 year old boy with a face full of acne and deep booming voice. "Double grande decaf skim latte." He called out to the bar.

"That's *decaf double grande skim latte*, Pat, get it right next time." Jenny barked back to the front of the store. She turned to her mother and said "Now what are you whispering to me?"

"Your father. Was your father just in here?" Karen repeated a little louder.

"Darned if I would know, Mom. I'm kinda busy here in case you haven't noticed, and I'm too short to see much over the counter. What would he be doing here anyway? He lives half a country away."

Jenny Overton was 21 years old, but had never really lost that smart aleck teenager tone of voice, despite her mother's objections. A cute girl, with beautiful brown eyes and sandy blond hair, her lack of stature at 5 foot 2 inches didn't detract from her appearance. She had a perfect figure, except perhaps for her shoulders, which were enhanced by her love of swimming. The timer on the machine drew Jenny's attention away from the counter, requiring Karen to lean in again to keep the conversation alive.

"I swear he just left here as I came in." Karen insisted. "I figured maybe he had come in to see you."

"Get a grip, Mom, I haven't spoke to Darrell in almost a year. He has no idea that I work at Arnold's. In fact, when I last visited him, I got the impression that he didn't really even know what town we lived in now." Jenny had long ago dropped the moniker of "daddy" when referring to her father. Her opinion of him was now on the same level as her mother's, which is to say not very high at all. Referring to him by his first name was her way of showing that telling hint of disrespect, just as calling her mother "*Mrs. Overton*" was always a thinly veiled insult of her mother's choice of spouse.

Jenny worked her way down the bar more in the direction of her mother's craning neck. "Now --- again, please notice how busy we are here. Do you want your regular? I'll get it started." She asked.

"Okay, honey, but make it an iced latte today, it's too hot for hot coffee. And leave it behind the counter for me, I'm going outside for a minute." Karen didn't wait for a reply, but walked briskly to the exit, turned left outside and followed the path she thought she had seen Darrell take, making another left into the drug store entrance four stores down the block.

Coincidentally, the Darrell double was leaving the drug store just as Karen entered. This entrance had a vestibule between a double set of double doors. As Karen and the man who looked like Darrell again passed one another he glanced slightly in the direction of her stare. His eye contact was shadowed. No display of recognition was

apparent from those dark eyes, which seemed a little too dark to be Darrell's, Karen thought, based upon that glimpse. As the door shut, she moved into his vacated space in the vestibule, hoping to catch the scent again, but, quickly realizing that she would lose him if she lingered, Karen turned on her heels and followed the man walking away in the clean jeans, arms full of newspapers.

A familiar slight limp in his stride seemed to be there as he dodged the passing cars in the lot to the back row, stopped and placed his papers and Arnold's coffee cup on the roof of the Honda Civic. Karen didn't want to follow too closely. In fact, the last thing she wanted was for him to recognize her and for them to have a meeting, or perhaps a confrontation. Well, she thought, the non-descript little car could not have been more different from the Harley-Davidson cycle she expected to see the Darrell-like character ride away in. She made a mental note of the tag number of the Civic – WPP 234 – and wondered if the real Darrell still had the vanity tag with "BYKER" on whatever car he drove now.

Sitting alone in the coffee shop with her iced latte, Karen mulled over the sighting and tried to make sense out of what she thought she had seen. She had not seen her ex-husband in years, not since Jenny's high school graduation. He had not come to the ceremony, but had invited Jenny to visit him that summer for a week. Both Karen and Jenny had wanted to see their old home town, catch up with old friends and such, so they decided to make a vacation of it. Rather than stay with Darrell and whatever horny and obnoxious men he might then be living with, Jenny had elected to share a hotel room with Mom. Karen had only seen Darrell for a brief time, just short enough that their transparent civility did not wear off. It was important for her to be nice to Darrell if she could stomach it, because she knew that there was an evil, vindictive side of him that had never forgiven her for leaving him and stealing away his beautiful and only daughter. Jenny had revealed that, in her visits with him over the years, Darrell had not hidden his growing hostility toward Karen's success in the "real world." Darrell recognized that the breakup had been good for Karen, giving her the opportunity to go to a new town, get a good job, move up in the world, while he had fallen further and further into the influence of a criminal underworld.

Knowing Darrell as she did, and having heard about his rising animosity, Karen had waited for years for some vengeful event to happen, even for a while checking the undercarriage of her car for explosives, not that she would know such a thing if she saw it. Even today, she sometimes grimaced as she clicked the ignition, anticipating the worst.

It amazed Karen that she had seen this man today and couldn't be *sure* it was her ex-husband. While it was true that she hadn't had much contact with him in the 15 years since the divorce, this was, after all, someone she had been intimate with. Hell, she thought, doing the math in her head: two years of dating, three years of real marriage, two years of breaking up/making up. You have to figure an average of at

least 2-3 times a week. She calculated that she had probably slept with this man *over a thousand times* and could not be sure whether she saw him, touched and smelled him today.

The problem was that although this man looked a lot like Darrell, there were some things, other than the mystery of him showing up here at all, that did not fit. What's with the hair and scruffy beard, she thought, and the eyes didn't seem quite right. In fact, it was those glowing green eyes that had first attracted her to him. Newspapers? She had never, ever seen Darrell read a newspaper in 7 years of co-habitation. The humble little car was also out of character for Darrell, who had spent the past 10 years or so working his way up in the underworld of petty criminals back in their hometown. During that time, her sources had confided, he had driven the fastest, flashiest car he could afford. She had tried to get an increase in child support based on the lifestyle she had heard rumored of, but the effort had failed, since his legitimate income, the measure that the court examined, showed Darrell below the poverty level. He rarely had ever paid on time anyway, she remembered, happy that their daughter was more self-sufficient now, working a good job while taking classes at the community college.

Just then Jenny pulled up a chair next to her mother, sipping an espresso from a small plain paper cup. "I'm on break." She announced. "When do you leave for work?"

"I have to leave in 5 minutes. Seeing that guy still has me rattled a little though." Karen admitted.

"Did you see him again?" Jenny asked. "Is he still around? Let me check him out, I think I know him at least a little better than you these days."

"He's gone – drove away." Karen replied. "Left in a little blue Civic."

"Hah! If that's Darrell, he's had a personality transplant, Mom. You know he'd never drive around in something like that. Anyway, did you get a chance to check out *your* tattoo?" Jenny asked, needling her mother.

Karen had been peering down into her almost empty iced latte cup, absently stirring the few remaining chips of ice, when she looked up with a startled expression. While they were young and dating, Darrel had tattooed a heart with "Karen" written in the middle on his left forearm. She had not seen it because he had been wearing a long sleeve T-shirt that covered his arms. She knew it had bothered her that he was wearing long sleeves on such a hot day, but now she understood what had really bothered her.

"No. His -- his arms were covered up. He had on a long sleeve shirt." She stammered.

Jenny was quick to reply. "So it was some NUT, who looked like my Dad, wandering around in 92 degree heat in a long sleeve shirt, driving a Honda, no less. This story gets worse every minute. Wouldn't he have recognized *you* anyway?"

Karen thought over that last remark. Darrell may not have easily recognized her she grudgingly admitted. An extra thirty pounds or so filled out the girlish frame she used to have and the long dark ponytail she sported to match her husband's had been replaced by a mostly salt with a little pepper wedge cut more appropriate to her banker image. There were the wrinkles she tried to ignore, a more business-like set of clothes...no, he'd probably have to look her squarely in the face to know her now.

Karen shrugged, said goodbye and left Arnold's to go to work. She arrived at the bank 10 minutes later, said polite hellos to the rest of the staff and went to her office. She had worked her way up in the bank from teller to her present position as a loan officer in the consumer lending division, mostly approving car loan applications. The job gave her access to the state DMV database, however, and, shutting the door behind her, Karen went right to her computer to type in "WPP 234." It didn't take long before the reply graced the screen. The name that came up – Nelson Carville – was meaningless to her. There were no liens for financing on the car. She entered a few more commands, searching for an address. She recognized the name of the street in the address, 2204 Mahogany Drive, as being in a neighborhood behind Arnold's Cuppa Java, and printed out all of the information she could find from the DMV.

Almost a week went by before she thought again about the Darrell sighting. One day after she had returned from work, Jenny mentioned that she had seen a guy "with Darrell's funny walk," a result of one of his motorcycle accidents, going across the parking lot, getting in a blue Civic and driving away. She had mentioned the guy to Pat, the cashier at Arnold's, who said that the guy had been there for coffee and had shown up a couple of times lately, but he had never seen the guy go to the rear of the store. He did mention, however, that the man would usually peer over to look into the bar area where Jenny worked. He had noticed, thinking that it was just some leering old coot checking out the cute girl at the bar. Jenny told her Mom that she had not blushed at that remark, but did blush when Pat admitted that about half the men he waited on did just the same thing.

It was then that Karen decided to take a more active approach in solving this mystery. Her phone calls to old friends back home were largely unproductive. Either her friends had themselves moved away, or they hadn't seen or heard of Darrell in years. One old friend guessed that Darrell must have been caught up in the local "crime family" bust that had made all of the papers, and was probably behind bars. A call Karen placed to Darrell's old number produced an answering machine message so "typical suburban family" that it just could not be the place where Darrell lived. The

number for his old employer had been disconnected. Three different times she had called the number she had found for Nelson Carville, once from home, once from work and then later from a pay phone, when it occurred to her that with Caller ID, this Carville person, who once answered with a gruff, but unrecognizable hello, could discern her identity. She certainly didn't want Darrell to know she was checking him out, if Darrell it truly was. That series of failures led her to her storage closet, where she rummaged through piles of old photographs, worn-out luggage and rolls of Christmas wrap to find the old set of binoculars that she used to use to watch Jenny at her swim meets.

The next Saturday morning, a hot "cuppa java" from Arnold's in hand, she scouted the terrain around the 2200 block of Mahogany Drive for an unobtrusive lookout where she could park her Camero and scope out the Darrell look-alike. No Honda was apparent at 2204 and Karen found an out-of-the-way spot not far down the block with great line of sight to the driveway. The coffee at the bottom of the cup was cold and the newspapers long finished before the blue Civic appeared down the block. Karen instinctively reached for the spyglass and was lifting it to observe when, instead of turning up the driveway the car continued down the block towards her. She gasped in horror that she might be recognized and slammed her knees into the underneath of the dashboard, trying to slink her 5'5" 140 pound body down below the steering wheel out of sight of the now passing car. The Civic seemed to slow as it went by, and she sensed the pair of eyes scanning her car as it turned around in a nearby driveway, passing her a second time before finally pulling up at 2204. As she heard the car door slam, Karen lifted her head to peek just as the man turned his head in her direction. Even without using the binoculars and even as she re-ducked to avoid being noticed, she saw those dark eyes that belied her suspicions about the identity of this man.

Karen waited a full half hour before starting the engine and slowly driving away. As she passed 2204 he was there, standing in full view in the front bay window, a cell phone pressed to one ear, watching her car intently. At that sight she stepped on the gas and sped away, weaving too fast through the neighborhood side streets, dodging children on bikes and skateboards, playing in the streets on this Saturday morning. As she reached the main highway she saw a police car start to turn into the Mahogany Drive community, the officer in the passenger seat pointing in her direction, instructing his partner to turn around. Karen guiltily reversed her course, made a few extra turns and pulled in behind a shopping center. After parking the car, she sprinted to the grocery, hoping they had lost the trail, absently reviewing the deli counter as she considered whether and why this Carville guy had called the cops on her. Did they have her license number, she wondered, while ordering sliced turkey that she didn't need.

The police episode made Karen more determined than ever to explore the background of Mr. Carville. She employed every free internet search engine and came up basically empty. Then she started paying for on-line services such as

peoplesearch.com and *graduates.com*, even re-subscribing to *mynextdate.com* where she had become previously discouraged after a series of disappointing evenings with loser after loser. Inevitably Karen would stumble onto a hit or two for a Nelson Carville, only to find that it was a false lead, someone of the wrong age, race or background to fit the Darrell Overton twin. It seemed as if this fellow either did not exist, or just dropped down from the sky into the house on Mahogany Drive. Even the resources of an old flame working in the security division of the bank came up zero.

Armed with a file folder full of printed material from the internet about Carville and the binoculars, Karen borrowed Jenny's car for the next trip to the mystery man's house. She parked in a different spot, saw the car parked this time in the driveway, and camped out with a magazine and a soda. She was determined this time to see him leave the house and follow him in the hope of learning more about this man.

Finally after an hour or so, Carville got into his car and drove off, Karen following at a safe distance. He seemed to travel randomly, with no apparent destination, even at times circling the same part of town over and over. Karen was so intent on pursuing carefully, unskilled as she was at this art, that she didn't notice that she too was being followed by a white late model Ford. As a result she was completely taken by surprise when Carville pulled his Civic behind an unfamiliar building into an alley lined on both sides with police cars. It was only a moment after the blue Honda pulled over to the curb that the flashing lights of the white Ford ordered Karen to do the same.

"Mrs. Overton?" The gruff voice outside of her window asked. She nodded.

"Please keep both hands in full view and exit the car." Came the order from the younger second man, also wearing a dark grey suit.

"What were you doing, Mrs. Overton?" asked the younger man.

"Her rights---read her her rights first." Said the older man sternly. The younger man recited to Karen the latest version of the *Miranda* warning about the right to remain silent, etc. as the three of them, with Carville following, moved toward the police station. After entering the building, Karen was handcuffed to a bench in a waiting area as the 3 men conferred in an adjacent room. Karen was attempting to lip read what they were saying through the glass door, when another man entered the room carrying her files and binoculars, leaving the door ajar.

"If this gal works at a bank, a stalking conviction would probably get her fired, right?" She thought she heard Carville ask.

"Hard to say, Mr. Carville, this being a fairly new law and all, but I would think it wouldn't help her employment, that's for sure. I'd say that with what we

already know and the evidence just found in her car, she's a stalker alright, as we read the law. State's attorney will have to decide on what to do next, of course." A voice, sounding like the older man, opined from behind the door jamb.

Karen, confused as ever, was still sitting cuffed to the bench, staring at the stark linoleum floor, when Carville, who had never looked in her direction all day, left the adjacent room, and passed by, still with his head tilted away. He then stopped, bent over and turned, raising his hands to his head like he was going to sneeze. He seemed to cup a hand, first over one eye, then the other. Backtracking to the bench he turned suddenly in Karen's direction.

"Hey sunshine!" Came a familiar voice, greeting her with the affectionate nickname Darrell had always used.

His face was now just about a foot away from Karen's. Once again she sensed that familiar scent. Those dark eyes that had puzzled her all along had been replaced by the bright green that was distinctly her former lover's.

"When they offered me that witness protection gig, I never once guessed that it would have this kind of fringe benefit." Darrell Overton bragged, then, turning quickly away, replaced his dark contact lenses. He was striding purposefully to the exit as Karen sat stunned, staring at the departing figure of her ex-husband. Then she spoke, mumbling at first "Darrell --- Darrell." Then shouting "Hey, THAT'S NOT CARVILLE, IT'S DARRELL, DARRELL OVERTON!!!!"

The grey suits burst from the door, the younger one forcibly covering Karen's mouth while the other found a suitable gag.

The older man reassured the man at the exit. "Don't you worry, Mr. Carville, your friends with the feds told us to take care of this problem. And we will."

THE END

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