



pretty little
devils

nancy holder

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Pretty Little Devils

RAZORBILL

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AN EVIL LURKS AMONG THEM

I'm right here, but they can't see me. They're too caught up in their stupid little lives. Too bad. I'm their worst nightmare. They've had fair warning. It's showtime!

"Teens who think this is just a chick-lit book will find more than they bargained for . . . [This] book delivers." —*Booklist*

"Gripping suspense" —*School Library Journal*

"Clever, full of personality and deliciously spooky"
—Teenreads.com

PROLOGUE

Sylvia: "Damn it, Carolyn, I can still hardly hear you. Thank God you only have one more month on that loser phone. It doesn't get any reception."

Carolyn: "I know. I cannot wait. Can you hear me now?"

Sylvia: "That might be funny if I actually *could* hear you."

Megan: "Same here. I thought three-way calling was supposed to make this *easier*."

Sylvia: "Moving on. Listen, Breona threw down again. At the mall. It was another Josh incident. She said he wants to go back to her, but he's staying with me because I 'put out.' 'Put out.' Who even talks like that?"

Megan: "You have got to be kidding me! What a slut! She is dead!"

Carolyn: "So dead. But you know she was lying, Sylvia. Josh would never say that."

Megan: "Totally lying."

Sylvia: "It was like she was begging me to lose it right there in the mall, you know? It was in the food court. I was standing in line at Boudin's and she just came over. She was smart to pick a public place. You guys know what I can do when I'm pushed."

Carolyn: "She's so *déclassé*."

Megan: "*Vraiment*. Did you talk to Josh yet?"

Sylvia: "Excuse me? There is nothing to talk to him about. She's lying!"

Carolyn: "God, Megan, you don't believe her, do you? You

don't think Josh would actually say something like that about Sylvia?"

Megan: "It's just . . . I don't know, I wonder how she can lie like that in front of everybody. Josh should know she's lying about him to people."

Sylvia: "You have a point. Josh should know his reputation is in danger."

Carolyn: "Except . . . it'll look like you don't trust him if you talk to him about it."

Megan: "Then one of *us* should talk to him."

Sylvia: "Maybe Ellen should. She's so *nice*. By the way, Ellen is our second agenda item, after we take care of this."

Megan: "Yeah, because she was wearing that retarded outfit again—"

Sylvia: "Megan, *second* agenda item."

Carolyn: "Right. Back to the first. Breona is such a ho."

Sylvia: "Well, it's just stupid anyway. The way she deals with guys is dysfunctional. If I ever thought Josh really was staying with me because I—because we—"

Megan: "She's so wrong. How can she think she can get away with this?"

Sylvia: "That's my point. She can't. By the way, she talked about the *incident* too. You know which one I mean."

Megan: "Oh my God."

Carolyn: "That skank. She really is looking for trouble."

Sylvia: "Absolutely. But, as you say, no one will believe her. No one believed all the other gossip about your little entanglement."

It died down over the summer. With the pictures.”

Megan: “Was Stephan there when she mentioned it?”

Carolyn: “Megan, get over Stephan. He just brings it up to get a reaction out of you.”

Megan: “Whatever. We need to discuss how we’re getting back at Breona.”

Sylvia: “Give me your best ideas tomorrow morning. Before school. We are seriously weakened as a group if Breona thinks she can just say whatever she wants without any repercussions. Now, on to the second item. Let’s talk about Ellen.”

Megan: “She’s been a total humiliation lately. That dress—”

Sylvia: “One bad outfit I could forgive. But that hair . . . This is the beginning of junior year, ladies. We have to take ourselves seriously, or no one else will. When Ellen started falling all over that guy at the movies—”

Carolyn: “She does act a little dorky on occasion. . . .”

Megan: “A *little*? His friends were *laughing* at us. She didn’t even notice.”

Sylvia: “Ladies, ladies. I don’t want to get rid of Ellen. She’s been really loyal, and she’s a good friend to all of us. But it is a bit of a problem.”

Megan: “It’s like you always say, Sylvia. We are known by the company we keep. If we hang with losers, we’re losers. We’ve worked hard to get where we are. We all take pains to look good, to be popular. What we do reflects on all of us.”

Sylvia: “No. No dumping Ellen. It is not an option. We don’t want people saying we turn our backs on our friends.”

It would be terrible publicity. Breona would jump all over it. And she would probably invite Ellen into her group just to get to all our secrets."

Carolyn: "Ellen would rather die than betray us."

Sylvia: "Well, it's a situation, definitely. She's losing ground. Maybe she's working too hard, babysitting *too* much. We could cut back on her jobs. . . ."

Megan: "Then we would have to do them. I've already got tons of homework, and Mrs. Sprague said I have to get some more extracurriculars if I'm going to get into a decent college."

Carolyn: "Like your brother?"

Megan: "Back off, Carolyn!"

Carolyn: "God, Megan, what's your problem? Your brother goes to a serious school. Does that, like, freak you out or something?"

Sylvia: "Megan? Are you keeping something from us? Because friends share."

Megan: "No. It's nothing. I didn't understand what she meant."

Carolyn: "So you thought the worst?"

Sylvia: "Both of you chill out right now. My God. Do you even remember what we were talking about? I say it's time to ask a new girl in. That way we can dilute the Ellen factor."

Megan: "Are you serious? It's always been the four of us."

Sylvia: "Are you questioning me, Megan? Who has kept this group going all this time? Me. And what I say goes. Oh, look, Ellen's logged on. Let's go to the chat room, *mes petites*. Now remember, be kind. Ellen is still one of us."

YOU HAVE ENTERED
The pretty little devils chat room

THIS IS A PRIVATE CHAT ROOM FOR INVITED MEMBERS ONLY

Members in chat room:

PLDSLY

PLDEL

PLDCARO

PLDMEG

PLDSLY: *Bonjour, El! Home early?*

PLDEL: *Still at Hernandez. Using their laptop.*

PLDCARO: *Bonjour, toutes!*

PLDMEG: *Bonjour!*

PLDSLY: *Clever U, El. Don't forget 2 charge 4 lateness.*

PLDEL: *Suki warned me ahead of time might B late.*

PLDSLY: *Late = late. Suki agreed 2 7 PM. On schedule.*

PLDEL: *OK.*

PLDSLY: *We let 1 slide, they all do it.*

PLDEL: *Sorry. :(*

PLDSLY: *N/p. Listen, El, Breona attacked me at the mall. Re Josh. It was bad.*

PLDEL: *OMG, that's terrible! She hurt U? :(*

PLDSLY: *Not physically. Not a scratch. Though she did have her claws out. LOL.*

PLDEL: *What'd she say?*

PLDSLY: *SOS. Josh couldn't wait 4 me 2 go 2 France, only came back 2 me cuz I give him benefits.*

PLDEL: OMG. UR kidding! :(

PLDSLY: No worries. I ripped her a new 1. She wuz crying by time I left. :)

PLDEL: Go, Sylvia!

PLDSLY: Of the past. We move on.

PLDCARO: But Josh needs 2 know she's lyin' about him. Some1 needs 2 tell him. Not Syl, cuz it'll look like she doesn't trust him.

PLDEL: Don't worry, Syl, I can do in Art2.

PLDSLY: GR8. I'll call U later, fill U in.

PLDEL: KK, but before 9 OK, cuz my dad.

PLDCARO: Just put cell phone on vibrate. More fun anyway, LOL.

PLDEL: LOL, but big trouble if he finds out.

PLDMEG: E!, UR a wimp.

PLDSLY: Meggers, B nice. :(

PLDMEG: Sorry, S.

PLDSLY: N/p. E!, I'll call B4 9. So, new school year goin' on.

PLDs gotta look good. Love streaks, Meggies. New salon?

PLDMEG: Still at Tuberose.

PLDCARO: In the mall, right?

PLDMEG: Please. Who goes to mall 4 hair? White trash!

PLDSLY: E!, UR place is in mall?

PLDEL: Yes.

PLDMEG: Oops. Sorry, E! My bad X2.

PLDSLY: E!, mebbe try Meg's? Also, gel . . . over.

PLDEL: Hair not good?

PLDSLY: U've done better. Every1 remember, we R in spotlight. That dress Friday . . . mais non, cherie.

PLDEL: ?

PLDMEG: No offense, it makes U look fat.

PLDEL: OMG!

PLDSLY: We can't give Breona any reason 2 attack us. Solid fashions, solid rep. We R Pretty Little Devils!

PLDMEG: *Mais oui!*

PLDCARO: *Mais oui!*

PLDEL: OMG, Suki home. Gotta go.

PLDSLY: *Au revoir!*

(PLDEL has left the chat room)

PLDMEG: So, do you think she got it?

PERSONALBLOG

HAPPY2BME

SHE'S SUCH A STUPID BITCH. SHE THINKS SHE'S TOTALLY HOT, BUT SHE'S GOT NO IDEA WHAT CONSEQUENCES ARE. YEAH, WE'LL CHANGE THINGS. WE'LL SEE WHO MAKES THE CUT. ONE BY ONE. THEY'LL ALL FEEL THE BLADE. LAISSEZ LES BON TEMPS ROULER!



H A P T E R O N E

By the end of the first week of school, everyone had their designated seats in the cafeteria. Hazel Stone's spot was at the third table from the diversity mural on the west side. There, the diffuse light from the thick windows cast a halo over the heads of her so-called friends—Lakshmi, Ginger, Jamie, and the embarrassingly named LaToya.

Friends . . . they were more like friends by default. Joy had been the one they had in common, and Joy had moved to San Jose during the summer. As soon as she'd left, Hazel had tried her hardest to break away. It hadn't taken.

She had gotten a job and steered clear of the phone, preferring to blog on her LiveJournal or watch *Osbourne's* reruns with her little brother, Corey. Hazel had spent more time that summer with Corey than she had the rest of their lives combined, and if her parents had been the kind of people who actually commented on what was going on around them, they would have told her they were pleased.

They wouldn't have been pleased if they'd known what else

had happened during the summer, but she was not going there.

Lakshmi spotted Hazel and waved expectantly. Hazel cringed as the four girls smiled and beckoned her over, as if they had to invite her or something. It would never occur to them that she didn't want to sit with them. It didn't matter that Hazel had pretty much avoided them for the entire summer.

She had pretty much hidden herself away from everybody, feeling guilty and unsure about what she was doing. She would start to think, *Okay, I've made the break*. Then her mother would answer the phone and unknowingly accept an invitation from the Lakshmi contingent on Hazel's behalf. Her mother was clueless, as usual.

Unable to explain that she was trying to dump "those nice girls," Hazel would find herself at the movies or the mall. Thus she would be reconnected with Lakshmi's group, and all her careful isolation would be thrown out the window.

Hazel didn't feel she was asking for much. All she wanted were *real* friends—friends who were interesting and intelligent, friends who understood her. Lakshmi and the others were just treading water until they got out of school, content to stay in the background, idly worshiping the popular kids. Graduation was their only goal.

Hazel had bigger dreams—way bigger. She wanted high school to count for something. She wanted to be one of the girls people remembered when they opened their yearbooks. Not just some other "Who?" in a sea of unrecognizable faces. This was the year to make it happen. Senior year would be too late. The time was now.

And this was a defining moment. Or at least it felt that way. Here she was, halfway through October and still trapped. She knew she needed new friends. And not just good friends, but great ones. And if she worked it right with the right group, she might even have a shot at the object of her total desire, the new guy, Matty Vardeman.

She stole a glance at his table. Despite being new, he was already on the varsity football team, and he sat with some of the first-string guys, like Stephan Nylund, Brandon Wilde, and Josh Douglas.

Stephan was stocky, with red hair and a goatee. He was some kind of tackle or something. Brandon and Josh were the team quarterbacks—friendly rivals—and Josh was Sylvia Orly's boyfriend. He was tall, blond, and very wiry. He laughed a lot, and he was very smart. He would have to be, to keep up with Sylvia.

Brandon was bigger, with chestnut hair and a pair of very thick eyebrows. Unlike Josh, Brandon was a total jerk. Last year he had humiliated a girl in Hazel's geometry class by pretending to ask her out, then telling her he was kidding when she stammered out a yes—as if he would ever go out with someone so beneath him.

Hazel felt sorry for the girl. Then she felt sorry for herself. For her, Matty was just as unreachable.

But God, she thought, he is hot.

Matty Vardeman sat at the far end of the table, leaning back casually in his chair. He was wearing a gray sweater that looked thick and expensive, maybe hand-knit, and a pair of black jeans. He favored dark clothes, and he looked good in them. The other guys

had on their green letter jackets and jeans. Matty usually just carried his jacket, but when he did wear it, his shoulders looked enormous.

She had noticed him on the first day of school. He was Matty, not Matt—and he was a miracle of quirks. Push the quirk meter one more click on the dial, and he would be ugly. But somehow, all of his face's strangenesses came together into one amazing picture. He had a long, straight nose, flaring cheekbones, and deep-set eyes that were dark chestnut in color. His eyebrows were heavy and also dark, like his wavy hair. No spiky tips for him; instead, it was a little long—more Ashton Kutcher than Chad Michael Murray, to use Lakshmi's fan-girl vocabulary.

He was smart, too, Hazel knew. His classes were all AP or honors. He carried a sketchbook wherever he went and sometimes spent study hall or lunch working on a drawing.

His birthday was March 16 and he was from Virginia. He had a soft southern accent that made Hazel smile.

His father was in the navy and his parents had moved to Japan. He had come to Brookhaven to live with his sister and finish out his junior and senior years. Hazel had heard he was really pissed off about having to leave Virginia, but whenever she saw him, his full lips were curled in a faint smile, as if everything secretly amused him.

He was a little reserved and still a little apart from the other guys. He sat at their table and hung with them, but Hazel could tell he wasn't one of them. Not yet.

Hazel had tried everything to get him to notice her. She had memorized his schedule and had "just happened" to wander by

his classes so many times that one of the boys in his precalculus class had asked her what the homework was. Despite the fact that Hazel sucked at drawing, she'd taken to carrying a sketchbook as well. She hoped if she appeared to be into art, it might pique his interest. Nothing seemed to have any effect.

"Hazel!" Lakshmi shouted over the din, half rising from her chair as the others waited for her to come and sit down. LaToya gazed at her over her soda cup, sucking on a straw.

Hazel sighed. She just didn't know how to do it, how to go through with cutting them loose. Putting on a little smile, she made eye contact, walked steadily to the table, and put down her tray.

They all had on knockoffs of the current fashions: short blazers, white shirts, and light wash jeans. But somehow on them, it looked like trying too hard.

Hazel had gone preppy, with an oxford shirt, knee-length denim skirt, and black ankle boots. Blue went nicely with her auburn hair, which she'd added a tiny bit of henna to. She had blue eyes, and she knew she wasn't ugly. But looks weren't always enough.

"Hi," Lakshmi said, grinning at her as the others made a show of clearing a welcoming place. "Didn't you see us?"

"Oh, I—I . . ." Hazel stuttered. "I just got distracted for a sec. I thought I heard someone call my name."

"Guess what!" Lakshmi said. "Breona and Sylvia had a fight in the mall last night. The security guards had to come and pull them off each other. There's a deep scratch on Breona's cheek and she's going to sue Sylvia."

Jamie nodded. "She's going to get plastic surgery. Because of the disfigurement."

Hazel's attention immediately ticked to the cheerleader table, where Breona sat with her new, spiky haircut. Her brown sugar complexion was flawless; her dark almond eyes glittered as she talked with the other cheerleaders, all of them in tight kelly green sweaters and gold cheer skirts that showed off their skinny, muscular bodies. There was a Band-Aid on her cheek. But it hardly covered a plastic-surgery-worthy wound. Lakshmi was good for gossip, but sometimes she tended to overdramatize.

Not that the Breona-and-Sylvia war needed dramatization. The two queen bees had always hated each other. They were the two most popular girls in school, and the source of their conflict was always Josh.

The gossip went that last summer things had come to a head. Even though he was officially Sylvia's boyfriend, Josh had hooked up with Breona two weeks after Sylvia had gone to France with her family. Sylvia came back and Josh pretended everything was fine. But of course Sylvia found out the truth. From what Hazel had heard, Josh was lucky to be alive.

"It's all over the school," Lakshmi gushed as she plucked a couple of french fries off Hazel's plate. "Everybody's talking about it."

Hazel watched as Lakshmi popped the fries into her mouth and chewed.

Lakshmi had a skin problem. Hazel had tried to tell her not to eat greasy food, but Lakshmi was very fragile on the subject. She would start crying and insisting that Hazel thought she was ugly.