

‘Well, that’s just great,’ she said, glaring at the dripping skeleton in her hand. ‘Fifteen minutes in New York and someone’s already stolen my umbrella.’”

Andrea Carole sighed and examined the substitute the unknown thief had left in place of her eight-dollar street seller special. Its spokes were bent and rusted. When she pushed the automatic open button, the umbrella shaft creaked and collapsed. In contrast to the one that she had deposited there, its poor cousin was torn and smelled of mildew. She had beaten a rival passerby to the last one just as it started to rain. There was little hope of finding another in the six blocks between lunch and her hotel.

Shaking her head and muttering under her breath, Andrea looked at her watch. She still had twenty minutes. She trudged away from the rectangle of light at the front door and returned to her uncleared table. As she had suspected when she discovered this place on her first day wandering the city, the food was spectacular. The décor and the service, less so. But with nasi goreng to kill for, and green tea by the bucket, this Indonesian dive had turned out to be the perfect place for lunch and a private pep talk before the big interview. The umbrella was a minor snag. No big deal.

Andrea swirled the last mouthful of steaming tea in the miniature white cup. Taking a compact from her slim black briefcase, she appraised her reflection and nodded. Her wide, freckled forehead was framed by shoulder-length red hair, deepened from childhood pumpkin to a few shades shy of auburn. She tucked a fleeting strand behind her ears. When Andrea stood to pay the check, her expensive pinstripe suit fell softly against comfortable hips, a discernible waist, and narrow shoulders.

At twenty-three, five foot two in square heels, Andrea Carole was full-figured and self-assured. Feet firmly on the ground, pennies in her pocket, and eyes on the clearing sky, the

young woman opened the tinkle bell door and stepped outside. The noise. It was the noise that mugged her first, before the rising heat, the blur of pedestrian traffic, or the stench of week-old garbage.