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opening extract from

The Summer I Turned Pretty

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"Just hanging out," Jeremiah said vaguely.

Judas, I thought. A bunch of Benedict Arnolds. "Where's Conrad?"

"Who knows? He's too cool to hang out," Jeremiah said, falling onto a lounge chair.

"He went running," Steven said, a tad defensively. "He has to get in shape for football season. He has to leave for practice next week, remember?"

I remembered. That year Conrad had to leave early so he could get back in time for tryouts. He'd never seemed like the football type to me, but there he was, trying out for the team. I guessed Mr. Fisher had a lot to do with it; he was exactly the type. So was Jeremiah. Although he'd never take it seriously. He never took anything seriously.

"I'll probably play for the team next year too," Jeremiah said casually. He sneaked a peek at Taylor to see if she looked impressed. She didn't. She wasn't even looking at him.

His shoulders sagged a little, and I felt sorry for him despite myself.

I said, "Jere, race me, okay?"

He shrugged and stood up, taking off his shirt. Then he walked over to the deep end and dove in. "You want a handicap?" he asked when he emerged up top.

"No. I think I can beat you without one," I said, paddling over. "Whoo-hoo! Let's see."

We raced across the length of the pool, freestyle, and

he beat me the first time, and then the second. But I wore him down by the third and fourth and beat him too. Taylor cheered me on, which only annoyed me more.

The next morning she was gone again. This time, though, I was gonna join them. It wasn't like she and Jeremiah owned the beach. I had just as much right as they did to watch the sunrise. I got up, put my clothes on, and headed outside.

I didn't see them at first. They were farther down than usual, and they had their backs to me. He had his arms around her, and they were kissing. They weren't even watching the sunrise. And . . . it wasn't Jeremiah, either. It was Steven. My brother.

It was just like in those movies with the surprise ending, where everything falls into place and clicks. Suddenly my life had become *The Usual Suspects*, and Taylor, Taylor was Keyser Soze. The scenes ran through the mind—Taylor and Steven bickering, the way he had come to the boardwalk that night, Taylor claiming that Claire Cho had cankles, all the afternoons she'd spent at my house.

They didn't hear me walk up. But then I said, loudly, "Wow, so first Conrad, then Jeremiah, and now my brother."

She turned around, surprised, and Steven looked surprised too. "Belly—" she started.

"Shut up." I looked at my brother then, and he squirmed.