

TAYA BAYLISS

CODE BREAKER



E. J. Gore

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Also by E. J. Gore
Taya Bayliss – Treasure Hunter
Taya Bayliss – Dog Sitter



Chapter 1

In the dream Taya was cold. The sun was shining, but a chilly breeze ruffled her hair. She was sitting with her knees drawn up, her hands clasped underneath them. Beside her, the boy lay pale and still. She knew she should help him, but she couldn't move. She felt like a statue, frozen in place, watching as the world moved on around her. She wanted to cry out, but she was so dreadfully afraid that she couldn't make a sound.

Twice now the dream had disturbed her rest in the early morning hours and she had woken shaking and confused. She had lain in the warm safety of her bed, trying to recall the images that had frightened her. She didn't know what was worse, the sight of the poor boy or the feeling of complete helplessness - the feeling that something terrible was about to happen. Even now, hours later, she still felt confused and annoyed.

The car in which she was travelling drew to a halt and the driver turned to face her.

‘Okay, Taya, here we are,’ Mr Comino said with a gentle smile. ‘I’ll go back to the hospital now. I’m sure Chris will call you when he comes home.’

‘Thanks for bringing me home, Mr Comino,’ Taya said, as she climbed out of the car. She stood watching as he slowly drove off down Grange Road. It had been an eventful afternoon. She sighed and went into the building.

‘There you are at last. I was beginning to worry about you,’ said Julia Bayliss when she heard her daughter enter the apartment.

‘Oh no, not again,’ Taya sighed as her eyes swept around the room. Open suitcases rested on the couch and several boxes were lined up beside the coffee table. ‘Please tell me we’re not going away again. We’ve only just come home from one of Dad’s trips.’

‘You’re late,’ Mrs Bayliss continued. ‘I expected you an hour ago.’

‘Didn’t you get my text? I sent you a message when we were at the hospital,’ Taya replied. She took off her jacket, hung it in the small closet near the door and turned to face her mother.

‘Hospital? I thought you were going with the Cominos to watch Chris play football. What were you doing at the hospital?’

‘Yes. I did. But, Chris had the ball just before half-time. He was about to kick it when this huge guy from the other team raced over and tackled him, smashed him to the ground and sort of fell on top of him. Chris was knocked out and his arm was all bent and weird, so the paramedics took him off to hospital. The doctors said that Chris has to have surgery to set the bones in his arm so Mr Comino brought me home and now he’s gone back to wait with Mrs C. until the operation is over. I sent you a message so you would know where I was.’ Taya paused, took a deep breath and inspected one of the suitcases. ‘Mum, what’s happening?’

Mrs Bayliss checked her phone. 'Oh, it needs charging. I keep forgetting to plug it in. So Chris is going to be okay then, is he? Was it just his arm that was hurt?'

Taya perched on the arm of the sofa and shrugged her shoulders.

'They x-rayed him and the doctor just said that he had two broken bones in his arm and that he would have to have an operation to set them. Chris looked awful, Mum. He was really white and he said he was dizzy. You should have seen him lying there on the ground, unconscious. For a minute I thought he was...' Taya shivered as she remembered the moment and she realized, *It was just like the dream.*

'Well, the paramedics were there and now he's being well looked after by the doctors and nurses.' Mrs Bayliss hugged her daughter. 'He'll probably come home tomorrow and want you to sign his cast. Now, put these socks in that case, please.'

Taya frowned and dropped the socks into the open suitcase on the couch beside her. Her mother began packing sketchbooks, pencils and packets of charcoal into a large cardboard box. She worked as an illustrator, so her art equipment went with her wherever she went.

Taya's father's work as a research scientist specializing in coastal bird life meant that the Bayliss family travelled about a lot. Mrs Bayliss called them "The Bayliss Travelling Circus" because they had become so used to packing up and moving on to wherever Steven's work took them.

'You will need your computer and your school stuff,' Mrs Bayliss said, looking over the top of her glasses at Taya. 'Dad said we'd be gone for two weeks, so I am packing for at least a month.'

Normally Taya would have found that funny. Her father's estimation of time was a family joke. At that moment, however, it just made her more annoyed. She kicked the side of the couch with the back of her foot.

'Why can't he just go by himself? We don't need to be there. He doesn't need

us to help him. He could just go, do the research and come home when he is done. Why does he have to drag us along?’

‘Drag? When have we ever dragged you anywhere, Miss Cranky-pants? Wherever we’ve gone, you’ve had a great time - adventures even. I cannot believe you just said that.” Mrs Bayliss sent Taya a sharp look. ‘Where is this attitude coming from, might I ask?’

Taya kicked the couch again. She wasn’t sure where the annoyance was coming from. She just knew she didn’t want to go. Her mind was racing. *Something is wrong. If we stay at home, everything will be okay. I shouldn’t be going anywhere.*

‘I don’t want to go away again. My friends are here. I just want to be like everyone else and stay in one place,’ she said without looking at her mother.

‘It’s only for two weeks. That’s not so bad.’

‘Yeah, and in that two weeks I’ll miss Bethany’s birthday party. It’s a disco bowling party and we were all going to wear costumes...and Mia’s school concert is next week, so I’ll miss that too...And, now, Chris is hurt. I won’t be able to help him if he needs anything. I don’t want to go, Mum!’

Mrs Bayliss sighed. ‘Taya, we’re a family and we do things together. If your father has to go, and you know he only goes when there is a major problem somewhere, then we go with him. I’m sorry about your party plans, but we are going away and that is that!’ She returned to her packing.

Taya stood up and walked to her bedroom door.

‘Right. Mention a bird in trouble and Dad is off like Superman to the rescue. It’s just too bad about the rest of us, isn’t it?’ she snapped before slamming the door behind her.

Parents! This happens all the time. They never talk to me about their plans. They make all the decisions and don’t even bother to tell me until we’re practically out the door. I’m eleven years old, not a baby. I should get a say in what is happening.

Taya continued to fume about the coming trip as she gathered her school equipment together. Visions of her father, complete with cape and

superhero outfit, swooping down to scoop up distressed birds whirled around in her imagination.

Birdman Bayliss to the rescue! Hero of the bird kingdom! Birdnappers beware! Drop that nest! Unhand those chicks!

She pulled a face and thought about the angry feelings she was having. Her mother was right. She usually had a great time when the family went off on one her father's research trips. So why was the prospect of this trip bothering her so much? Sure, she would miss her friends, but, as an only child, she was used to finding things to do by herself. She was, according to her mother, naturally inquisitive, so she found poking around new places very interesting. But this time she was annoyed and worried. It was all very confusing.

She moved over to stand at the window and then looked out into the night. The street-lamps created pools of light along the laneway behind the building. Taya could see a man leaning against the lamppost. She didn't recognize him. He was short and stocky with dark hair and he was smoking. The cigarette smoke spiralled upwards in the cool air. She knew everyone who lived in the apartment block, and he certainly was not one of the residents.

Who are you? What are you doing?

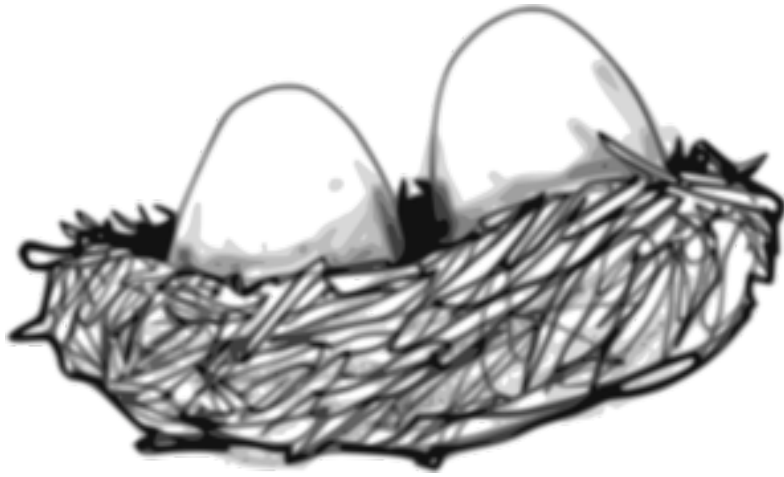
A car turned into the laneway. It was her father, driving the large four-wheel-drive wagon he used for his trips. Taya watched as he pulled in to the kerb, turned off the engine and climbed out of the vehicle. Expecting to see him open the gate and walk along the path to the back-stairs of their apartment, she began to turn away from the window. When her father walked across the lane to the lamppost, she quickly returned her attention to the scene

Puzzled, Taya leaned closer to the glass. Her father was talking to the man she had noticed earlier. Their heads were close together, her father's blond hair standing out clearly in the lamplight. The man handed a backpack to her father and jabbed him in the shoulder with an extended finger, as if he were making a strong statement. Her father nodded and the two men shook

hands. Then, as her father returned to the vehicle and threw the backpack inside, the dark-haired man walked briskly away.

That was weird, Taya thought as she finished stacking books and folders into a plastic crate. *Why would Dad be taking a backpack from that man?*

She lay down on the bed to think about what she had seen and within seconds was fast asleep.



Chapter 2

Taya woke slowly as voices in the living room intruded into her semi-wakefulness. She sat on the side of the bed for a moment before opening the bedroom door to peek out. Her father lay on the couch watching television. Taya picked up the box of school gear and carried it across the room, depositing it beside the other boxes lined up near the front door.

‘Hello, Featherhead.’ Her father sounded sleepy too.

‘Hello. Did I miss dinner?’

Steven Bayliss sat up, rubbed his fingers through his hair and smiled at his daughter.

‘Yup. I looked in on you earlier but you were sleeping soundly. Mum left you some spag bol. Want me to heat it up for you?’

Taya nodded. ‘Yes, please.’

They moved quietly around the small kitchen. Taya made cups of tea and found the cookie jar while her father heated the bowl of spaghetti

Bolognese in the microwave. When they had seated themselves at the table, Mr Bayliss watched Taya eat for a minute or two before he spoke.

‘So, you aren’t happy about going away again? You don’t want to come with me tomorrow?’

‘Not really, but I don’t get a choice, do I?’ Taya stared into her spaghetti.

‘No, you don’t, TJ. Not about this. This is my work. I’ve tried going on research assignments alone, but your Mum didn’t like it and neither did I. We decided that, even though the travelling can be a nuisance sometimes, being together is better than being apart. We’re a family, and families stick together.’

Taya sighed, ‘That’s what Mum said, but I don’t think it’s fair that you don’t even tell me when the trips are going to happen. You could at least give me some warning. I’m not a baby. You could tell me when you are planning something.’

Steven Bayliss nodded. ‘Fair enough,’ he said. ‘But I didn’t know about this trip until lunchtime. That was when I called Mum and told her to start packing. So, you see, it’s been a surprise for all of us this time.’ He took his cup of tea to the living room and made himself comfortable on the couch again. Taya finished her dinner, rinsed the bowl and put it into the dishwasher.

‘Who was the man in the laneway?’ she asked as she joined her father in front of the television. Mr Bayliss sipped his tea.

‘What man?’

‘In the laneway...I saw you talking to a man out in the laneway. Who was he?’

Her father’s gaze remained on the television screen.

‘There was no man, Taya. I wasn’t talking to anyone in the lane. You must have been dreaming.’

‘He had a bag or something, and he gave it to you and then he poked you in the shoulder and then he went. I saw him there,’ Taya persisted, turning sideways to look squarely at her father.

‘Taya, there was no man. You couldn’t have seen me with anyone. It was

a dream.' He spoke the words clearly and slowly, but Steven Bayliss did not look at his daughter until he had finished speaking. The face he turned to her was stern. The flickering light from the television cast dark shadows under his eyes and chin, making his familiar features seem sinister and scary.

Taya exhaled and looked away. 'It was really clear. It seemed real.'

'Dreams...,' her father said quietly. 'Sometimes they're clear, sometimes all misty and vague. Sometimes you remember them. Sometimes you don't. Funny things dreams are.'

Later, snuggled up in her bed, Taya thought about the conversation. It had been really strange to look at her father's face and feel uncomfortable. She had never doubted him before. Now there was a niggling little voice in her mind that was telling her that he had lied to her.

Did it really happen or was it a dream? I have been dreaming a lot lately. I remember it so clearly. Why would Dad lie to me though?

She drifted into sleep, expecting that the dream would break into her rest again but the night passed without interruption.

Taya woke the next morning to a bright, sunny day. She dressed, made her bed and went to the kitchen to find her parents making breakfast.

'Good morning, Taya Jeanne,' smiled her mother. 'I hope you are in a better mood today. Cereal or eggs?'

'Morning! Hi, Dad. Eggs, please. Sorry I groused at you yesterday, Mum. I guess I was just worried about Chris.'

Mrs Bayliss nodded. 'He'll be fine. A broken arm isn't going to slow him down for long. Would you take that rubbish bag down to the bin please? Your eggs won't be long.'

Taya shot a look at her father but he was focused on buttering toast and seemed not to notice her. She picked up the plastic garbage bag and walked to the door.

'Still weird,' Taya muttered under her breath. She headed downstairs to the bins. The building consisted of six shops that opened on to Grange Road, each with an apartment upstairs. There was a coffee shop, a convenience store,

a bookstore, a pizza shop, a fruit shop and a dry cleaner. The Bayliss family lived above the bookstore. Taya dropped the bag into the rubbish bin and looked hopefully towards the back garden of the fruit shop two doors down along the lane. Usually at this time, at least one of the Comino family would be out there enjoying a cup of coffee but today the garden was empty. She took a deep breath of the morning air, glad that it was a fine and not rainy. *Travelling in the rain is no fun. Everything looks so sad and miserable.*

She looked across at the lamppost on the other side of the lane and wondered again about the events of the previous evening. In her mind's eye she could see the man leaning there, cigarette smoke curling around him.

'Still weird,' she repeated, shaking her head. She walked over to stand beside the four-wheel-drive wagon parked by the gate.

'I really thought I saw him. I wonder if...'

Standing on tiptoes, Taya peered through the passenger side window of the vehicle. She noticed nothing unusual. The interior of the car was neat and clean.

Wait a minute. He threw it in the back.

She moved sideways and, cupping her hands around her eyes, looked into the back of the vehicle. There was nothing on the back seats, nothing under the back seats, but there, in the luggage area, lying between the bundle of tent poles and a camping stove...there it was - a backpack. Taya drew a sharp breath!

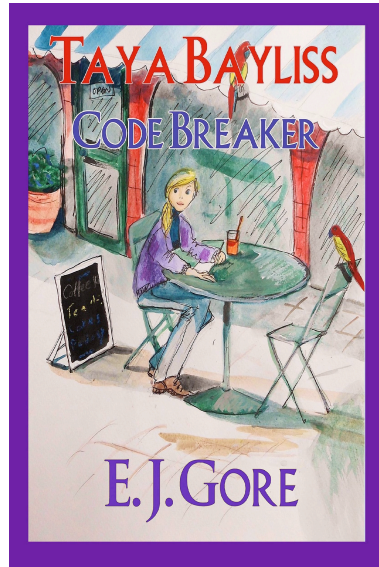
He lied to me! It wasn't a dream! He lied to me!

She turned to look at the lamppost again, her mind racing. Her father had never lied to her before. Well, not that she knew of anyway. Another look into the vehicle confirmed that she had not been imagining things. The backpack was definitely there.

Maybe it's stuff he needs for the trip. Maybe the man was someone from the university. Why would he lie about that though?

Her mother's voice calling her to breakfast broke into Taya's thoughts. She climbed the back stairs to the apartment and returned to the kitchen.

Eating her breakfast and listening to her parents chat about what to take on the trip, Taya realized that her father had still not spoken to her or even looked at her that morning.



Want to know what happens next?

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