

Who Is She?

He strode into the high-rise, the cool air assailing him as the door opened then closed behind him. He'd planned this trip for almost a week. His third date with Jenny had gone well, but she hadn't committed to the fourth he'd suggested for this evening at his chosen upscale restaurant. She'd begged off for family obligations for the week, but what could those be? If he wasn't proactive, he might lose the chance to see her again. He wanted an opportunity to meet her family, to get closer. He needed to convince her she was *the one*. If he could just meet her when she was getting off work, he could make sure she didn't give up on them as a couple.

He scanned the list on the wall of companies in the building. The tenth floor held several investment firms. He smiled. He'd found the right place. He positioned himself near the welcome desk and watched the elevators. Drove of people had begun exiting them, and he couldn't risk missing her in the crowd. All he had to do was wait.

About five minutes later, his patience was rewarded as Jenny exited with a group of women. As he approached, he heard one of the women talking to her. "So, Jackie, how do your displayss in the new gallery exhibition look? Can you get me free tickets to see them as usual?"

He stopped in his tracks. Jackie? Gallery exhibition? Jenny worked for an investment firm. What was this woman talking about?

Jenny smiled at her. "I have a few pieces I love there. I'm anticipating some nice sales. You know, there's even going to be coverage by several art magazines this time and, if it goes well enough, I should get offers for a couple of other exhibitions." She paused, winking at the woman. "Do you want the tickets to be for opening night, or do you want to come a few days later?"

“When is the official opening?”

“Next Thursday at 6. What do you say?” She tilted her head, listening.

“Thursday works.”

“Okay, I’ll drop the tickets by your office in the next few days.” She winked as the women parted.

He scratched his head and closed, then opened, his eyes. What was going on? He looked around. How had she slipped past him so quickly? He rushed back into the heat outside, scanning the crowd for her, and spotted her walking down the sidewalk to his right. He hurried after her.

“Hey, Josie, how are you doing?” Jenny’s head spun around to look at one of the women crossing the street nearby and waved.

“I haven’t seen you in forever! I’m okay. How are you doing, Sue?”

He moved closer so he could listen to their conversation. Who was this woman he’d been dating? Jackie? Josie? How many identities did she have? He matched his step to hers and heard Josie, or Jenny, ask. “So, Sue, what’s new on the work front?”

Sue smiled back. “Not much. Everything’s going pretty well. How’s the research going?”

“We’re just hunting for a group to finish up a new drug trial. It’s kind of exciting! Some of the groups are so close!”

He grimaced. Drug trial? What the...? Jenny had trouble mixing the dressing into her salad the last time they ate out, ending up with clumps in some spots and bare lettuce in others. What was she talking about?

The words jumbled together as the two women stood discussing proteins and lipase and other terms that meant nothing to him. How could she understand all that? They’d talked about

her college days, and she'd admitted she squeaked through chemistry and biology. How could she be involved in research on proteins and lipase?

Just then the two women stopped talking and Jenny, or Josie, or Jackie, or whoever she was, started walking again, this time in another direction. Who was this woman?

Two blocks later, she turned left and entered a jewelry store. He stopped just outside the door to listen as the woman behind the counter looked up. "Josie! It's great to see you! Are you here to pick up the bracelets?"

Jenny nodded. "Yup. Did you have any trouble getting them to match?"

The woman behind the counter smiled. "Absolutely no trouble at all. All in a day's work."

Jenny pulled a wallet from her purse and handed the woman a credit card. She ran the card, gave Jenny a bag with everything in it, and waved goodbye as Jenny left.

Two stores later, she stopped and entered another shop. What was she doing now? He watched her pick up three matching sweatshirts. As she left, the woman yelled, "Jackie, make sure to come back again! We loved this design. I'm hoping you'll let us print your next sweatshirt line."

By this time, he'd grown dizzy. Artist, researcher, investment banker, sweatshirt designer. What would be next?

After following her for another fifteen minutes, she arrived at the Regency West Hotel. A hotel! Was she meeting a man? A pit began to form in his stomach, threatening to swallow him as he collapsed into it. He had to convince her she wanted to stay with him! His fists clenched and teeth ground as he felt sweat form on the back of his neck.

He followed her in, hugging the wall, expecting her to walk to the front desk and register yet disappointed when she did. What was she saying? He craned his neck to hear better as she handed the young man her credit card and identification. “Have you got the reservation for our suite taken care of?”

“Yes, ma’am. Here’s your key.”

The exchange took only a few minutes, but for him time seemed to have stopped. After she finished, she walked toward Chez Louis, the hotel’s ground floor upscale restaurant. He shook his head and rubbed his eyes. This was the restaurant where he’d planned to take her! Who was she going to meet here instead of having dinner with him? He stopped just outside the door as she entered, peering into the entrance as the maître de approached.

“Sir, are you here for the multiples event?”

He gasped. “The what?”

“The multiples event, sir. I’d ask if you’re a twin or a triplet. But, if you don’t know about this event, the fact you aren’t goes without saying. I’m sorry, but the restaurant’s closed for this event now.”

“Closed?” he croaked.

He spotted Jenny at a table with two other women, brunette hair worn the same way, sporting the matching sweatshirts he’d just seen Jenny—or Jackie—or Josie buy. “I just want to say hello to my girlfriend. Can I do that?” he whined as his eyes darted between Jenny’s table and the man barring his entry.

“Sir...”

“Jenny! Jenny, can you come here for a minute?” His voice boomed, drawing all three women’s eyes to the door. In unison, they stood and approached him, accompanied by a tall, dark-haired man.

The Jenny to the left began, “Harry, I told you I was busy this week.”

He started to open his mouth, but the woman next to her spoke before he got out a sound. “Why can’t you respect my wishes?” His eyes shifted to her just as the woman on the right spoke. “All you’re doing is proving why I shouldn’t see you anymore.”

Which one of them was Jenny, and why was this happening? His mouth opened and closed several times. What should he do now?

“Jenny, uh, Jenny...which of you is Jenny?” His eyes rotated to each woman, trying to decide.

“I am,” all three answered.

He moaned. “Jenny, I came here because I want to spend more time with you. You’re special and important to me. Why are you doing this?”

A hand wrenched him away from the door. “Harry, or is it Mr. Raymond Jones? What are you doing here?”

He swallowed, looking into the hardened face of the man accompanying them. “It’s Harry, and I’m here to see my girlfriend, Jenny Smythe. Who are you, anyway?”

The man’s cold smile chilled him. “You can call me John Smith. I ask you, is it Jenny you’re hoping to see, or are you hoping to wheedle time with her so you can get the inside scoop on a government contract for your employer?”

His eyes snapped to the man’s, probing. Jenny had never shared she was a multiple or that she handled government contracts, saying instead she handled people’s personal investment

accounts. How did this man know about his interest in government contracts? “Who are you? What are you talking about?” Maybe he could feign ignorance.

One of the women spoke behind him. “He’s talking about you stalking me.”

He turned. “Yes, stalking me,” said another.

“And me,” said a third.

“Will you three stop doing that?” he blurted. “I came to see my Jenny. She’s special to me.”

They laughed, almost in unison, then all said. “How am I special?”

He shook his head. This unison thing was getting old. “Why are you three doing this?”

“Oh, this old game? We’ve been doing this since we were kids.” The woman on the left spoke.

“Yeah, we all know about each other’s lives,” said the middle woman.

“That’s what being multiples is about,” smiled the woman on the right.

“And this isn’t our first rodeo with someone trying to use Jenny. When you control that kind of government money, there’s always some cockroach trying to crawl into her hemisphere.

Nearby, Mr. Smith smirked.

“When you did your despicable research on Jenny, you never noticed our birth dates were the same? You’re worse than most of them have been!” clipped the woman on the left. “You really have no idea who you’re spying on, do you?”

“What’s the matter?” said the middle woman.

“Can’t handle the heat?” said the woman on the left.

“Then stay out of the kitchen, you liar!” ground the woman on the right.

He swallowed. “What...” He coughed, trying to calm the sudden tremor in his voice. “What do you mean?”

Mr. Smith placed his arm around the woman in the middle. “They mean you’re a corporate spy trying to get insider information from my *wife* for your employer, *Harry* or *Raymond*, or should I just call you Stephen Brooks? We caught onto you when you started investigating Jenny a month ago and flagged your connection to one of the companies bidding on the government contract for the new bomber.” The man’s eyes bored into his. “Using Jenny—not a new idea, nope, not at all, and these women hate that kind of underhanded garbage the most. That’s where my day job as an investigator comes in.”

He shrugged, his smile rueful as he addressed Mr. Smith. “Well, nothing ventured, nothing gained. I’ll have better luck next time.” He looked around. “But since you can’t get me arrested...”

He started to turn toward the door as John Smith tilted his head, assessing him. “You do realize you’re now flagged on every corporate and government watch list as an industrial spy, right?”

He paused, sighing, then swallowed. “I guess I’ll just have to find a new line of work. Still, you can’t keep me here, so I’ll just gather up my pride and leave now.”

Mr. Smith and all three women smiled. Each word the woman in the center bit out pierced his skin as she looked toward the man now standing behind him. “Officer, thank you for coming. I want to report this man for stalking. We have video to support it.” Her smile was acid. “We’re all witnesses, and we’re ready to make a statement whenever you need it.”