



Seriously
Single

*Written and Illustrated
by Jennifer Andrew*

Table of Contents

After Office Party Pg. 3

New Year's House Party..... Pg. 6

Lock and Key Valentine Party..... Pg. 9

Big Date Shot To HellPg. 14

Office Surprise Pg. 18

Unexpected Visitor Pg. 23

That's What Friends Are For Pg. 26

If I Could Turn Back Time..... Pg. 33

Too Close For ComfortPg. 37

Down Another Dating RoadPg. 41

It's Never What You Think Pg. 46



VIP
Femme

After Office Party

The company Christmas Party at the banquet hall was a blast but it was getting late and Jessica was attempting to get a ride home. She was buzzed from drinking too much rum and cokes so everyone started to look good. It had been two years since she had any close contact and her skin was itching to be touched. Best to get home soon, she thought, before she ended up sleeping with the guy from the mailroom.

Actually, now that she thought about it. It was pathetic that she had let it go for so long. She was being too fussy and wondered what sort of selection she had at the Christmas Party. The array of drinks she had throughout the evening was starting to affect her judgement but she didn't care. She was having too much fun.

She looked around for Bruce. He was a very nice guy who worked in the Marketing dept. on the 3rd floor. They always bumped into each other in the elevator and he could never resist making eyes at her. How could he help not looking? Although she was big-boned for her 5'7" frame, her body was solid and she was lucky to be born with a set of long legs. She wore her figure well and had the attitude to go with it – bold and confident.

Jessica didn't want to get involved with someone at work but figured it was okay if they didn't work on the same floor. The only time she really saw Bruce was travelling the elevator and in the lunchroom, so she thought what the hell plus he had his own transportation.

She found Bruce talking with one of the bartenders at the bar, exchanging recipes for exotic drinks. She leaned on the bar and flipped her thick, brown hair to make sure she grabbed his attention. The spaghetti strap of Jessica's black dress slipped off her right shoulder so he reached over and slipped it back on, lingering his hand on her skin. His hand was soft, warm and big and his fingers were slender. She smiled up at him and led him away from the bar.

"Listen, Bruce." She cooed. "This function is getting a little dry. Do you have any other ideas?"

"I have a great sound system at my place," he answered. "A lot better than this crap they're calling music."

"Then let's split." She said, pulling him towards the door. "The night is still young and I am itching for some good time."

Without wasting any time, they headed down to the parking lot after grabbing their coats at coat check. Bruce played the gentleman and opened the car door for Jessica. Then he ran around to the driver's seat, slipped in and took off out of the lot. He had not been drinking all night because he had to drive so he was eager to head home and start his party.

When they reached Bruce's apartment, they couldn't keep their hands off each other. Jessica was barely covered under her thick, maroon winter coat when he finally unlocked the door and they tumbled into the apartment. She threw off her coat and headed to the kitchen as he threw his keys on the side table.

Jessica quickly composed herself, thinking that she didn't want to be labelled as "too easy" by the guys at work so she asked Bruce to fix her a drink while she reapplied her lipstick. He pulled out a bottle of Chardonnay from the refrigerator and grabbed a couple of wine glasses from the cupboard. After pouring them both a glass, Bruce ushered Jessica to the plush couch in the living room where she sat down.

Bruce sipped his white wine as Jessica placed her wine glass carefully on his small glass coffee table in front of her. She didn't come to his apartment for more alcohol. Jessica turned to face him and started to play with the buttons of his shirt.

"I was always wondering when we were going to get together", she said.

"Well, sooner or later all those meetings in the elevator were going to lead somewhere, ah?" he smiled, placing his glass on the table. "I just thought you were never interested."

"Well, a girl can change her mind, can't she?" she answered, thinking if she should give it up to Bruce.

Just as Jessica started to undo the top button of his white dress shirt, the front door opened and in walked a short, frumpy woman in her early twenty's.

"Who the hell is that?" Jessica asked, glaring at Bruce who sat with a regretful expression on his face.

"She's just my ex-girlfriend." He answered, reaching for Jessica. "You don't have to worry about her. She'll be very quiet."

"Don't touch me," Jessica growled, pulling away from him and standing up to leave.

The other woman practically dashed into the other room when she saw that something was going to blow. "I am not going to fool around with you when another woman is in the other room. Are you kidding me? What are you doing here with her? I thought you broke up?"

"Jess, don't leave." Bruce pleaded. "I did break up with her but apartment's are so expensive we decided to become roommates. What's the big deal?"

"You're incredible!" She exclaimed, looking around for her purse. "I'm outta here and don't call me Jess or talk to me at work."

On her way out the door, she grabbed her shoes and her coat. She was pissed that she ended up having to pay for a cab home. What a sorry Saturday night this turned out to be!

On Monday morning, Jessica sat at her desk opening the mail that was brought to her by Bill from the mailroom when she had a thought. She got on her computer and in her Outlook, sent an email to Roxanne concerning New Year's Eve. She wasn't going to spend the night alone and she didn't want to go to the Single's Club boat cruise. The thought of spending her time below decks, freezing herself, did not appeal to her.

After a few moments, she received a response stating that Roxanne was going to throw a New Year's Eve party at her house. Jessica was excited since everyone she knew was going to be there. She wondered if Roxanne was going to invite Christopher. Of course, but would he come?

She sorted through the business mail and the advertisements and put her employer's mail into his mail tray in his office. Early this morning, Bruce had been standing by the elevator waiting for her when she returned from the café with her tea. She refused to speak to him and when he got angry, she threatened to tell everyone at work that he still lived with his ex-girlfriend and all this time he was playing the big shot. He left her alone after that.

She looked into her in tray. She had many promo letters to send out to the merchants listed in the Restaurant Association. MasterCard had a new terminal that was faster at capturing credit card transactions and they wanted their advertisement to go out to the members as soon as possible. There was no way she was going to work overtime. Tonight, she was going shopping to buy something new for Roxanne's party.

New Year's House Party

Jessica showed up with no gentleman on her arm. She was hoping she would leave the party with one. Besides, spending time with her friends seemed to be more satisfying than hooking up with an old boyfriend or deadbeat date. She looked around for Roxanne and found her chatting with some guests.

"Hey, how are you?" Roxanne asked, when she could finally break away. She was dressed in a royal blue pants suit and her black hair was straight and long. She didn't normally wear a weave except tonight was a special occasion. She preferred to go natural but her boyfriend loved when she embellished her looks and she wanted to make him happy.

"Fine," Jessica answered, brushing back her bangs. She decided to wear her hair up in an elegant bun but kept a few strands flowing down the side of her face.

"I'll be with you in a minute," Roxanne said as she led Jessica through the room. "In the meantime, I think you'll like this guy I'm going to introduce you to."

"I just got here, Roxie."

"Don't be silly, girl." She smiled. "You look great, as always. Besides, you'll be bitching later about not meeting anyone and we know it. This guy is not going to stay long and I would like you to meet him. He works with Peter and I think he can help you further your career."

Jessica followed Roxanne and was introduced to a young, black male just slightly taller than her. She excused herself and left her to chat with Tyrell. He seemed nice enough and what she liked about him was that he always had a smile on his face, but there were no vibes between them.

"So what's this all about anyway?" Jessica asked, looking around the room to see a mixture of business types and Roxanne's friends. She was hoping it would be a small gathering but the party resembled a typical New Year's Eve corporate function.

"Peter has been promoted to Marketing Manager so 2007 is going to be a great year." Tyrell answered. He was dressed in a dark grey suit and looked like he should be going to work, not a party.

"What's in it for you?" Jessica asked, attempting to further the conversation.

"I work with Peter and I'll be part of his team next year." He smiled. He sipped his beer and leaned in a little closer. "There will be plenty to look forward to for the department."

"Oh, good for you." She answered, scanning the room for Roxanne but not finding her. She turned back to Tyrell. "I could really use a drink so I'll be right back."

He nodded and watched as she disappeared into the crowd.

Jessica found the food table and headed directly to the punch bowl. After a small sample, she realized it was punctuated with rum so she took a full cup but sipped it slowly. She was hoping her new black cocktail dress was not going to go to waste on businessmen. She had enough of them at work without coming to a party and bumping into them there. Jessica wasn't about to go back and talk to Tyrell so she looked around for anyone she knew. Since she didn't recognize anyone, she downed the rest of her drink and turned to replenish.

"Hey," came a familiar voice from behind. When Jessica turned around, she was greeted by Roxanne. "Come."

Jessica followed her through the gathering of people, down the corridor and into a small room. Roxanne used the room as a study while she worked on her hobbies so she could have a place for herself. She closed the door and dropped down into her thick leather reclining chair.

"What do you think you are doing?" Jessica asked. "I thought this was going to be fun."

Roxanne crossed her legs and looked up at her friend. "I know, but Peter came to me and said it would be great to invite the people at work to make his promotion look good and stand out. Kind of making him a big shot, you know? I figure why not since I was throwing a party anyway."

"Bad move. Now you have just a bunch of stiffs mingling around, talking business and trying to get with your friends." Jessica said. She sipped at the punch and then shook her head. "Are you trying to impress Peter so he can marry you?"

"Excuse me?" Roxanne asked, standing up to meet her friend face-to-face. "I've been under a lot of stress putting this together and you have to come out and say that?"

"Roxanne, you've been together for four years and been living together for three. Half our friends are already married and every time he wants you to do something, you just do it. Is that what love's about?"

"It's just not the right time." She responded on the defense. "We've talked about marriage a number of times and when we're ready, we'll make the move."

Jessica sipped at her drink. "You've been ready for ages. I wouldn't be a friend if I didn't say I think you're wasting your time."

Roxanne dropped back into her seat. "I know and I appreciate it, Jess."

"I didn't see Christopher in the crowd." She grinned and finished off the rest of the punch.

"I didn't invite him," Was the response. Roxanne stood up and fixed her outfit. "I couldn't have Christopher and Peter in the same room."

"Don't keep banging your head against the wall because you blew it in college."

"Well, there's no point pining over a married man, Jessica." She opened the door and the din of voices and music flowed into the room. "I better get back to take care of this party."

They left the room together and closed the door behind them. Jessica watched as Roxanne mingled through the crowd like a perfect hostess. She sauntered back to the food table and refilled her cup with punch. Glancing over the crowd, she tried to search for anyone interesting. Since she was here, Jessica was going to make the most of it and was hoping to have a probable man before New Year's Eve count down.

Lock and Key Valentine Party

"I don't believe I'm doing this."

"You're doing me a favour," Jessica said, holding six raffle tickets in her hand. "You don't have to open any locks."

Jessica had dragged her friend to a Lock and Key Valentine's party hosted by a Single In The City organization. She had already opened four locks and was anxious to introduce herself to more men so she could attempt to open more locks. The trick was to socialize while finding locks to open but Jessica was interested in gathering as many raffle tickets as she could. One of the prizes happened to be a free admission ticket to a Hurry Date event.

"I'm an attached woman," Roxanne whispered, sipping at her white wine. She felt like a fraud being there among single people when she was in a relationship. Living together for so long, she couldn't see her life being anything else. She felt guilty being there when she would rather be at home cuddling with her man.

"You're my support. You wouldn't let me come alone. Besides, all of my friends are married so I couldn't get anyone else to come."

"So what does that say about me?"

"That you're the best," Jessica grinned and nudging her friend on the shoulder. "I'm going to get a drink. Do you want anything?"

"Oh no, Hun. I'm diving. This is enough for me." And she lifted her half glass of Zinfandel.

Roxanne watched as Jessica made her way to the bar. She thought her friend tried too hard. Jessica was a little heavyset but she wore it well with her tall height and her charismatic personality, shifting the attention from her weight. She had a warm smile and her laughter was genuine. Jessica wore her long brown hair in large curls because she thought the look would make her more appealing, but Roxanne tried to tell her that if a man wasn't interested, he wasn't interested. The right man for her would come along and she shouldn't push it. Jessica wanted to be married by the time she was 30 but at 29, it seemed rather unlikely. She was at least anxious to find herself a boyfriend.

Roxanne was glad she didn't have to play the dating game anymore. It was so difficult now days to meet people, not like it was in high school where you had the pick of the crop. Jessica came back holding a zombie and another raffle ticket. Her hair bouncing as she swayed back to her friend. "I hope I win something."

"I don't want to stay out too late, Jess."

“At least stay ‘till midnight and then we’ll leave.”

Jessica nodded in agreement and finished off her wine. She approached the bar to set down the empty glass and picked up a glass of water with ice and a thin slice of lime. The MC flashed a light on the dance floor and announced they would be starting the raffle.

Jessica shook with excitement. She had gathered enough raffle tickets for her to believe she should win something. Raffle ticket number by ticket number was called but she didn’t win a thing.

Jessica sucked back her drink and went to the bar for another. This time, she returned with a Singapore Sling and waited with Roxanne for them to announce the DJ and the dancing to start.

Jessica wore a black pair of pants and a black halter with the strings tied around her neck and her short heels. She was afraid the reason why men weren’t interested was because she was too tall.

Roxanne sat in a plush chair waiting for the music to start. She looked amazing in her sleek fitted black dress with a slit up to her right thigh, showing her smooth mocha skin. She was only 5’6” but she always seemed to command attention. She wore her hair straight tonight and didn’t feel the need for extensions or weaves, even though her hair never seemed to grow beyond her shoulders.

Nelly Furtado’s single, Promiscuous, blared around the room and Jesse squealed when she heard it. She urged Roxanne to join her on the dance floor but when her friend refused, she went anyway. Jessica downed the last of her drink and swayed to the dance floor where she found a lonely male dancer and joined him in bumping hips.

Roxanne loved the way her friend could just go with the flow. Sometimes it took her awhile to warm up enough to dance on the dance floor. She went looking for some place comfortable to sit down when someone bumped her from behind. She turned around and was surprised.

“What are you doing here?” came a deep male voice from behind a wide smile. “You’re not available, are you? I thought you and Peter would be together forever.”

“Christopher? I could say the same for you.”

“Well, it didn’t work out. When you find your wife sleeping with her boss, it’s a little hard to go on after that.” He said, taking a swig from his Corona.

“I’m sorry to hear that.” Roxanne said, but she wasn’t really. She knew Paulina wasn’t a good match for him and she hated the fact that he still went through with marrying her.

Christopher had been part of their in-crowd in college and Paulina was a cheerleader who only went out with him after she was dumped by the football captain.

"I'm not, by the way." Roxanne said.

"Not what?"

"Available." Roxanne answered, looking up into his dark brown eyes. He was a few feet taller than she was but he always bent down to talk to her so she wouldn't feel so short. His black hair was cut short and brushed back, not like the long ponytail he had in school.

"So what are you doing here?" he asked, finishing off his beer and indicating to the waiter that he wanted another one.

"I came here as Jesse's support. No more single friends, I guess." She said.

When the waiter arrived, Christopher exchanged his empty beer bottle with a full one and asked Roxanne if she would like a drink. When she shook her head, he paid the waiter and took a drink before answering. "Jessica's here? Feels like a reunion. Is she married yet? She said she wanted to get married by 30."

"Unfortunately no, but she is trying."

"Did you have your usual New Year's Eve Party?" he asked.

"Yes, but if I knew your number, I would have invited you." Roxanne answered, "Besides, you wouldn't have come."

"no matter what you think, I'm not worried about Peter. I could always beat him at sports in college. He always had his nose in a book or two."

"Well, it paid off." Roxanne said. "He's going places at work."

Christopher took another sip of his beer as he looked down at her. Roxanne couldn't take her eyes off him. The last time she saw him was the summer of graduation during his wedding. He moved out of the province after that and they didn't even get any correspondence from him.

"Maybe we can hook up after the dance. I've got nothing better to do."

"We never heard from you after you got married, why should we take off and spend some time together now?"

"You're not going to hold that over my head, are you?" he laughed, downing the rest of his beer. "That was a long time ago and I thought our circle of friends were tight?"

“A circle of friends is tight if you care enough to want to stick together.”
She said, “Excuse me.”

Roxanne headed for the dance floor to get Jessica. It had been years since everyone was together and she didn't know what kind of man Christopher had turned into. Everyone had gone off to do their own thing but she and Jessica stayed friends and stayed in contact.

The music had changed to Byonce's Baby Boy so it was hard to get Jessica off the dance floor. She agreed to leave after the song was over.

“Jess always liked to dance. I'm glad to see she's still rocking it.” Christopher had followed her onto the dance floor and was shouting over the loud music. He leaned in to hear if Roxanne had anything else to say but she said nothing else. Even under his navy blue silk shirt, Roxanne took in the faint aroma of Old Spice and couldn't help licking her lips at how attractive Christopher had become. His thin gawky physique had matured to broad shoulders and chest and a firm midsection. When he sucked back the last of his beer and turned to place it on the bar, she even took in his tight behind.

Roxanne reached into her little black purse and pulled out her own keys. “We're leaving.”

“This better be good,” Jessica exclaimed. “The DJ was good.”

“I'm sorry, Jess, but it's almost midnight and I have to get going.”

“What about Christopher? We haven't seen him in ages and I don't want to go home early.” She said, following Roxanne to her red Honda Civic.

“Christopher got divorced.”

“Oh, Mr. Big shot split up with his demon wife?” she laughed. “Good riddance. You know she was a controlling witch.”

Once in the car, Roxanne had to take a minute. She sat behind the wheel, looking back at the doors to the hotel.

“What are you doing?” Jessica asked, opening her purse to touch up her makeup. Maybe after her friend dropped her home, she could make a few calls. The night was still young and Roxie was bailing out on her. “Peter will just be sleeping anyway. What's the point in rushing home to sleep?”

When Roxie didn't answer. She added, “I hope you still don't have feelings for him. You know how you were in college.”

“What do you mean, how I was?” she asked, finally starting the car.

“All I know is that when we were back at York University, you had the hots for him but he had his eye on that cheerleader and you were pissed!”

“Well, I got the better end of the deal since I am still with Peter.”

All she knew was that her friend was ready to blow her off at midnight when she bumped into Christopher and she didn't see the big deal in ruining the rest of the evening because he simply neglected to stay in touch.

She smiled over at her friend as Roxanne kept her eyes on the road. Why the sudden change in attitude? Jessica had her doubts but kept her mouth shut. Who was she to talk when her love life was heading down the drain. Come to think of it, when Roxanne dropped her at home, she was going to enjoy the rest of the night with a large cup of tea and Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*.

Big Date Shot To Hell

Jessica was running around her apartment getting ready for her big date. The representative from the dating service said that this one might be the one for her because according to their stats, they were quite compatible. She had heard it before but she was always willing to give her dates a chance. She was a romantic at heart and she knew that some day she would find true love like her friend Roxanne.

Her date's name was David and he worked as a copywriter for an insurance journal. He was taking her to a club and he was three years younger than her so she wanted to dress in style. Her hair fell in curls just passed her shoulders. She wore a black and red lace dress which complimented her voluptuous frame and simple silver jewellery.

She squealed when she heard the doorbell because she was still looking for her red heels and her black purse. Soon afterwards, she ran to the door and threw it open. He stood taller than she did, even with her two-inch heels. He reminded her of a younger Ewan McGregor when he smiled but minus the accent. He was third generation Canadian and had never left the province of Ontario. As long as he had a job and a car, she didn't care.

She rushed out with him, locking the door behind her. She was excited. He seemed full of energy and focused on showing her a good time tonight.

Once they were outside, he unlocked the door and they jumped into his red sports car. He sped out of the parking lot just barely after Jessica strapped on her seat belt. She was smiling though. She was feeling very optimistic about this one. She looked over and caught him eyeing her, which made her feel sexy and confident that he had his eyes on her. Although she was a little heavy set, she had a firm body for a big boned woman. Even Queen Latifah would be jealous.

He hopped on highway 427 and headed downtown to the core of the city – the entertainment district. She disliked downtown, especially at night. She heard too many stories of shootings, especially in the local clubs in the area. She didn't let it get her down, however, she wanted to make a good show of this evening.

When they showed up at Fluid, David said a few words to the bouncer and they were led right in past the line-up. The place was already packed but Jessica blended right in. She swayed her body through the crowd as David led her to the bar. He bought her a rum and coke while he ordered himself a Corona, which he put on a tab with the bartender.

One of his friends spotted him at the bar and came over to introduce himself to her. After whispering something in David's ear, they left shortly after, but David ensured her that he would be right back. After her first drink, she ordered two B52's and had the bartender put it on David's tab. She enjoyed his company thus far but she didn't know how long she had to wait before hunting him down.

The music was hopping. Jessica sucked back her two shooters and headed for the dance floor, swaying her hips to Shakira's "Hips Don't lie". When David returned, he would have to go looking for her on the dance floor.

Jessica must have danced four sets when she still saw no sign of her date. Buzzing from the hype music and the smiles from the young men in the crowd, she went looking for him. She didn't even get annoyed when she was groped by some Asian man while squeezing past a group of drunken men. She felt on top of the world and nothing was going to spoil her mood. This was the best time she ever had. She was dressed hot and she had a number of interested men to choose from.

Eventually, she gave up looking for him and decided he must have taken off with some whore, so she went to the bar for another shooter and rum and coke then headed off to the dance floor to take advantage of the banging music. Whitney Houston's remix of "Dance With Somebody" was playing and she felt no pain. She accepted the advances of a young, African-American man who joined her dancing to the rhythm of the music. When it was over, he didn't have time to introduce himself because David came between them.

"Where have you been?" she asked. She thought she was going to be pissed but when he smiled at her, she melted and all thoughts of anger slipped away. "I've been trying to entertain myself."

"Well, it looks like you're doing a great job." He responded, looking back at the dance floor.

Jessica couldn't do anything except giggle. She was flying high from the liquor and couldn't wait to get back to the bar for some more drinks. Instead of veering her to the bar, however, David led her through the crowd to a narrow hallway that led to a small closed door. "VIP room," he whispered, before he opened it quickly and ushered her inside.

Jessica wasn't too surprised to see a small group of people sitting around smoking and drinking. It wasn't too different from her days in school, except she didn't participate too much then. She cared more for her studies. A lighted cigarette was being passed around and when it came her way, she knew it was more than tobacco. She passed it along without taking a toke since drinking was more her thing.

The dark, cozy room was like a VIP room. The furniture was black leather and a glass table held everyone's drinks and small stashes wrapped in plastic baggies. She started to feel uncomfortable and hoped David would leave soon but considering he was starting to roll another joint, it didn't seem like there was a chance of that.

When David noticed that Jessica was still standing, he asked what the problem was.

“You know,” she answered, looking at the group eagerly anticipating the next dube. “This isn’t my thing. I think you should take me home.”

“Baby, I can’t go now. I’m in the middle of this.”

“Unbelievable!” she growled, as she marched out of the room into the blare of the music.

Jessica pushed her way through the crowd until she got to the front entrance. She walked past the hot dog stand that always seemed to appear outside every dance bar at 2am and proceeded to find Yonge Street. She dug into her purse to see if she had enough money to take a cab home when a black Honda Civic drove up beside her. “Do you need a ride?”

Looking up from her purse, she freaked when she saw who was behind the wheel. She ran around to the passenger’s seat and let herself in. After strapping on her seatbelt, she laid her head back on the seat and thanked her lucky stars she had a free ride home.

“Christopher, I cannot tell you how happy I am to see your face.”

He smiled and headed down the street towards the highway. “No, problem, Jess. I thought that pretty lady in red looked familiar.”

“What are you doing down here?” she asked, looking through her purse for her mirror to see if her makeup was still in tact. “You were the last person I would expect to see.”

“I had to get out of the house. When you’re used to having someone around and then the place is empty, it drives you nuts.”

“Well, I can’t say that I have ever felt that way.” She answered. “My date was a bust, again and if it keeps up this way, I’ll never know what it’s like to live with someone.”

“Why are you trying so hard, Jess?” Christopher asked, keeping his eye on the road.

“Well, unlike you, I have to try a little harder. There is a lot of competition out there. A woman can’t just throw herself at any guy she finds attractive. It’s easier for men to just go and talk to a woman without being labelled.”

“Do you think relationships are easy?” Christopher asked. “Try getting married. My advice to you is don’t rush it. When the…”

Jessica cut him off. “Yea, yea. I’ve heard it all before. When the right time comes, the man of your dreams will be there. I’m tired of hearing that crap. I want the whole story, Chris. I want the husband, the kids and the white picket fence and I don’t want to be too old to have it.”

Christopher drove Jessica the rest of the way home in silence. Before he dropped her off at the front lobby of her apartment building, he gave her a hug.

“You have nothing to worry about, Jess.” He said, pushing her thick curly hair back from her face. “You will have plenty of time to find the right guy. I’ll see what I can do, okay?”

She smiled, returned his warm hug and went into the building. What she needed was a lady’s night out and nothing like the lock-and-key party. She was thinking of a totally new atmosphere than the one she was used to and the next morning, she was going to give Roxanne a call.

Office Surprise

The next morning, Jessica couldn't contact Roxanne on the phone. Thursday night was a bust. She would have had more fun sitting in her pajamas, eating a bowl of popcorn and watching Ugly Betty.

She shuffled into the office building holding her large cup of Tetley tea in her left hand while her heavy black jacket lay draped over her right arm. The mornings were so cool and she never knew if it was going to warm up during the day, no matter what the forecast.

She nodded to her co-workers on the way to her desk. Surrounded by cubicles, she was glad she didn't have to sit directly in front of her boss' desk. Jessica was tired and a cup of tea before 8:30am really helped to ease her into her day.

She shoved her black leather tote into her bottom desk drawer and turned to put on her computer to check her emails. The beauty about coming in before nine is that she had the opportunity to prepare her day's work. While Jessica was writing out her to-do list, her boss paged her on the intercom. She looked at the time. 8:50am.

Damn, she thought, I haven't even started yet and he's calling me.

Jessica glared at the time again as if it was going to jump ahead ten minutes but she knew that he would keep paging her until she showed up in his office. She sighed heavily, grabbed her pen and notebook and headed around the corner.

"Good morning, Sir." She sang, as she sat in the seat before him. She tried to be pleasant, although he was impeding in her morning ritual. It took a lot of effort to be cheery. She wasn't a morning person but he unfortunately was. "What can I help you with?"

He took his time to answer as if he was choosing his words carefully. This sometimes made Jessica feel uncomfortable because she felt like he was starring her down. She always dressed well for work so he wouldn't comment on her office attire.

She pulled at her burgundy skirt until the hem touched the top of her knee and fixed her black cotton blouse so it covered her stomach. He always reminded her of Buck Rogers from the 21st Century. Jessica used to watch that show religiously when she was a kid. Mr. Jewel had brown hair and a solid build. He always had a smile on his face. Some women believed it was because his entire department consisted of women. Even now, he wore a smile. Mr. Buck Rogers, waiting for Tweedy to walk in with his coffee.

“That manual you were talking about last week.” He said, as if they were already engaged in conversation. “It’s a go and I want you on it.”

“Me?” she asked, sitting straight in her seat. It was too early to take on this project. “I’m swamped and I would hate to do a bad job on it.”

Mr. Jewel ran his hand through his thick hair. It would be hard to imagine him ever losing his hair. At 35, there was a while to go before that ever happened.

“You’ll do a great job. You know the branches more than anyone. You talk to the branch managers every day.” He leaned forward and folded his hands in front of him. “They have been complaining that they don’t have a reference to our procedures. Some managers have to call us all the time so you can put something together. It was your idea after all.”

“Isn’t that something the Marketing Department should be taking care of?”

“Actually, you’ll be doing it for the Marketing Department and if you do well, there might be something in it for you.”

Jessica didn’t know what that meant. It could mean anything. She should have been excited but she didn’t know how to react. She was too busy thinking about taking on more work, especially one so important. Jessica just sat there in silence looking at his charming smile and vibrant blue eyes, thinking if he ever had to work hard to get to Office Manager.

“Get a temp,” he said, as if reading her mind. “Call Human Resources and have them send someone.”

Jessica nodded and willed herself to stand. She had so much to plan. She walked back to her desk and sat down while she drank her lukewarm tea. The mail was already on her desk but she didn’t open it right away. Sitting protectively behind her cubicle, Bruce popped his head around the side. She opened her mouth to speak but he raised his hand.

“I was sent here to ask if there was anything you needed in the way of supplies for the manual.”

Jessica looked at him and all she could remember was attempting to unbutton his shirt while sitting on his couch after the Christmas party. What was she thinking? She shook the image out of her mind. “How do you know?”

“I got an email yesterday.”

“Why wasn’t I told until this morning?”

"I don't know." He answered. "Listen, just email me the list when you have the time, okay?" and he walked off.

Jessica couldn't take any more surprises. She had to start fresh and go to the bathroom to get herself together. She heard soft whispers before entering but they stopped just as she opened the door. She stood for a second looking at Angeline and Jodie who were standing in front of the sinks looking back at her. Angeline turned her head away and Jodie stood with her hands on her hips waiting for Jessica to do something.

"What's going on?" she asked, walking over to the sink. After some silence, she asked again. "I'm not leaving until you say something so we could be here all day."

Jessica didn't care if their conversation was private. These ladies worked in her department and if it was something work related, she wanted to know. She had it this morning.

"I'm being transferred out of the department." Angeline answered, as her eyes teared.

"Why?" Jessica asked, thinking about what Mr. Jewel said to her about an opportunity in the Marketing department. "Come to think of it, he was hinting about me going to another department too!"

"This is getting out of hand." Jodie said. "Angeline requested a transfer, I don't know how many months ago, and she's just upset because he actually signed the papers instead of begging her to stay."

Jessica looked over at Angeline. What a *drama* queen. If it wasn't for the meeting she had with him this morning, she would have believed there was more to it. "What did you expect? This isn't the fourth grade. This is a corporate office. If you request a transfer, Angeline, you're going to get it."

"That's before I realized he was the best one to work for." She explained, leaning against the stall door.

Jessica scoffed as she washed her hands. "Who told you *that*?"

Angeline didn't answer but looked over at Jodie. "Maybe he's trying to get rid of those women who don't kiss his butt." Jodie remarked.

"Now, what does that mean? I'm his Administrative Assistant and I have never had to do anything with his butt or anything else. I've only had to do my job and do it well." Jessica remarked, walking over to the air dryer and drying her hands. "Don't you two have anything better to do this morning? It's kind of early for a

morning break.”

Jodie turned to her. “You’re so pathetic, Jessica. You come to work early and stay a little later than anyone else in the office. It’s no wonder why people think the way they do.”

Jessica’s mouth shot open. “*What?* You have got to be out of your mind! Just because I take my job seriously and I actually do want to make it in this company, you’re making accusations? Why don’t you put *your* lazy rump to work instead of worrying about what your boss is doing. I noticed you’ve been here for eight years and you’re still a customer service representative whereas in the last four years, I’ve gone from the receptionist working out front to Mr. Jewel’s admin assistant.”

“Yes, you have.” She sneered. “And one wonders how that happened. Working long hours, right?” Jodie turned to Angeline and wagged her finger at her as if she was a schoolgirl. “You’ve got to get your head out of the clouds and figure out what you want to do at this company.” Then she turned and left.

“What a *freak!*” Jessica said. “Why do you put up with that? Is that why you wanted the transfer in the first place? Because of her?”

Angeline shook her head.

“There’s got to be something that Human Resources can do.” Jessica said.

“It doesn’t matter. I start at the Accounting Department on Monday. They were swamped and needed people. I get to use more of my skills and there’s room for advancement. I just got used to this place, you know? Sometimes it’s hard to leave where you feel most comfortable.”

Jessica watched as Angeline left the bathroom. She had a lot of work to do herself so she couldn’t stand around trying to figure out what just happened. What did Jodie mean about kissing his butt? Mr. Jewel was considered one of the best managers to work for? Well, in all the years that she worked for him, she must have missed something.

Jessica had to admit that he didn’t give you a hard time about coming in late or having to leave early, but he was a stickler to getting the job done on time and he hardly ever gave you a promotion or a raise. The only thing he had going for him was that he was single and cute and that doesn’t make for a good manager.

She stormed out of the bathroom and headed straight to her desk. She couldn’t concentrate right away. Her mind was too distracted. She gulped down the rest of her tea since it had cooled down while she was away and then turned to her

computer.

Jessica emailed Roxanne a message asking her to go out for a drink after work. She growled when Roxanne told her she was going out of town for the week. The only thing Jessica could do was immerse herself in her work, creating a to-do list for the temp tomorrow morning and putting the plans together for the Internal Branch Manual for the Marketing Dept. Jodie's words still bounced around her head. She couldn't help scanning her eyes over the room. Did they actually think something was going on with her and Mr. Jewel?

Unexpected Visitor

Human Resources contacted Jessica to notify her that a temp would come this morning. She came in early to ensure she had her to-do list ready and the desk set aside for the temp to use with the essentials.

As she completed the voicemail message on the temp's phone line, she was paged to go to the Marketing Dept. to speak with Mr. Evan Adelblue, Manager of the department.

She smoothed down her red knee length skirt and straightened her tan blouse so the matching nylon scarf hung over her left shoulder. It was a more mature look than she was used to but she wanted to make a good impression today.

When she arrived at Mr. Adelblue's office, she was surprised at how plain it was. With only the complimentary artwork on the walls, provided by the company, it was devoid of any family pictures. His desk was made with the customary maple wood and it had the standard office tools as anyone else in his office. Her boss had lavish art work displayed around his office, including a tall vase in the corner with fake flowers sticking out and a sculpture beside his computer desk.

Mr. Adelblue stood as she walked in and shook her hand before she took her seat. Jessica couldn't help smile at his warmth while she settled herself in. She was taken in by his blue eyes and how they stood out from under his light brown hair. There were only a few men at work that were noteworthy and he was one of them, as well as her boss. It was a shame to be in arms reach and not be able to do anything about it. Jessica wanted to be professional so she sat back and waited for him to speak.

"I know this may seem overwhelming, Ms. Saunders. " he started, "especially when you weren't told in a proper manner about the project. I apologize. The branches were getting frustrated about spending the extra time having to call our offices. This manual is required as soon as you can put it together. Mr. Jewel told me that you would be great for the job and you are up for a promotion. What kind of experience do you have?"

Jessica took a breath before answering. "I have years of experience working on the company newsletter, using desktop publishing and I know a lot of the material first hand that I don't even have to refer to my training notes. I've worked for this company for some time now, Mr. Adelblue. I feel very confident I am the best person for this project and I won't let you down."

The conversation lasted another twenty minutes and it seemed like an interview. Jessica was glad she was always dressed the part and since she had her back up already, she felt she was prepared for anything.

“You do well on this, Ms. Saunders, and we’ll be happy to have you on our team.” He said.

After their talk, she knew if she did a great job on the manual, she would be transferred to their dept. and she needed a change, especially if some of her co-workers believed there was something going on with her boss.

Jessica was on her way to the floor when Mr. Jewel stepped into the elevator. He wore a pair of pressed black business pants and the sleeves of his white shirt was rolled up to his elbows. His forearms were lean which made her wonder just how lean the rest of his body was.

“How’s the project?” he asked.

“Fine.” She answered, licking her lips as her eyes roamed over him. It was sinful to have an employer this good looking and be totally hands off. “I’m meeting the temp this morning.”

He nodded and looked at the lights flashing each level going up. The door opened and he motioned for Jessica to leave first. She thanked him and walked back to her desk. She didn’t realize she was holding her breath until she got back.

She sat down. What was wrong with her? The stories circulating were making her nervous. The best thing she could do is work towards making this a great manual and she would leave the dept.

Shortly after she arrived at her desk, the receptionist called her to let her know that someone was waiting for her up front. She was eager to meet her apprentice. Come hell or high water, she was going to wean this woman in the job so she can comfortably move out of the role. Jessica was sure she was going to land this new position and nothing was going to interfere.

She walked down the hall with her full frame extended, showing confidence and experience. She turned the corner and stopped in her tracks. Quickly, she reeled back and fell against the wall hoping she wasn’t spotted. That wasn’t the temp!

Jessica calmed her breathing and forced herself to move. She inched backwards and slowly headed back to her dept. The last thing she expected was a bitter distraction.

The last thing she wanted was her ex-boyfriend showing up at her work. It had been one year since their break up and she thought he had disappeared. How was she going to get rid of him this time?

That's What Friends Are For

"Markel Mcphee," she said, under her breath. "If he's here, he needs money."

Jessica called the receptionist from her desk and told her she is preparing the last of the assignments for the temp. In the meantime, she can't see anyone else right now. She wanted to add that if the gentleman gave her trouble, she should call security but she held her tongue.

She had nothing else to prepare since she had double checked her work but she soon received a page from the receptionist. She felt like a kid again when she asked if the gentleman was still there for her. The receptionist confirmed he left and the temp was on her way to see her.

She was dating Markel for two years before she found out he had two other girlfriends on the side. She blamed herself for working too many hours when she first got her administration job but he could have told her. She hated finding out on her own, like most women do. She had called him on his cell and he answered with another woman's name.

Jessica met the temp at her desk and shook her hand to introduce herself. She showed her to the desk Jessica set up for her where she would be working until the project is over.

She was glad that Shelby was dressed in office attire, a long, simple navy blue skirt and tan blouse. The last temp they had in the office looked like a 70's throwback with long straight hair tied back with a headband and checkered, bell bottom pants.

"You can make yourself at home here," Jessica said, showing her the desk and checking to see if she had the essentials.

She quickly went over the details of the office on how to dress, where the bathrooms are, etc..

"Do you want me to just start going over things or do you want to settle in?" Jessica asked.

"Oh, just go right ahead." She answered, placing her purse on the desk and sitting down to receive instructions.

Jessica went over the project she was undertaking and she needed Shelby to take over her administrative duties while she completed it. Although she didn't know this woman, she felt very comfortable with her off the bat. She seemed nice and easy to talk to. Jessica didn't mind delegating but sometimes she felt she was being judged on what

she wanted the person to do. Shelby made her feel as if she was doing her job properly.

“You can page me at any time in case you need help with anything.” Jessica said. “Just to let you know that your best bet is to ask me for help instead of the rest of the girls. It’s only because I wouldn’t want to see you screw up because you were given the wrong advice.”

Shelby was taken aback but she agreed to come to only Jessica if she needed problems.

“Let me introduce you to my boss, Shelby.” Jessica led her to Mr. Jewel’s office and checked to see if he wasn’t busy.

He was sitting at his desk looking over some written material and not once glancing up to see if there may be anyone at the door. Jessica hated to interrupt him but she didn’t want him to freak out when he noticed a stranger in his office. Mr. Jewel did not like surprises.

She cleared her throat and when he looked up she waved at him. “Sir, I just wanted to introduce you to our temp, Mrs. Strole. She’ll be handling things for me while I work on the project. If there is anything you need, can you direct your inquiries to Shelby for the next few weeks.”

He watched them quietly from his seat until Jessica finished.

“Thank you, Jessica.” He responded. “I would like a word with Mrs. Stroud. If you may come in, please?”

Jessica ushered her in and closed the door behind them. She walked back to her desk and threw herself into her work. His face kept coming into view while she was talking to Shelby and it was distracting. She had plans with Christophe and Roxanne tonight and she was definitely going to talk to them about her ex-boyfriend.

“*What if he is at my apartment?*” She thought. She had to block it out or she wasn’t going to do a good job.

The rest of the day went uneventful. Shelby was a pro at her job and only asked questions about the photocopy room and the facilities in the office. Jessica felt slightly jealous of the rapport between her boss and Shelby. They just seemed to hit it off immediately, making Jessica all the more anxious to leave the department. It was her time to move on but she was glad Mr. Jewel gave her the opportunity to concentrate on this project.

The end of the day couldn't come any sooner when she checked the clock to notice it was ten minutes after five. She organized her desk, writing out a to-do list for tomorrow morning.

Shelby stood over her desk. "Well, I'm out of here. Mr. Jewel said that you can sign my form for me. It has to be signed daily and, if you don't mind, I am going to need to fax it into the office at the end of the week so I'll have to use the company fax machine."

"Sure, no problem. I used to temp way back when so I know all about it." Jessica signed the space Jessica filled out for Monday and handed it back. "I'm on my way out as well."

"Do you need a ride?" Shelby asked. "I don't have to run home quickly. My husband's a very patient man."

Jessica hesitated. She felt uncomfortable with people doing things for her. It took her almost a full night of prepping herself up to be able to allow a temp to do her job for her while she worked on something else.

"I don't want to trouble you, really. I'm not even going straight home." She answered.

"Listen, the guy I met in the lobby insisted that he see you but the receptionist told him to take a hike." She said, out of the blue. "I heard him say that he didn't want to leave a message because he'll meet up with you later."

Jessica must have had a horrified look on her face because Shelby added, "Don't worry, I can come to your apartment, if you like. Two people are better than one."

"That won't be necessary, Shelby. Thank you but I will take that ride, if you're still offering."

Shelby nodded and they both left the office. They drove downtown towards Kelsey's and on the way, Jessica asked Shelby if she wanted to join them for dinner but she politely declined.

Shelby dropped Jessica off at the front doors and sped away in her misty blue, Chevrolet Aveo. She watched as her car merged with the traffic and thought how cool it was going to be to work with her.

"Who dropped you off?" Christopher asked from behind Jessica, starting her into reality. "I could have come and picked you up if I thought you needed a ride."

"It was the temp." she responded, holding her chest from fright. "She's so nice, Christopher. It's better than some of those back stabbers at work."

“Oh, so now they’re back stabbers?” he asked, grabbing her hand and leading her into the restaurant. “Come. Roxanne must be waiting inside. She is always early for everything.”

They walked to the table and sure enough, Roxanne was fixing her make up at the table waiting for them. “He’s a workaholic.”

Christopher and Jessica look at each other before taking a seat across from Roxanne. “Who?” they asked in unison.

“Peter, of course.” She answered. “While on my trip, I realized, without a shadow of a doubt, he’s a workaholic and I am doomed to never get married.”

“Honey, you’re going to just have to talk to him.” Jessica suggested. “Break him out of his habit and show him there is more important things than working all the time.”

“He’s so ambitious.” She said. “It’s going to be difficult.”

“Never mind, difficult.” Jessica remarked. “Guess who showed up at work today and guess who may be hanging around my apartment tonight?”

The dinner crowd was just filing in so the dining room was still pretty quiet. When no one responded to her statement, Jessica answered her own question. “Markel.”

“Are you kidding me?” Roxanne asked. “Didn’t you leave that loser almost a year ago?”

“What does he want?” Christopher asked, skimming over the menu. “I’ll take care of him, if you want me to.”

Jessica appreciated her friends. They were always there for her and wished they had just as good a friend to set her up, but no such luck. All of their other friends were married and not even their married couples had time to seek out any of the singles left.

“I asked the receptionist I wasn’t seeing anyone. It was the temp who told me what he was up to.”

“Oh, the temp who dropped you off?” Christopher asked. “The one you met today? Why’s she being so nice?”

“Maybe she is hoping to get your old job?” Roxanne suggested. “You know how temps are. They want to try to squeeze their way into any positions available in the company. Be careful she doesn’t bump you out of the way.”

Jessica was surprised by their reaction. “We’re not talking about the temp here. We’re talking about my ex-boyfriend, remember? In time, I’ll figure out her motive but he’s

going to be a problem. Christopher, I will take up your offer in bringing me home. If he is waiting at my apartment, I'm going to freak."

"Tell me you changed your locks." Roxanne said, flagging down a waitress.

"Of course, I did." Jessica replied. "You think I'm nuts? I just don't want him bothering me. This project is really important and I don't want to mess things up with him on my mind."

The waitress arrived with some water for each of them and took their orders before she left the table.

"Roxanne, Peter has always been ambitious." Jessica said, after drinking down some water. "So were you, remember? After you graduated from college, I could never get a hold of you. You were so eager to get a good job that you never had time for any of us."

"I'm just tired of waiting." She grumbled. "Sometimes I don't think he'll ever be ready."

Jessica noticed that Christopher grew quiet. She looked over at him but he was surveying the dessert menu.

"You'll just have to deal with it, Rox. In the meantime, how was your trip outta town?"

The rest of the evening was spent talking about work trips, traffic, transit and the weekend. Christopher and Jessica walked Roxanne to her car before heading out themselves to take Jessica home. They were tired after the long day so the time taken to Jessica's place was filled with the music from Chum FM.

Jessica was anxious when they got to her apartment. He wasn't lingering around the lobby and when they reached the 6th floor, he wasn't in the hallway either.

"You know, Jessica, it's ten thirty. Even if he did drop by, he wouldn't be here still." Christopher reassured her, giving her a friendly hug in front of her apartment door.

Jessica took out her keys and handed them to him. "Just in case," she said, looking around and ushering Christopher to open the door.

He shook his head and searched for her door key among the many keys and paraphernalia hanging from the keychain. Although he thought that maybe Jessica was a little overboard, he slowly opened the door and switched on the light before entering the apartment. He checked the living room before Jessica came in.

Jessica closed the door behind her and waited in the room until he checked the bedroom, bathroom and the kitchen. "Thank you," she said, as he finished inspecting the kitchen. "Can I make you a coffee?"

“Sure,” he replied. “I’m not in a rush to go home to my lonely apartment.”

Jessica smiled as she plugged in the kettle and then pulled out two mugs. She put a little sugar in each and then turned to face him. “You got pretty quiet when Roxanne was talking about Peter. Are you okay?”

“You know what?” he asked, sitting down at the small, white kitchen table. “I’m fine. What we had was in college and she obviously moved on.”

“Well, yea.” Jessica sneered. “She was able to just talk about him without any hesitation. She really wants to get married and it’s funny because I thought I would be desperate for it, but you know, I’m starting to appreciate my freedom.”

Jessica unplugged the kettle, poured two cups of coffee and went into the fridge to grab some cream. She poured a little in each cup and brought the mugs to the table. “I think he’s too preoccupied with work.”

“I think he’s an idiot. He’s got a great girl and, like usual, he’s taking advantage but I warned her.”

“Oh, you warned her by getting married to that cheerleader.” Jessica said, laughing when he blushed by her comment. “Christopher, don’t worry about it. She’ll figure it out. She always does. I’m not going to say they’re meant for each other because I think they’re too alike. She’s scared that he’s a workaholic because she can be one too. I think he loves her because this way, he doesn’t have to spend too much time with her. It’s perfect because he can concentrate on other things. Now, she’s getting older and her mind is wandering to other important things besides work.”

Christopher sipped at his coffee and watched the animated way Jessica was explaining the relationship.

“Once I suggested they go on a vacation and you should have seen the look on her face. I don’t know if it was because of the vacation or if it was because of the time they would be forced to spend together. I don’t think they have had one weekend away since they moved in together, and they live together for goodness sake.”

“It was a bad idea to move in.” he commented. “It’s never going to work.”

“Are you sure you’re okay with them, Christopher?” Jessica asked. “The group thought were two were going to hook up.”

“Jessica, if anything was going to happen, nothing would have stood in our way. She was determined to pursue the guy regardless of any of our advice. She’s got what she deserves and now she has to work hard at keeping it together.”

“Well, I can’t knock her for trying. I’m glad that you’re doing alright, though. How’s your ex?”

“Don’t go there with the ex’s. If buddy shows up, just give me a call and I’ll be right here in a second to punch his lights out.”

They sat in silence for a moment, sipping their coffee and smiling at each other.

“What?” Jessica asked, feeling surprisingly awkward sitting in front of Christopher. They were friends since their college days and she had never felt anything but friendly and relaxed with him.

“I better be going,” Christopher spoke, pushing his coffee aside. “It’s getting late.”

“You’re right,” she agreed, pushing her own coffee mug away and standing up. He stood shortly afterwards and went to the sink to dump his coffee. She followed him to the front door but before he left, he turned to give her a warm hug. “I’m glad you came, Christopher. You’re the greatest.”

They held each other in the silence of the apartment. He pulled away from her but kept his arms wrapped around. Looking down at her, he shook his head.

“What is it?” she asked, getting annoyed by his reactions. “Are you making fun of me?”

“No”, he said, smiling. “I can’t believe you’re single.”

“Well, you just go ahead and tell the male population that they’re insane. I’m a perfect catch. I’m funny, I don’t give guys a hard time, I have a lot of energy, the list goes on.”

Suddenly, Christopher kissed her.

If I Could Turn Back Time

Jessica took a second to push Christopher away as it wasn't easy. His soft lips were inviting but she felt like she was betraying her friend in some way. "Are you crazy?"

"Didn't you enjoy it?"

She released a breath and backed away from him. "That's not the point. The only reason you kissed me is because you wish you were kissing Roxanne. You're lucky I'm your friend but I don't feel like such a friend right now."

"Why? You've been nothing but straight forward with me. Besides, she confirmed it tonight that she is in love with Peter so I have to move on."

"Move on to me? Is that it?"

"No, Jessica." Christopher moved closer to her but she refused his advances. "I'm not going to break up anything between them. She'll have to make the move. You saw her tonight, you heard her. She has no intention of looking back. She has moved on. Am I to wait like a dog on the side of the road until she glances my way?"

"I should slap both of you to wake you up. I could only wish for someone to feel as you two feel about each other and you're playing games. Sometimes I can't stand the both of you. You'll have to let it go or come to grips with this but I won't be used as a go between. I like you, Christopher, but I can't have you like this. You don't understand how I need you to be sure about this and how you are feeling. I know how I feel. Talk to her and don't do that again unless you mean it."

"I have talked to her several times and it eats my heart out that she can just look at me and talk about him as if he was her everything. Jess, we were all very close in college and sometimes you just don't know how you feel about someone when we all cared about each other." Christopher reached for the door. "I'm sorry. I don't want to hurt you."

Jessica knew he told the truth but she let him leave. She had her own problems to deal with and didn't want to get involved in his mess. Yes, they all cared about each other but she wasn't very social in school and was lucky to have been in a group at all. She always felt that some morning she was going to wake up, get to school and they would all turn on her and tell her to stop following them around. Christopher had been unattainable so she never gave it a second thought. When Jessica turned him down, she was surprised but lost hope when he married that cheerleader. She had to put it out of her mind until this whole situation unraveled.

The next morning, Jessica was ready and alert for work. She decided she was going to talk to Roxanne because she wasn't going to let a good man go to waste. She knew that Christopher was only acting on the sexual tension he felt for her friend but if Roxanne had really moved on then she was going to move in on him. After all, the best relationships start from friendship and his kiss still left an impression on her lips.

When she opened her door to her apartment, she froze as Markel was standing in the threshold barring her way. Her mischievous grin turned into scowl. "What are you doing here? I have to go to work. If you need money, I'm not an ATM machine."

"What's with the attitude?" he asked, backing off. "I have a job."

Jessica scanned his attire. He didn't look like he had a job, a respectable one anyway. Dressed in a pair of Levis straight cut jeans, black shoes and a Blue Jays T-shirt, he looked like he was going to hang out at the mall.

"So get to it," Jessica said, leaning in on him as she pulled her apartment door closed and locked. She could feel his body pressed against her as she fumbled to put her keys in her purse. "Leave me alone."

They walked together down the short corridor to the elevator.

"Baby, don't be like that." She stood in silence, pressing the up button over and over in hopes of having it arrive faster. "Who were you with last night?"

She turned to face him. "You're stalking me now? It's none of your business who I'm with." Jessica turned to the elevator buttons and started pressing the up button again. "You cheated on me, remember?"

Markel stood beside her pursing his lips and teetering on his heels. Jessica knew he wanted to say something more. It was her own fault, dating a younger man. She thought it would be thrilling to see what it would be like but when she found out he was doing half the city, that joy slowly dissipated. He was four years younger, attractive, in a Keanu Reeves sort of way, but he was never going to be serious about life. She needed a solid man, not a master player in the game.

He stopped teetering. "Give me a second chance."

Jessica was glad when the elevator came and she dashed inside to delay the confrontation. He followed in pursuit and stood beside her knowing she would eventually have to say something. Since they were alone, he pressed all the buttons from five to the ground floor.

"What are you doing?" she growled. "You'll make me late for work."

"Yea. You care about that stupid job more than you cared about me."

Jessica turned to face him. He stood only slightly taller than her so looking into his brown eyes was not difficult. The elevator hummed downwards. "I have an opportunity to advance at my stupid job which is more than I could say about the status you placed me in your life. What are you doing here anyway? I'm older than you. You can have any woman you want and you probably have so why are you here? I may be a fine woman but I am in another league. Just go find yourself a stick thin blonde and leave me be."

She turned away from him and couldn't believe she was going through this. Both Christopher and Markel, within 24 hours, were making her feel as if she was an ugly duckling. She believed in herself and forced herself to show as much confidence as she built up over the years. When men who can easily get someone better looking or more intelligent came to her door, she felt like they were making a fool of her. She wasn't going to let herself get hurt again.

The elevator opened at the fourth floor, paused and closed again. Jessica shook her head. She thought of Christopher and wanted to believe his words were genuine. She didn't want Markel to enter the picture right now and blow it for her. Should she wait until he got his head straight with Roxanne? Should she talk to her?

Her thoughts were interrupted by Markel's high voice. "Can't a man regret what he lost and realize he can't do without someone?"

"You're unbelievable! A man would but you're not there yet, Markel. Why don't you just do what you were meant to do and sleep with the rest of the women in the city?" She remarked, listening to the slow hum of the elevator and feeling anxious about getting to the ground floor.

Markel went quiet. The elevator was quiet as well and all Jessica could hear was his breathing. From the third floor, to the second floor until the doors closed to approach the first, his breathing was the only sound in the room besides her own. She didn't realize his silence would make her feel uncomfortable. When the doors slid open on the ground floor, she was just happy to get out.

"I'm unbelievable? Do you think I am such a jerk to care about the way you look?" he asked, "You're the jerk. Have a good day, Jess."

But Jessica wouldn't let him leave. She was only thinking of herself when she stopped him. She couldn't go to work in a bad mood, not when everything was riding on her promotion. "Hey, wait a minute. I didn't mean it that way. You just don't know what you want right now and I don't want to be caught up in the cross fire, you know what I mean?"

"You're just saying that because you don't want to be late for work," he said.

"Listen to me, Markel, I don't have feelings for you." She said. "but I don't want to see you get hurt. This working the city isn't good for your health and only a friend would tell you that. I had a rough night last night and I jumped the gun this morning. I'm sorry I let my past feelings for you make me act like a jerk. Please give me a ride to work and I'll make it up to you."

Markel didn't see that coming when she weaseled her way in to ask for a ride. "Come on." She begged, pulling on his T-shirt. "I'll never make the bus now and this is really important to me. This is your fault. Besides, we can talk on the way and I'll buy you a coffee."

"You're incredible", he said while Jessica pushed him towards the lobby doors.

On the ride into work, Jessica thanked Markel and promised to give him a call. She was going to make it up to him for the way she acted. Was this new job making her insensitive? He did cheat on her so why did she feel guilty?

Jessica had also picked up a coffee for Shelby and a tea for herself. Shelby was already at her desk so she placed the hot drink in front of her.

"Oh, you're a life saver," she said, smiling up at Jessica. "I feel uncomfortable coming into work the first week with a coffee, being a temp and all."

"Don't worry, Shelby. If all this works out, you'll be a permanent fixture in this department."

Shelby was dressed a little more casual with a light pink sweater and black pants. Jessica was glad that she still outshone her in a violet dress slightly tapered at the waist. Although Shelby was slightly taller and much thinner than Jessica, her confident stature made her more sophisticated. Not that she wanted to be above Shelby, on the contrary, she thought they could be friends. She remembered what it was like to start as a temp. She started with Provincial Management Services as a temp in the role of receptionist in the front lobby downstairs but soon became permanent as the Administrative Assistant in this department.

Jessica left Shelby to take on the day's tasks but from the moment Jessica started her day, Christopher and Roxanne were on her mind and she couldn't shake it. Markel's visit this morning made her realize that you can't let important moments slip from your fingers. He had taken a big chance to come back and confront her so she should have the courage to confront her feelings as well.

Christopher had never been invited to Roxanne's New Year's Eve party because they both thought he was still married. Now that he wasn't, it was like a light sparked in them again. Maybe Christopher was right and Roxanne had moved on. She was so concerned with her relationship with Peter that she barely talked about Christopher at all. Besides, why would she need permission? They were all adults. Jessica was in a serious relationship and she was living with her boyfriend. Christopher was single. She was single, so why not? He kissed *her*. Not the other way around.

Jessica pushed her thick, brown hair back from her face. She wore it out today because Christopher made her feel special last night. She licked her lips and imagined his there again. She willed herself to concentrate and go over her work timetable. She had contacted the printers and was given a date on when she would receive the promotional binders for the 52 branches in Canada. In the next two weeks, she would have finished the draft and hopefully be given the go ahead to proceed towards the final copy.

Thoughts of her single life seeped back into her work plans. She was twenty-nine and her birthday was in eight months. She will not be able to get married within that time and it would probably go downhill from there. She wasn't even engaged and that was depressing. Roxanne had been pissed off that Christopher broke communication with the gang but she had been too. She missed him.

Jessica just had to be careful since she had so much going on. Her ex-boyfriend was back in town, her recent project was overwhelming, she was desperate for a relationship and her emerging feelings for her friend Chris was the final episode in her personal drama. He made her feel like home and she was beginning to agree with him. Roxanne had moved on and it was time for everyone else to move on as well. If Christopher was interested then she'll give him a chance. She didn't need Roxanne's approval. Peter was the only person on her mind right now and interference may blow her friend's chances on getting married.

Jessica sighed deeply, took a sip of her Earl Grey tea and opened her agenda. She wanted Mr. Adelblue to be proud of her so she pushed her personal thoughts aside and concentrated on her work at hand.

Too close For Comfort

Several more weeks went by and after working on the minor details of the binder, Jessica had sent the final draft to the printers and was eagerly awaiting the shipment. The position was in the bag. Mr. Adelblue practically told her that when he saw the first copy made from the final draft. He had commented on how professional it was and better than he expected. Shelby had helped her a lot on keeping her focused and organized so to pay her back, she had requested her old position be taken over by her.

Tomorrow night would be cause to celebrate once the shipment came in. She was on her way to visit Roxanne. She hadn't heard from Christopher, who appeared to have been avoiding her. Jessica decided that she had to take care of this problem herself.

Roxanne opened the door dressed in her track pants and her hair in a ponytail. The only time she was dressed like that was when she locked herself away in her apartment and didn't go out, which didn't happen very often. Her friend was an outgoing person who rarely stayed in the apartment.

"Were you home from work today?" Jessica asked, walking in.

"I decided to take the day off." She replied.

"Since when?" Jessica asked, falling onto the plush baby blue couch. "You used to have a heart attack when you had to take time off."

Roxanne came out of the kitchen with two Tia Maria's and ice and handed one glass to Jessica. "I think I've made headway with Peter."

"Great." Jessica said, sipping her drink. "This is going to make things a lot easier."

"What easier?" Roxanne asked, laying back on the couch.

"Well, I didn't want to tell you before but several weeks ago, Christopher kissed me." Jessica said, taking another sip of her drink. "Of course I pushed him away but I told him he has to speak to you about any feelings that may still be between the two of you because I didn't want to get involved in anything. Well, I haven't heard from him but before I

go knocking on his door, I want to make sure everything is okay. Now that you tell me you've made headway with Peter, this solves everything."

Roxanne placed her drink on the coffee table and stood up. "I don't see how it solves anything."

"I don't know what you mean." Her friend replied, downing the rest of her drink. "It's obvious you love Peter, so why are you playing games with everyone?"

"I'm not playing games. I'm just surprised that the two of you could hook up?"

"Why? Because I'm not as thin as you or as pretty?" Jessica asked.

"Of course not. I just didn't think you were his type."

Jessica closed her eyes for a moment and took a breath. "Roxanne, I have been your friend since college and granted I was not in the "in crowd", I thought we had gotten to be really good friends. I have seen you with Christopher and wondered why you never had the courage to pursue him when it was obvious you two were stuck on each other. Your relationship wasn't my business since you made that perfectly clear upon graduation, but I am not going to sit by right now and let you play games with me. When you decide to figure out what your problem is and why you're doing this, kindly let me know."

Roxanne watched as her friend grabbed her purse and stomped out the door. She honestly didn't know what to do but there was only one person that could clarify any doubts for her. She picked up the phone and dialed Christopher's number. "I'm coming over." She said and then hung up before he had anything to say. Roxanne reached for her car keys hanging on the peg beside the coat closet and grabbed her coat.

Her long time friend had dinner on the table when Roxanne knocked on the door. He had been cooking when she had called and the urgency in her voice told him that whatever she wanted to talk about was going to be important. He couldn't discuss crucial matters on an empty stomach.

He opened the door and Roxanne rushed inside, pacing back and forth. When she saw the meal of steak, potatoes and mixed vegetables on the

table and the setting placed for two, her mouth watered. She didn't have supper and before their fight, she was going to suggest to Jessica that they go out to dinner.

"You better eat first." Christopher suggested. "You know your brain gets scattered if you don't have anything in your stomach. I know mine does. Please, sit down. You look frazzled."

He took her coat and purse and urged her to sit at the table. Roxanne took his advice and sat down to the delicious meal. She was famished and this would give her time to collect her thoughts. She dove into the potatoes before Christopher took his seat.

When Christopher sat in the chair across from her and started eating, Roxanne looked over at him. He had filled out a little from his too thin frame in college. His muscular body complimented the sweater and trousers he was wearing, which was so much different than the jeans he always wore. He was home to make and eat dinner, whereas Peter was always at work.

She shook the thought out of her head. "Why did you kiss Jessica?"

"Oh, she told you, did she?" he asked, seeming a little surprised.

"Of course, she did. She tells me everything." She answered, playing with the carrots on her plate. "We had a fight tonight. It was about you. It was about us."

"I thought there was no us." He said, concentrating on his meal. He did not look up at her until she answered. He didn't want to look into her eyes to see the answer he thought he already knew.

"It's complicated. You shouldn't have kissed her."

"I don't think you're at liberty to say who I kiss." He said. "What's so complicated anyway? You made it perfectly clear at the restaurant that you had every intention to marry Peter. Move on with your life, Roxanne, or make up your damn mind because you're driving all of us crazy."

"Do you love her?" she asked, pushing back her plate. "Or are you trying to make sure I've made the right decision?"

“Why is it always about you?” he asked, getting up from the table. “You seem to be the only person who’s happy, right? You keep pushing it in everyone’s face so why are you here? To make sure I don’t have feelings for Jessica or to see if I do?”

“Peter and I have so much history. I can’t just let it go.” She said.

“So do we, Roxie, but you made your choice years ago and guess what? You’re still with Peter. Is that it, perhaps? I’m divorced now so since I’m once again accessible you came to see if I still cared about you? What if I did? What if I just kissed Jessica because I wanted it to be you? Would that change anything?”

“You can’t play with our friendship, Chris.” Roxanne said. “We’ve all been friends for too long.”

“So that’s it then? Friends?” he asked, walking towards her. Christopher grabbed her arms and pulled her towards him. He could smell the light aroma of her musky perfume as he brushed his lips lightly over hers. “What would you do if I kissed you now?”

Her heart raced. She fell into the pools of his eyes and didn’t want to come up for air. His lips had been inviting but he didn’t pursue. They stood for a moment, leaning a hairsbreadth away from each other.

Christopher soon let go. “I will not play around with another man’s girlfriend. You shouldn’t be here, Roxanne. You should leave.” He turned away from her and started clearing the table.

When she knew he was ignoring her, she took her coat and her purse and left his apartment.

Down Another Dating Road

Jessica was pissed that she was in the middle of a love tug between her two friends Christopher and Roxanne and she was blind if she thought he was actually interested in her.

The only thing that put a smile on her face was her new desk in the Marketing Department and her new position as Marketing Assistant. Jealous women in her old department thought it to be a glorified admin job but she had her own admin at her disposal. She was to assist the Marketing Managers and to ensure full communication between their clients, branches and staff. The marketing manual was only the first step. She was to update it as required and she was excited about doing something different. Jessica was glad that she had something else to concentrate on besides her friends.

Her conversation with Roxanne had her so upset that the night before she went out and bought a new outfit for work and wore it on her first day. Jessica wore a cream cotton and linen blazer with a white tank underneath so the v-neck showed a little lace and a matching cotton and linen pencil skirt. She splurged a little and also bought herself a snake-print pleather handbag and patent-leather cream and brown sandals to finish the ensemble.

Jessica already had her voicemail box set up and her email account so she was ready to throw herself into her work. Her to-do-list soon became full and she went about fulfilling email and phone requests until before she knew it, it was 12:15pm. She grabbed her handbag and went to pick up Shelby for lunch.

“Hey, how are ya?” Jessica asked, catching Shelby at the elevator. “Where do you want to go for lunch?”

“How about the salad bar?” she answered, pulling down her sweater past her waist. She always reminded Jessica of those girls on the prairies with the long skirts and long sleeve, high necked blouses. She dressed so conservative but never felt self conscious. Good for her but if Jessica ever wore an outfit like that, she would suffocate.

“Why *again*?” she asked. “You don’t need to lose weight unless you’re suggesting that I do.”

Shelby smiled and shook her head. “I love the variety.”

“Fine.” She said, following her off the elevator and through the underground walkway to the salad bar.

They grabbed their white Styrofoam containers and proceeded to pick at the variety of vegetables, finger foods and fruits. After paying at the cash, Jessica and Shelby went to find themselves a seat at the table.

Jessica sighed heavily when she sat down and shook her head at the food. Then she played with a piece of broccoli before eating it.

“What’s the matter with you?” Shelby asked, opening her can of ginger ale. “You didn’t like your first day?”

“No, that’s not it. I was so stupid to believe that you should ever fall for your friends and dumb enough to think it was over between Roxanne and Christopher.”

“Oh, them again.” Shelby remarked, rolling her eyes. “Just because you’ve known each other for a long time doesn’t mean you have to stay friends you know.”

“But they’re my best friends.”

“Some best friends. From a spectator’s point of view, they seem to push you around.”

“No. I don’t agree.” Jessica said. “It’s not like that.”

“Okay, what happened to put you in this pissy mood?” Shelby asked.

“I crossed signals with Christopher and Roxanne, that’s all. I thought he liked me and thought she was over him. If anything, I guess I’m so desperate for companionship that I’m not paying attention to my friends.” Jessica explained.

“Is that how you sum it up?” Shelby asked. “I don’t know you very well but you seem to be a good communicator and pretty intelligent. I don’t think you’ve got your signals crossed at all. I think they’re playing you. They are so wrapped up in their problems that you’re getting in the way. Doesn’t your friend Roxanne have a boyfriend?”

“Yes.”

“Well, what’s up with that?” she asked. “She should try to figure out what’s going through her head or else as far as I’m concerned, she’s cheating.”

Jessica smiled. “You’re just saying that because you’re married, Shelby. She’ll never cheat on her boyfriend. She’s too good for that.”

Shelby leaned in close to Jessica and said, "Listen, I never told you how I met my husband. When anyone asks, I just say we met at Tim Horton's over a coffee but we really met on Plenty Of fish dot com.

Jessica laughed. "I wouldn't have pegged you for an internet dater."

A soft rose color blushed Shelby's cheeks but she continued. "In any case, I think you should give it a try. It's free and you can put a picture up with a profile and after a few days, I'm sure you'll get a lot of messages."

"I don't know." Jessica said, shaking her head and biting her bottom lip. "How safe is it?"

"Is anything safe?" She asked. "If you met any one of these guys here, would you know just as much about them as reading a profile? No. So just do it. It'll be fun and you don't even have to dress up for the evening. Just sit at your computer with your pajamas and a glass of wine and you're all set. Believe me, you'll feel better and who knows. By the end of the month, you'll probably have lots of men waiting to go out with you. Forget about Christopher. He'll never come around and you'll be left with a broken heart."

For the rest of the week, Shelby's suggestion was gnawing at her brain. She had to admit that she took a peak at the website a couple of times but was too chicken to do anything. She still couldn't believe that was where Shelby had met her husband but they have been married for eight years and going strong. She said that it was the best thing she could have done so Jessica was going to bite her tongue and go for it. It couldn't any different from the dating service she tried and failed at.

Saturday night after cleaning up and washing the dishes from her lonely supper, she poured herself a glass of white wine and sat at her computer. She had to figure out a username so she chose LonelyLady29 and filled out her stats, including age, height, hair and eye color. She didn't want to include a picture no matter how much more answers to her profile she would receive. She always had a fear that someone would cut it out and post it somewhere else. With her luck, some porn site and she would never know it. Anyway, after one hour and three drinks later, she started to have fun and at 10pm on a Saturday night it appeared that many people were lonely.

Just sitting at her computer, she received twelve responses and two wanted to instant message her but Jessica was too nervous. By midnight, she had received over thirty emails and she was having fun. She couldn't even pull herself away from the computer to get a refill on her fourth glass of wine. Jessica replied to emails and after seeing a picture from Cowboyintoronto, she decided to respond and agree to meet him for drinks on Tuesday after work. He was Caucasian, in his early thirties, with short black hair, brown eyes, five foot eleven and a non smoker. He enjoyed the outdoors, had a job, a car and was looking for a long-term relationship – or so he said.

Before she logged off for the evening at 2am, she received a request for an instant message from a user named Knighthawk. Jessica was relaxed from the wine and the hours of using the dating site that she didn't hesitate to accept the invitation to join him in the chat room.

Late, isn't it?

Jessica typed back. *For a Saturday night, not really but you caught me just getting off the site. I think I'll go do something else for awhile.*

What could you possibly do at this hour?

She thought for a moment. She could tell him anything and he would never know. She felt kind of weird being dishonest however. What if she said something and later forgot what it was?

I might read a book or watch a movie. She typed.

For how long?

I'm not sure.

Why don't you stay here with me instead?

Jessica smiled at the question. She wanted to respond but only knew that he will continue to ask her more questions and she had grown tired of the site for tonight. She needed to say something that would get her off or she could just ignore him.

Are you there?

Or she could turn off her computer.

I'm here. I was just thinking about what I should do. Jessica typed, biting her lip and waiting for his response.

Stay and answer me this. How long have you been on this site and what are you looking for?

Jessica sighed. That was the most typical question she had been asked all night. She thought that she would get something better than that. He seemed interesting and he had pulled her back to the computer after wanting to log off.

Listen, I have to go. She typed back. *I'm getting a little tired after all.*

What are you wearing?

She was taken aback by the question and wondered why he would ask. She would imagine that most people would be in their pajamas by this time in the morning. But she felt compelled to answer him.

I'm wearing a two piece red silk pajamas. She typed.

And underneath?

Jessica opened her mouth in surprise. Was he kidding? She was wearing black Fruit of the Loom cotton underwear, but she answered him anyway.

Black lace panties.

Her heart began to beat as she sat in front of her computer waiting for his response. Did he believe her? Did it matter? Her fingers hovered over the keyboard ready to type a reply to his next question but nothing happened. Jessica was getting worried. Did she say the wrong thing? Should she have answered at all? She had to add something.

And no bra, she typed and hit the enter key. "Ugh", she thought. "And no bra?" What kind of a stupid thing was that?

That's a sight to see, Lonelylady29. I will undress you with my eyes.

I have to go. She said, her fingers shaking on the keys as she typed out the letters.

See you in Cyber space, my lady.

Yea, see you around.

Jessica logged off the dating site and turned off her computer. What was she doing saying that? She blew it off as too much wine and turned her thoughts to her date on Tuesday night with the cowboy. His name was Tony and he was taking her out to dinner. Let's see how that turns out.

It's Never What You Think

Jessica was sitting on a wooden stool at the bar of the Bert and Ernie's waiting for her date. She had his descriptions and what he was going to wear that evening so she was prepared to watch for him at the door. She was fifteen minutes early because she wanted to be the first one. Jessica wore a pair of designer jeans, black sandals and a black tank top revealing her bust. She wanted to ensure that she was definitely interested in seeing him again, if it all turns out.

After 45 minutes she started to wonder if he was going to show up. Jessica shook her head from side to side and kept her eyes on her watch.

"Piss me off," she muttered under her breath. "Can I have a rum and coke?" she asked the bartender while rummaging through her purse for her wallet.

She felt a hand on her shoulder and quickly turned around. "Tony?" she asked, looking up at a tall, Caucasian male with brown clean cut hair and hazel eyes. From the description she was given, this was not Tony.

"No, my name's Gavin and I can see that you were waiting for someone and he didn't show?" he asked, pushing his hands into his jeans pocket.

"Oh, is it that obvious?" she answered, still looking for her wallet.

"It's on me." He told her as he pulled a ten dollar bill from his pocket and gave it to the bartender. "It's happened to me already last week and I thought you might want some company so you're not left alone."

"Thanks for the drink." Jessica said, hanging her purse around her shoulder and taking a sip. "Well, you might as well sit down. He's not showing up tonight or any night, I imagine."

"Dating has become so hard lately. I remember when I was in my late twenties; I don't remember it being so difficult. I had numbers stored away for dating emergencies, now you can't even get someone to commit to meeting you for 20 minutes."

“Tell me about it.” Jessica agreed. “I just don’t want to be alone anymore. What gives? I try to make an effort and I have to be met half way or how is anything going to happen between two people? It’s Tuesday night, don’t you think that I have things to do?”

“Well, have you had supper yet?” Gavin asked. “We could sit at a table, if you don’t mind, and I’ll get you supper.”

“Why are you being so nice?” she asked, sipping at her drink to make it last longer.

“Because I know what it’s like to be jilted and besides, forgive me but I think you are an attractive woman that shouldn’t have to be left alone.”

Jessica looked at his casual way of dress that matched her own. She smiled as he smiled back at her and thought why not? She felt like crap and she couldn’t go home feeling this way because depression would only set in.

She accepted his offer and they went to sit at a wooden table to enjoy his company and a good meal.

The rest of the week went by uneventfully and she never heard from Christopher. She refused to accept any of Roxanne’s calls and just wanted to be left alone until Roxanne and Christopher worked out their drama. She had a date with Gavin Friday night because they hit it off so well on Tuesday. She had to thank that idiot Tony for standing her up because she ended up meeting someone much better.

Thursday night she was on her computer and logged on to Canadian Connection Dating Service and found that she had twenty-eight new messages in her LonelyLady29 profile. Jessica had to admit that she had fun checking her messages and she felt like she was not alone in the dating world.

She went through fourteen of her messages when an msn request popped up in her window from KnightHawk. She held her breath and accepted the request.

How are you tonight?

She typed back. *Going well, actually, I'm just checking my messages and I have a date tomorrow night. How successful are you so far?*

Not well. I'm here to meet the right woman, not someone who's interested in playing around.

Jessica thought of how humorous that was since the last time they were online, he had asked her what she was wearing. What a player and he didn't even know it. She thought for a moment and then typed back. *I hope you find what you are looking for. I know it can be very difficult. You should take chances, though, or you won't find your Ms Right.*

What are you looking for, Lonely Lady. You didn't answer me the last time I asked.

Jessica sighed and started typing. *If you must know, I am looking for a boyfriend that isn't going to ditch me at the first sign of trouble in the relationship and for someone that doesn't have roaming eyes. Is it too much to ask?*

She waited to see what he was going to say. She felt connected to him somehow. Maybe it was like having two lost souls in the game of love, trying to find a perfect match. Maybe there was no such thing.

No. Seems similar to my situation but I have to be discreet.

Jessica banged her hand on the mouse pad. "I knew it," she called out to no one in particular. "He's probably married or has a girlfriend that doesn't satisfy him. Typical!" She started typing furiously with all the things that she wanted to say but before she pressed the enter key, she deleted her message. Who was she to judge?

You better get back to your wife! She typed and sat back to see what he was going to say to her.

There was a long pause so she thought that he had logged off but there was his response and she didn't know if she should believe him or not. He had said that it was his job that required him to be discreet. He held a corporate position and it wouldn't look good if he was found hunting for women on the internet.

Jessica realized it was 10:30pm and she was tired. She told him she had to go and quickly logged off her computer before he had a chance to respond.

What was she doing? Was she so desperate she had to resort to these types of avenues? She'll forget about this and concentrate on what truly matters.