

What's In a Name?

“You know, Jackie, I really enjoy being with you.”

La Vie En Rose was pretty crowded, but we were in a booth near the back, away from the swinging doors to the kitchen, so it felt private. Our own little world.

It was our third date, and I liked him. A lot. He'd picked the restaurant again, which was fine with me. He had good taste. We could've been at Mickey D's for all I cared, but it was fun to sit at a table draped in stiff white linen, with flickering candlelight reflected in my wine glass and soft classical music playing in the background.

Our waiter had a convincing French accent and had served our salads with a flourish and a wink at me. Little red and yellow tomatoes glistened in a bed of bright greens, just waiting to be speared by chilled forks.

We had really clicked, I thought, just like my friend Mary promised when she set us up. And I was so relieved—it had been a long, sad time since my last relationship self-destructed. I was ready.

And there he was: nice looking, tall, early 40's just like me. So what if his hair was beginning to thin a little and he could stand to lose maybe ten pounds. Heck, so could I for that matter. My hair didn't show its age thanks to a really good colorist in Pasadena who kept the brown looking natural.

He tended to dress up a little more than I was used to; that night he had on a crisp white shirt and a gray sport coat over navy trousers—never jeans, I don't think he owned any. No tie, although he'd worn one on our first date. I sort of liked the way he dressed, even if it meant I had to wrestle myself into panty hose and high heels when I'd have been more comfortable in pants. But he'd taken me to the opera on our first date, a chamber music performance on our second, and that night we were going to a play, so I'd thought, *better safe than sorry* as I zipped up the third of my basic black dresses, the one he hadn't seen yet.

He loved to talk, and I loved to listen. He was really well informed—I think he read the daily paper all the way through. He could give you the scoop on which politician was in trouble this week, why the stock market was still a good bet, when housing prices were going to level off, where to find a good deal on a car, and how to negotiate the best price. So I was pretty taken by him, all right, and I'd been happy that he kept asking me out.

His eyes were dark and unreadable in the candlelight, but he was smiling at me, smiling like he meant it. His right hand rested on the table, and I knew if I reached out and touched it, which I very well could do, his skin would be warm and welcoming.

I put down my fork. "Julie," I said. "My name is Julie."