

Alternative

She drudged through straining motions on the Stairmaster, alone for once. Usually her prying friends remained close, ever since the recent fallout with the world that defined her. She was not completely through with the life she currently knew, and might give it another chance. Some of her friends were close to both sides of the conflict. *Could they be trusted?* There appeared to be at least two people keeping an eye on her, and occasionally she felt watched at this exercise sanctuary. *They should just mind their own business.*

Even though they were only concerned about her situation, she wished they would allow her to pursue something else, whatever that turned out to be. This required a clean break from what she currently knew, and might be harder to achieve than first considered. Just leaving and abandoning her house and friends was giving away all for what she had ever worked. Although needing to scrape what she could from the circumstances, discarding a major part of her life, she was afraid to lose what made her what she was.

Could she find another going through the same challenges? There were others at the club who she wanted to talk to, but it might get back to the wrong person, who might not be able to tolerate losing her.

Looking over to the bicycle stations in front of the aerobics floor, she spotted one cycle in use, the rider relentlessly grinding away at its mechanics. Did she know him or did her friends know him? He looked like someone she had seen or heard of before, another soul also engaged in discord with his world, but in physically aggressive circumstances against those close to him.

What would her friends think? Perhaps she should give them something to see after all. *If that is what they really wanted, she could put on one hell of a show for them!*

This day on the bike, Bill felt especially primed, pumping away at a fanatical rate, his mp3 player blasting through his ears. Health charts of club members, the majority female, stood publicly displayed nearby against a yellowed wall, enclosed in old vanilla folders. Bill was careful not to stare at these beautiful women taking their charts to document their progress. That might have been rude, and they would undoubtedly embarrass him off this machine if they suspected his eyes were wandering toward them.

One gal looked at her chart briefly, and then, turning away towards the equipment, needed to pass by Bill to get to where she wanted to go. She looked interesting. Bill peered at her as she approached, hoping he could catch her deep-set eyes and trap her into at least one rewarding smile before facing the usual callous evasion that the women of the club practiced on the sorry-mood cyclist.

She stopped abruptly as she fell into Bill's gaze, and a warming smile met him, forcing one of his own as he nervously mumbled, "Hello ..."

She had turned Bill's trap around on him, her desire to remain catching him completely by surprise.

He quickly pulled off his headphones, suddenly face to face with someone who was supposed to have passed him by. "Hey, your kids went to Little Folks Day Care Center, didn't they?" she quickly engaged him. "My kids went there with yours."

Bill struggled with memories of the faces he had known when his children were smaller. *Why*

could he not recall her from the day care?

“You remember that place?” he fought to keep the conversation casual; eighteen years of faithful marriage to Linda meant that he might not know what he was saying, and he did not want to insult this new friend. “Too bad they had to shut it down, huh?”

“Oh, what a crime that was!” she acknowledged, and then paused briefly to measure his interest.

She was gorgeous: a perfectly petite woman whose dominating smile and piercing dark eyes seared through Bill, their haunting fragility melting away at his soul, chipping into his withering barriers.

“Hey, I’ve seen you exercising here before,” she admitted with pride. “You’re really working hard, and you’ve lost a lot!”

“Thanks ...”

“You’re married to Linda, aren’t you?” she continued before Bill could catch a breath to form a thought.

She held out her hand. “I’m Jamie. Glad to meet you. I’ll be seeing you around?”

“Sure, I’m here a lot!” Bill volunteered in complete surrender, taking her soft hand into his and eagerly obliging the friendly shake.

She smiled again, reclaiming her hand, and then moved from his space. Bill watched her with captive admiration as she slipped from his sight.

This made no sense. Beautiful women did not just pop up and introduce themselves to Bill. That just did not happen to him. Who was this girl?

Perhaps there just might be a God, he ceded, as his arduous exercise gradually eased into optimistic deliberation concerning this pleasant stranger, her piercing gaze continuing to invade his swarming thoughts.