

DEAD MAN'S CELL PHONE

BY SARAH RUHL

CHARACTERS

JEAN (*late 20s*), responsible and considerate, is trapped by circumstances; OTHER WOMAN (*20s–30s*), a bit more worldly, is also confused by these circumstances.

SCENE

A café

TIME

The present.

When a cell phone rings incessantly at the table next to hers, JEAN intervenes, only to discover the owner, Gordon, is dead. In an effort to “comfort his loved ones,” SHE continues to answer his calls, and arranges to meet the OTHER WOMAN, who naturally believes JEAN was Gordon’s lover, too.

(A café. Film noir music. The OTHER WOMAN waiting in a blue raincoat. JEAN enters in a blue raincoat.)

JEAN: Hello.

OTHER WOMAN: Hello. Thank you for meeting me.

JEAN: Not at all.

OTHER WOMAN: We like the same clothes.

JEAN: Yes.

OTHER WOMAN: I suppose that’s not surprising, given the circumstances.

JEAN: I don’t know what you mean.

OTHER WOMAN: You don’t need to pretend.

JEAN: I know.

OTHER WOMAN: Gordon has good taste. You’re pretty.

JEAN: I’m not—

OTHER WOMAN: Don’t be modest. I like it when a woman knows she’s beautiful. Women nowadays—they don’t know how to walk into a room. A beautiful

woman should walk into a room thinking: I am beautiful and I know how to walk in these shoes. There’s so little glamour in the world these days. It makes daily life such a bore. Women are responsible for enlivening dull places like train stations. There is hardly any pleasure in waiting for a train anymore. The women just—walk in. Horrible shoes. No confidence. Bad posture.

(The OTHER WOMAN looks at JEAN’s posture. JEAN sits up straighter.)

A woman should be able to take out her compact and put lipstick on her lips with absolute confidence. No apology.

(The OTHER WOMAN takes out lipstick and puts it on her lips, slowly. JEAN is riveted.)

JEAN: I’ve always been embarrassed to put lipstick on in public.

OTHER WOMAN: That’s crap. Here—you have beautiful lips. *(SHE hands JEAN the lipstick.)*

JEAN: No—that’s—

OTHER WOMAN: I don’t have a cold.

JEAN: It’s not the germs. It’s—

OTHER WOMAN: Put it on. Take your time. Enjoy yourself.

(JEAN puts on some lipstick.)

That was disappointing. Oh, well.

JEAN: I’m very sorry about Gordon. You must be—his friend?

OTHER WOMAN: Gordon didn’t tell you much, did he?

JEAN: No.

OTHER WOMAN: Gordon could be quiet.

JEAN: Yes. He was quiet.

OTHER WOMAN: He must have respected you. He was quiet with women he respected. Otherwise he had a very loud laugh. Haw, haw, haw! You could hear him a mile away. *(SHE remembers Gordon.)* You must wonder why I wanted to meet with you.

JEAN: Yes.

OTHER WOMAN: You were with Gordon the day he died.

JEAN: Yes.

OTHER WOMAN: Gordon and I—we were—well—You know. (SHE thinks the word—*lovers*.) And so—I wanted to know... this is going to sound sentimental... I wanted to know his last words.

JEAN: That's not sentimental.

OTHER WOMAN: I have sentiment.

JEAN: I don't think that's sentimental. Really, I don't.

OTHER WOMAN: So. His last words.

JEAN: Gordon mentioned you before he died. Well, he more than mentioned you. He said: tell her that I love her. And then he turned his face away and died.

OTHER WOMAN: He said that he loved me.

JEAN: Yes.

OTHER WOMAN: I waited for such a long time. And the words—delivered through another woman. What a shit. (THE OTHER WOMAN looks away. SHE wipes a tear away.)

JEAN: It's not like that. Gordon said that he had loved many women in his life, but when he met you, everything changed. He said that other women seemed like clocks compared to you—other women just—measured time—broke the day up—but that you—you stopped time. He said you—stopped time—just by walking into a room.

OTHER WOMAN: He said that?

JEAN: Yes.

OTHER WOMAN: Oh, Gordon.

(THE PHONE RINGS. JEAN hesitates to answer it.)

Aren't you going to get that?

JEAN: Yes.

(SHE answers the phone.)

Hello?

[[On the other end: Who is this?]]

My name is Jean.

Yes, of course.

How do I get there?

(A pause while the mother gives directions. To the OTHER WOMAN, whispering.)

Sorry.

(THE OTHER WOMAN shrugs her shoulders.)

All right, I'll see you then. Good-bye.

(JEAN bangs up.)

OTHER WOMAN: Who was it?

JEAN: His mother.

OTHER WOMAN: Oh, God. Mrs. Gottlieb? Let me touch up your lipstick before you go.

(SHE does. JEAN puckers.)