



Manhunting

By Jennifer Crusie

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Editorial Review

Review

"A sure bet . . . Jennifer Crusie's rollicking romance hits the jackpot." -- *BookPage on Bet Me*

"Crusie seems incapable of writing a boring page, or one that's not aglow." -- *Kirkus Reviews on What the Lady Wants*

"Few popular writers handle light romantic comedy as deftly as Jennifer Crusie." -- *Boston Globe on Bet Me*

"Wonderful, fresh, funny, tender, outrageous . . . Crusie is one of a kind." -- *Booklist on What the Lady Wants*

About the Author

Jennifer Crusie is the New York Times, Publishers Weekly, and USA Today bestselling author of *Tell Me Lies*, *Crazy for You*, *Welcome to Temptation*, *Faking It*, *Fast Women*, and *Bet Me*.

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"Planning on jumping? I wouldn't. Blood's hell to get out of silk."

"I'm just checking the weather," Kate Svenson said patiently and continued to stare out her apartment window, knowing that Jessie would lose interest and go back to her newspaper if she ignored her long enough.

She'd pulled back the thick drapes to let in the early-morning August sun. Even with her best friend sitting behind her, rustling her paper and slurping her coffee, Kate felt alone, mired in a despair that not even Jessie's pragmatism could dispel. This is doing you no good at all, she told herself and moved away from the window to sit at her linen-covered dining-room table. She tried to concentrate on her breakfast coffee and the business section of the Sunday paper, but her mind kept wandering to the miserable state of her life.

Well, not exactly miserable, she thought. Actually, not miserable at all. I have a great career in a top management-consulting firm. Of course, I could wish that my father didn't own the firm, and sometimes it's boring, but it's a great career—Well, an okay career....

With an effort, Kate pushed her career out of her mind and went on with her catalog of blessings. Her life was good. She had her health, and enough money, and terrific friends, the best of whom she was having breakfast with right now in a beautiful apartment full of exquisite French Provincial furniture that she certainly couldn't afford if she didn't have this damn job....

No. Kate clamped down on her negative thoughts and peered over the top of her paper at the brunette across from her who was reading her paper and drinking her coffee with the same total absorption she gave everything else.

Jessie Rogers jerked her head up, her dark curls bouncing. "What?"

"Nothing," Kate said. "Just counting my blessings. You're near the top."

"I am the top, which is a real comment on your lousy life," Jessie said and went back to the paper.

Trust Jessie to cut to the chase, Kate thought. She sits over there looking like Audrey Hepburn at twelve, and here I am looking like Grace Kelly at fifty. And we're both thirty-five. Doesn't she care that life is slipping away from us while we carve out careers we don't want?

Of course, Jessie didn't care. Her life wasn't slipping away, she was living it. She wasn't carving out a career she didn't want, she was completely involved in one she loved, if you could call cake decorating a career, which of course, Jessie did, although how she lived on it, Kate would never know. Jessie just went with the flow, no plan at all. Maybe if Kate hadn't planned her career out so precisely, maybe if she was doing something else...

Stop it, she told herself. She was a damn good management consultant, and she'd made a lot of money. It wasn't her career that was bothering her, it was her empty personal life. Of course, Jessie was happier than she was. She hadn't gotten herself into three horrible engagements in the past three years because she didn't care that she was thirty-five and not married. I'm the one who cares, Kate thought. She was the one who was guilty and miserable. It shouldn't matter but it did, and there was nothing she could do about it.

Pathetic. Kate sighed and went back to her paper.

Jessie slapped the newspaper down on the linen-covered tabletop and said loudly, "This is all your father's fault."

Startled, Kate looked up from the paper. "What? The recession? The construction on 70? Calvin can't find Hobbes? What?"

"Don't play dumb." Jessie folded her arms and glared at her. "You're unhappy."

"No, I'm not," Kate said, forcing a smile. "You read that in the paper? What are you reading? I told you not to read the personals. You get too upset about all the lonely people and you transfer it to me. I'm fine. Read the sports page." She went back to her paper, holding it like a shield in front of her.

Jessie, as usual, did not give up. "You keep sighing. I can't concentrate on Travel and Leisure with you sighing."

"I'm not sighing," Kate said without looking up.

"It's sinus."

"No, it's not." Jessie narrowed her eyes. "You're not still pining over that jerk Derek, are you?"

"No." Kate stuck to her paper. "I don't pine over jerks. It's not time-efficient. Go back to Travel and Leisure."

Jessie hooked her finger over the edge of Kate's paper and pulled it down so she could look into her friend's eyes. "You want to get married."

"Of course I want to get married," Kate said reasonably. "Some day. Get your finger off my paper. You're crumpling the Dow-Jones."

"You want to get married now." Jessie looked disgusted. "It's your biological clock or something."

"Your nail polish is chipped," Kate said. "It's also a really ugly color, but I'm not mentioning that because it would be none of my business."

"You've been engaged three times in the past three years," Jessie said. "Not one of them could keep you. You said yes to three men and then dumped them. Why would you say 'yes' to three men you couldn't bring yourself to marry?"

Kate took a deep breath. "Derek insisted on a pre-marital agreement. Paul informed me that my success threatened him and if I loved him I'd stop working so hard. Terence wanted me to quit my job because my social duties as his wife would be too pressing. And you think I should have married one of those men?"

"Frankly, I don't think you should have dated any of them," Jessie said. "I just think being raised by your father has given you a warped idea of life, marriage, and men. And I think you're unhappy, which makes me unhappy. And I don't like being unhappy, so we're going to fix you."

Kate put down the financial section. "No, we're not."

"Yes, we are," Jessie said. "We're going to improve your life. We're going to make you more like me."

Kate started to laugh. "I don't want to be like you."

"Hey," Jessie said, not fazed at all. "You should be so lucky."

"You decorate cakes for a living," Kate said. "Beautiful cakes, admittedly, but still..."

"I'm an artist," Jessie said.

"You're a nut," Kate said. "But I love you, so I overlook it."

"I may be nuts, but I love what I do and you don't," Jessie said. "Remember when you were with the Small Business Administration? You used to tell me about all those little businesses you'd help get started, and you'd feel so good, remember?"

"The pay was terrible and the career possibilities nil." Kate picked up her paper. Jessie pinned it down with her hand.

"Remember Mrs. Borden's day-care center?" Jessie said. "It's still going strong. She's got a waiting list."

"Of course, I remember." Kate smiled at the memory. "What a lovely woman she was."

"Is," Jessie said. "She didn't die just because you sold out."

"I didn't sell out—"

"And that old man—what was his name, Richards? The one with the shoe-repair shop."

"Richter," Kate said. "Mr. Richter. How is he?" Jessie shrugged. "How should I know? Like it's my job to keep an eye on all those little businesses you played midwife to."

"Very subtle, Jess," Kate said. "And I didn't sell out—I'm doing the same thing." At Jessie's skeptical look, she added, "I am. I'm just saving much bigger businesses for a lot more money. I'm still helping people."

"You're helping a bunch of suits," Jessie said.

Kate held on to her patience. "Why don't we just agree that we have no respect for each other's career choices

and forget the whole thing?"

"You used to have respect for my career choice," Jessie said. "You helped me save my career."

"I couldn't help it," Kate said. "You were such a mess, standing in the middle of my office at the SBA, raving about creating the greatest cakes in the civilized world." She smiled at Jessie and shook her head. "I'd never seen anyone like you before."

Jessie grinned back. "I felt the same way. I'd never seen anybody as polished as you. You looked like you'd been varnished. I thought, Oh, good, I'm in big trouble and they send me to Wall Street Barbie." She tilted her head and looked at Kate with deep affection. "And then you saved my business."

"It was a business worth saving," Kate said. "You truly do make the most beautiful cakes in the civilized world."

"Uncivilized, too," Jessie said. "Which brings us to the subject at hand—men."

"Jessie," Kate said. "You're even more inept with men than I am. You keep dating those boneless, purposeless men who need someone to take care of them."

"Yes, but that's because I don't care," Jessie said.

"When I care, I will be ept."

"Well, when you're ept, I'll listen to you." Kate tried to pick up her paper, but Jessie put her hand on it again.

"Listen," Jessie said, leaning forward. "I'm willing to approach this your way."

"My way?"

"Right. Logic and reason." Jessie made a face. "I prefer instinct, but we've gotta go with what we've got, here. Now, you want to get married, right?"

Kate looked wary. "Right."

Jessie spread her hands apart. "So what have you done all your life every time you wanted something?"

Kate looked even warier. "I made a plan?"

"Exactly," Jessie said. "So we make a plan. What do we do first? I've never planned anything before, remember? You were the one who came in and did my business plan." She stopped to consider. "Which means I owe you this plan. It's the least I can do."

"The least is what you always do," Kate said. "If you'd followed the timetable in that plan, you'd be a rich woman today. What happened to all the promotion plans? The growth plans?"

"Too fast," Jessie said, waving the idea away with her hand. "If I'd stuck to your timetable, I'd have lost all the fun of designing the cakes. I'd end up turning out sugar roses like a robot, and after a while all my work would look like everybody else's, and nobody would be paying my prices, so I'd have to lower them, and then I'd have to make more cakes to cover the loss, and then they'd get really ugly, and I'd go out of business and starve." She looked at Kate triumphantly.

"You just don't want to succeed," Kate said. "You just want to noodle around with sugar, having a good time."

"And you want to succeed too much," Jessie said, leaning forward again as she closed i...

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