

Chapter One

Another long block of music coming up after news, weather, and sports. Now, here's Debby Basso with the latest traffic update."

Jenny Reed, star of Reed-ing In The Morning removed her headset, threw them at Debby, and left the studio on a mission. Debby didn't have time to ask her friend and co-worker what had gotten her so upset, but figured it probably had something to do with Brian Allen. Whenever Jenny was upset lately, the cause was usually the owner and general manager of KKTM.

Debby put on the headset and got the cue from Wes Woods in the engineering booth to introduce the traffic reporter who was patrolling over the congested freeways of downtown Los Angeles. "...and there's a big rig overturned on the 405, both northbound and southbound lanes are at a standstill, so if you're heading that way, you might want to take Sepulveda, although that isn't much better. On the 101...."

Same shit, different day, Debby thought as she listened to another reason she was glad she didn't own a car.

Jenny stormed out of the studio and headed straight for Brian's office. When she opened the door, she practically ran over the tall stranger who was shaking hands with the source of Jenny's irritation.

So, this was the sonovabitch who was going to be my new partner. We'll see about that.

"Jenny, I'm glad you're here," Brian said.

Yeah, I bet you are.

"I want you to meet George Dimmock. I just hired him from a station in Minnesota." Brian started.

"I haven't used that name for ten years," he corrected Brian. "Johnny King, Miss Reed. A pleasure to meet you." He held out his hand and Jenny took it, reluctantly.

"I'm sorry, Johnny." Brian corrected himself, then addressed Jenny. "He's going to be working with you for awhile until I figure out where I want him."

On a bus to Cleveland would be my first choice.

Jenny tried to be polite, but Johnny could see her eyes didn't match the tone in her voice.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. King. Welcome to KKTM. I guess I'll see you first thing in the morning."

"Actually, Johnny is going to start right now."

"Right here? Right now?" Jenny was fuming. "In the middle of my show? Brian, I only have an hour left. I already have everything programmed."

“You’re a professional, Jenny,” he said in a not too obviously apologetic tone, “I know you can handle it.”

“Handle this. I’m going on break. Debby will cover for me, but I’ve got to get out of here.”

“Jenny...,” Brian was practically begging, “Don’t do this, I need you to help me here. You can have the six to ten p.m. slot.”

“I think I’ll head over to the studio and get acquainted with things. Jenny, see you later?” Johnny left the two of them to their argument and wondered how long they had been sleeping together. He’d heard some rumors before taking the job and he could see all the signs. No way would a station owner take that kind of crap from an employee unless there was a deeper relationship. Knowing Brian as long as he did, it was no surprise to Johnny that the guy was a cheating jerk. It was just a pity that the jerk was married to his sister.

As the office door closed, his suspicions were confirmed when he overheard Brian say to Jenny, “Look, I told you about this last night. I know you’re upset but I’ll make it up to you later.”

Poor Denise, Johnny thought. She deserved so much better than that jackass cheating on her with that blond big mouth. Johnny left for the studio before he heard Jenny’s reply.

“There won’t be any later, Brian. We’re finished. I’m going across the street for some fresh air.”

“In a bar? All that smoke will harm your vocal cords.”

“It’s better than the bullshit I’m breathing in here. Don’t worry; I’ll be back in time to babysit your Mr. King.” Jenny slammed the door and headed for the elevator. She hoped a brief escape across the street would calm her, but the trip was far too short.

Jenny exploded through the large oak door of Charlotte’s Bar and landed with a loud squish on an unoccupied seat.

“Bob, when are you going to get these obscene chairs fixed? Would you please pour a very large Jack Daniels for me, and leave out the Jack.”

Bob Cash, owner and sole bartender of Charlotte’s Bar and Jazz Emporium walked cautiously to where Jenny had perched her petite figure. At five foot-four and a slightly exaggerated half inch, Jenny looked like a child about to have a tantrum. Of course, Bob knew she was closer to thirty-five than she wanted to admit. Jenny did, at times, behave the way her looks implied.

“Now, Jenny,” he said through a wide toothed grin, “You know you have to go on the air in less than ten minutes. Whatever it is will just have to be satisfied with a Perrier.”

Bob retrieved the familiar little green bottle from the cooler, twisted the cap, and emptied the contents into a tall glass. Jenny didn’t even bother to ask how he knew she’d left in the middle of her shift.

In the five years that Jenny Reed had been working as a radio announcer at KKTM-FM, Bob Cash had become her close friend, confidant, and psychiatrist when the situation warranted. They

might have become more than that if it weren't for the fact the Bob was more than twice her age and happily married.

It was times like these when Jenny's immature side would surface and Bob would put on his best fatherly image for her. He guessed that this recent outburst had a masculine origin. He was about to discover that once again, he had guessed right.

"Men! They're all schmucks. When you tend to forget, they tend to remind you!" Jenny fumed. "You know Bob, when I started out in this business I knew going in that it was going to be a struggle, but after all these years, you would think that I would have learned how to handle these incompetent idiots."

"Which idiot are we referring to this time?" Bob tried hard to suppress a laugh.

"The chief idiot at our glorious station, Mr. Brian Allen, of course. Never trust a man with two first names!" Jenny fished the lime wedge from the icy water and bit into it.

"First, he hires some jock-ass from Minnesota named George Dimmock, now he's telling me Dimwit is going to be doing my morning shift with me, starting this morning. He totally screwed up my schedule and I spent all weekend planning my show. So, I told him I couldn't change everything with such short notice and do you know what he said? That I was so capable and intelligent and all that crap. I mean, it's true, but it was the way he said it. The final insult was when he offered me another shift. Know where? That wonderful time slot when everyone is making like a couch potato, six to ten during prime time television viewing. This is more than an insult, it's a demotion! So, now I have to get up with the birds, before dawn, and babysit this Dimmock character. Brian is a real piece of work. I wonder how he sleeps at night."

"Seems to me the last time you mentioned Mr. Allen, lack of sleep was the one thing you two agreed on." Bob shot her one of his infamous all-knowing grins.

"Yeah, well, that poor excuse for a station manager has seen the last of my overtime. Oh great, if it isn't the devil himself."

Bob turned around in time to see the tall, stocky figure of Brian Allen enter the bar. From his appearance Bob figured he would want something a little stronger than bubbling water with a lime twist. Brian's usual calm brown eyes were on fire as he glared at Jenny. His thick, black hair looked as if a bird had laid a nest in it. Even his mustache was twitching.

Brian went directly over to Jenny without as much as a greeting to his old friend behind the bar. That was another bad sign. Bob decided to stay out of it and pretended to dry some glasses, but with his back to them, he could still see everything reflected in the large mirror.

"All right, Miss Reed, just what the hell do you think you're doing here when you have to be on the air in exactly seven minutes?"

"Suddenly everyone is Big Ben. I can still tell time, Mr. Allen. For your information, I'm having a nice non-alcoholic drink and cursing you out. And if it's so important to you that someone babysit your new genius announcer, why don't you do it yourself?"

“Look, Jenny, if this is about last night, we can talk later. This is business and you’re too much of a professional to let what happened affect your work.” He lowered his voice. “I’ll make it up to you later, Okay? Please get back before our listeners hear nothing but dead air.”

“You should be used to it since that’s all you have between your ears! And you can forget about later. After my shift I’m going home, then I’m going to bed...alone! Bob, put this on Brian’s tab. I’m outta here.”

Brian watched her leave. Her perfect body was silhouetted against the contrast of light when she opened the door. For that second, the sun ignited the natural blond highlights of her hair. He remembered the feel of it against his bare chest the previous night.

Brian smiled as he remembered the glow of Jenny’s wet skin and misty blue eyes. Those eyes! They were so full of passion and desire, until he had made the mistake of mentioning the schedule change.

He admitted that the timing was all wrong. He should have known better that to talk shop when they were naked, but she had to know sooner or later and since the new schedule was going into effect the following morning, he’d thought it was as good a time as any to break the news to her. After all, what woman could get angry after three hours of fantastic love making? Jenny Reed was that woman as Brian had discovered when he’d found himself out of her apartment before he had the chance to put his pants back on.

Brian had told Denise he wouldn’t be home until after midnight. Unfortunately for Brian, he’d found himself locked out at ten o’clock, half naked, with two hours to kill and no place to go. After several unsuccessful door-knocking attempts to get Jenny to reconsider, he got dressed and sat outside her apartment for two solid hours.

Now, he had to figure out how to make it up to her, keep the new schedule, and pray that Jenny wouldn’t sabotage Johnny’s first day on the air. He also had to explain to his wife how he had injured his back.

Things were getting too complicated for Brian. His back hurt, his brain hurt, and his pride hurt. Something had to be done, but for now he had the immediate solution to his last two painful problems.

“Bob, give me that double Jack Daniels on the rocks and leave out the rocks.”