

Written in the Stars © 2007
By Lynne Marshall

Julie Schultz fanned her face and headed for the nearest exit, wondering why she'd agreed to attend a speed-date extravaganza. Her best friend Stella had talked her into it. Being a hairstylist kept her in constant contact with women, and it had been four months since her last date.

"How's it going?" Stella asked, on the first fifteen-minute break of the "Thirty-Something Date Night."

"Not bad," she lied. No point in disappointing her friend.

They'd closed the restaurant for the pre-paid Thursday night event, and capped the number for attendees at 100. At least the odds of men to women were even, unlike the real world.

"Where're you going? The bathroom's this way," Stella said, veering to the right.

"To get some fresh air." Julie had already suffered through eight mini dates by circulating around the numbered booths at the Southern Comfort Café. She hadn't found one decent prospect for a future date, and the thought of going through a dozen more seemed daunting. Fresh air was in order.

Was she being too picky? Not living with one's mother had definitely been a requirement on her application. And what about holding a steady job for more than six

months? Was that too much to ask? Maybe she was shallow to hope for a halfway decent looking guy.

“Well, if you’re looking for fresh air, don’t go out front,” Stella said. “That’s where the smokers are.”

“Thanks for the heads up.”

Julie pushed through the double doors to the kitchen, and found the exit. Startled, she discovered someone already standing on the porch. A man in a flannel shirt with broad shoulders and long jeans-clad legs appeared as surprised as she was.

“Oh. I’m sorry,” Julie stammered.

“No problem. There’s room for two out here.” He stepped aside to allow her to lean on the rail next to him on the compact terrace.

An awkward silence followed as Julie tried to be content standing in the dark on an awesome starry night, with a complete stranger.

“I presume you’re here for the speed dates, too?” she said.

“Yep.”

He seemed to be studying her in the dark. Her eyes had adjusted to the dim lighting and she noticed a warm smile and deep-set eyes.

He glanced overhead and clicked his tongue. “See that?” He pointed toward the heavens.

Julie attempted to follow his hand, but truthfully didn’t have a clue.

He repeated the gesture. “That cluster of stars, right there.”

She squinted. “Oh, yeah. Like a W? Now I see it.”

“That’s Cassiopeia.”

“Wow.” She slipped him a sideways glance. He had a strong nose from his profile, and a thick head of hair, and his arms looked well developed.

“It’s said,” he went on, “the god Poseidon punished a beautiful queen and banished her to hang in the sky for being vain. That’s her constellation.”

“Ha! If they really hung all the vain people in the sky, I’d be out of work.”

They studied the stars for several seconds, shoulder to shoulder, and Julie secretly wished she’d put astronomy as an interest on her questionnaire.

“So are you in show business or something?” he asked.

She sputtered a laugh and shook her head. “No. I’m a hair stylist.”

“Ah. Hey you might be interested in the constellation called Berenice’s Hair. A woman promised to cut off her hair to save her man. Her hair’s in the sky.”

“Wow, star gazing is really interesting. Where’s that one?”

“We’d need a telescope to find it.”

She nodded, a bit disappointed. “So are you a professor or something?”

“I’m in construction.”

“Oh my, not too many women in that line of work.”

“And to make it worse, I don’t drink, so the bar scene is out.”

Julie’s eyes widened. “Neither do I.” Then realizing how that must sound added, “Honest.”

He laughed. “I believe you. I’m Rick, by the way.” He turned and offered his hand.

“I’m Julie.” She liked his firm, warm grasp. “Any luck tonight, Rick?”

He chuckled. “Well, I’ve met eight new women. But if you want the truth, I’m not ready to ask any of them out. How about you?”

“The evening’s been great if I want to date unemployed men who still live at home.” She covered her mouth. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be so mean. We all came here for the same reason, right?”

“You’re just telling it like it is. I don’t take that as mean. But you’re right. We did come here for the same reason. Somehow, we haven’t been able to find the right person on our own.”

“Isn’t that the truth?”

“So how do you feel about teenagers?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve got a sixteen-year-old daughter with an attitude up the wazoo. Some women don’t like that.”

“I can handle ‘tude’. And I know a lot of men aren’t too interested in dating women with young children. I’ve got a six-year-old boy. His name is Blake.”

“Does he play ball? I missed out on the little league thing with my daughter.”

“He’s in T-ball this year.”

A warm smile spread across Rick’s face. An old sensation of tingles tickled Julie’s spine, something she hadn’t felt in a long, long time. Possibilities.

A loud clanging sound warned that the break was almost up.

Julie pulled out her date sheet. Rick reached in his shirt pocket for his. Unable to read in the dark, they stepped back into the kitchen and compared lists. Neither was on the others'. Disappointed, she smiled resignedly at him before re-entering the café.

"It was nice to meet you, Julie."

"Same here, Rick." Poof went the possibilities.

"We'll start in two minutes," the organizer announced.

Julie made a quick stop in the bathroom. Determined to create her own possibilities, she fished for one of her business cards in her purse. She intended to find Rick before the evening was over, give him her card and boldly say, "Call me."

Planning to make the next mini date as brief as possible, she marched toward the booth. Her confident step faltered.

Rick stood with a wide grin on his rugged face. "It's an awesome starry night, and the Planetarium has a great show. I'm thinking about skipping out on the rest of the dates. You game?"

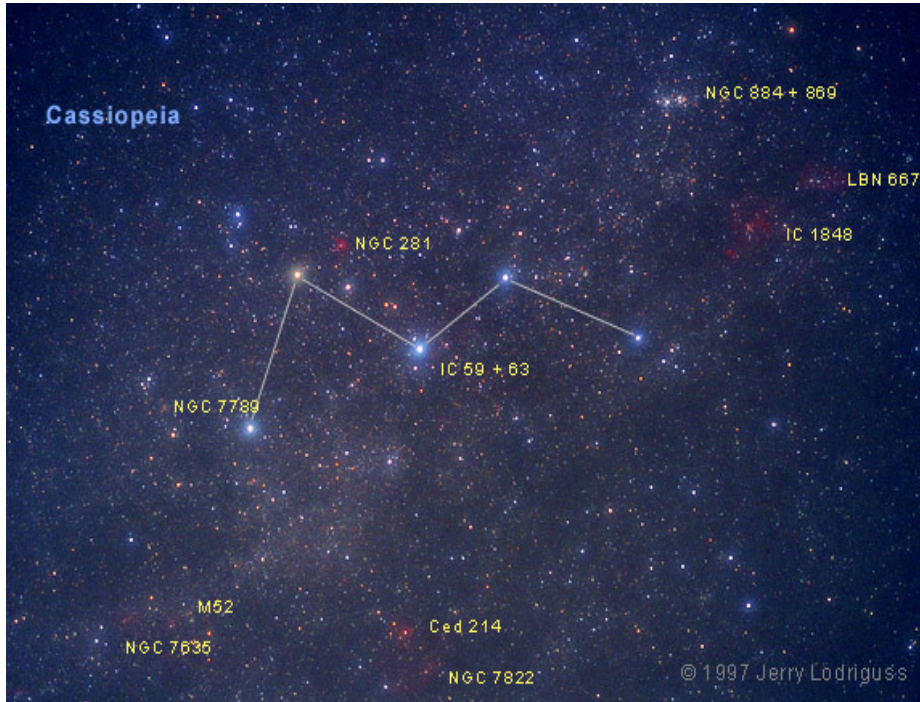
Not about to miss a second chance, Julie strode toward him.

The organizer stepped between them, looking perturbed. "But you haven't even interviewed each other."

"We had our speed date during the break, and this is the lady I want to get to know better," Rick said.

Julie stepped around the event's organizer ignoring his continued protests. She smiled and reached for Rick's outstretched hand, then flipped her hair with her hand

and turned back to the protesting proprietor. Out of the corner of her mouth she said, “Sometimes, you just can’t fight what’s written in the stars.”



Berenices Hair – also known as Coma Berenices

