

**It's Probably You**

ALSO BY JAYNE DENKER

*The Rom-Com Agenda*

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*For all the kids clutching their notebooks and whispering  
hesitantly, "I'm writing a story": YES. Keep going.*



**It's Probably You**



# CHAPTER 1

Nearly getting headbutted by a stranger in a tiny pharmacy foyer was the last thing anybody needed after a long day at work, but Gillian Pritchard took it in stride. Besides, it was partially her own fault. She'd been distracted by a text alert and wasn't looking where she was going.

A tall man, sneezing repeatedly into a large bandanna covering most of his face, hurtling into her and nearly breaking her nose put Gillian back in pharmacist mode even though she was off the clock and on her way out the door. She didn't mind. Gillian had been a pharmacist for years, and she was good at it. Nothing made her happier than being able to serve the citizens of the small town of Willow Cove.

"Allergies?" she murmured sympathetically, and the man nodded as he pushed past her into the building.

Gillian didn't take offense at his brusqueness; he was obviously suffering. She would have followed him back inside to help him out if it weren't for her text. A quick glance at her phone to see that it was from her elderly neighbor, Carol, and it only said *Come quick* was enough to send a zing of alarm through her.

Cursing the fact that the gorgeous spring weather had enticed her to walk to work that day, Gillian hurried through town and into her residential neighborhood as fast as she could, but it still took far too long to get home. She tried calling Carol back on the way, but there was no answer. Practically at a jog when she rounded the corner onto her own block, she nearly barreled into her three neighbors, Carol, Arnette, and Judy, clustered on the sidewalk. When they all turned to her en masse, their eyes wide, Gillian's heart seized.

"What's wrong?" she gasped. "Are you all right? Carol, why didn't you answer my—"

"It's Retha," Arnette stage-whispered, clutching the sides of her cardigan and pulling them tighter around her.

Gillian's heart skipped a beat at the mention of the ladies' fourth senior friend, her next-door neighbor. "Retha?"

"She's *gone!*" Carol burst out, breathless.

"Wait . . . *gone gone?*"

All the women nodded.

Gillian felt sudden tears prick her eyes, shock and grief constricting her throat. "But . . . but I saw her yesterday. She was fine!"

Her third neighbor, Judy, shrugged and said with venom, "And now she's in *Tampa.*"

"My God," Gillian whispered, staring unseeing at the pavement. "I can't believe she's . . . wait." Her head snapped up and she narrowed her eyes. "*Tampa?*"

Carol nodded vigorously. "Took up with that Norman character she met the last time she was visiting her nephew's family in February. Just up and moved in with him!"

"For God's sake!" Gillian burst out, trying to calm her rabbiting heart. "Don't *do* that! I thought—"

"That she'd kicked it?" Judy muttered. "Might as well have. I mean . . . *Tampa?*"

"Some people like Tampa," Arnette sniffed.

"Some people take up with random widowers without thinking it through too," Judy countered.

"Just because you can't be bothered to find true love in your twilight years doesn't mean the rest of us have given up, you know," Carol cut in, gently patting her white-blond gravity-defying blown-out bob that was equal parts hair, hair spray, and air.

"I never said I was against it," Judy said, pulling up an errant bra strap. "But I sure wouldn't count on it being found with *Norman* in *Tampa*."

"*Judy*," Arnette hissed, flicking a glance at Gillian. "Remember what we talked about. Positivity!"

Gillian fought back a weary sigh. Subtlety was not their strong suit. "Cut it out, ladies."

Carol wheedled, "We just want to see you happy. Is that so wrong?"

"Second chances happen all the time," Arnette said.

Gillian's neighbors knew she was perfectly content with her home and her job and her friends, and that "finding a new man," as they always urged her to do, would simply be a pleasant addition to her already happy life. Gillian actually had started dabbling in online dating, signing up with a couple of dating apps recently. She wasn't averse to finding someone to care about, someone who cared about her, but five years of blessed solitude since her divorce had made her pretty darn comfortable with her life as it was. She'd gone on a few dates, but apparently she wasn't working fast enough for the ladies' liking.

"If you'd only let me give my stepson your number—" Carol started, for the thousandth time.

"Not right now, okay?" She gazed across the street and felt a pang of loss. She'd really liked Retha. "What's going to happen to the house?"

“We don’t know,” Carol said. “Retha didn’t say boo about anything, not even that she was leaving, until today. She said she was moving to Tampa, hopped in an Uber with nothing but two suitcases and the urn with her husband’s ashes, waved to us out the window, and off she went to the airport. Poof, she was gone.”

“It must be true love if she paid for an Uber to drive her all the way to Syracuse to catch a flight. Must have cost a fortune,” Judy said. “Hey, if Norm’s loaded, that could explain a lot.”

“Judy!” Carol and Arnette snapped.

There was a lot of Judy’s name being snapped when the ladies were together. Judy had no filter. Gillian kind of liked that about her.

“I guess the house will go on the market soon enough, to catch the summer crowd,” Gillian said.

Sometimes visitors fell so deeply in love with the little town of Willow Cove, and the Thousand Islands region in general, that they couldn’t resist buying a summer home there. Gillian understood. The town, on the banks of the powerful St. Lawrence River in the North Country of New York State, with Canada to the north and the Adirondack Mountains to the southeast, was a charmer. Gillian had lived there more than half her life, and she absolutely loved it, even in the cold, blustery winter season. Which was finally over. The restaurants, wine bars, art galleries, and shops would throw open their doors soon, and the tourists and summer residents would arrive to enjoy life on the river.

“It should sell pretty quick . . . ly . . .”

Gillian’s words died in her throat just as Carol let out a little squeak. A large, dark pickup truck had barreled around the corner and pulled up to the house as they were talking. Now a tall, lean man jumped down from the cab and, hands on his hips, stared up at Retha’s former home. His well-worn jeans sagged a little at his waist; his bluish green heathered T-shirt strained against his ample chest and then slouched above his belt. As he squinted

upward, he casually scratched the back of his neck, where his light-brown hair faded to a close crop. He was surprisingly tan for early May.

“Real estate agent?” Arnette speculated.

“Not slick enough,” Judy countered. “Contractor, I’d bet. Retha mentioned she might need a new roof.”

“Gillian,” Carol whispered eagerly, “go find out.”

“Carol, stop.”

“Gillian Pritchard,” Arnette said in her scoldy voice, which was no less effective at reduced volume, “I want you to take a good look at those shoulders. And if you don’t go over and introduce yourself right now, there’s no hope for you.”

Gillian scanned her friends, who were all eagerly watching her. Arnette, her sharp eyes bright against her warm brown skin. Carol, sprightly and girlish, smiling hopefully. Judy, short and broad, cynicism oozing out of every pore. Gillian knew what they wanted of her. Even Judy, though she didn’t show it. So with a heavy, resigned sigh, she nodded wearily and started across the street.

She heard a definite Carol-is-excited squeal behind her and only felt a little bad for deceiving them, swerving to the right at the last minute and marching into her own house without a second glance at the man in Retha’s front yard. A chorus of boos assaulted her from across the street. Gillian laughed to herself as she shut her front door.