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John Richmond

Deep State (Who Is She?)

He had known her for a good amount of time; seen her every now and then at the supermarket where she *ostensibly* worked—but it wasn't until years later when she—*herself*—brought up something so private within him to his attention, did he seriously begin to wonder whether she was an agent of the “deep state” or what—how else could she know such a deep and secret thing about him?

For years he had read about the “deep state” and its purported doings, dismissing it at first, then giving it the benefit of the doubt, and finally assuming that some governmental agency probably had an extensive file on him and that it read that his greatest vulnerability was women—which takes us back to her *and* the possibility that she was “sent.”

Why?

Well, primarily because of reasons in his past.

The first had to do with his best friend from his first college. Actually, it was his friend's brother who had run afoul of the feds, which in turn, triggered an investigation—which his friend alerted him to—of anyone associated with any member of the family.

Within days, there came the phone call from a “she” who said that her name was “Diane”—a fellow student—and she wanted to come up to his apartment “to visit.”

Immediately, he saw this as an attempt at entrapment, seeing as his wife at the time was away at summer school, working on a Master’s.

He told “Diane” that he had lived in his apartment for the last five years and that when he looked in the mirror this morning, he didn’t look any different.

She, however, was insistent.

He, in turn, played along with the small talk, before turning the tables on her.

“Okay, listen, Diane,” he began, “I have to finish off a paper and drive it to Gatlinburg. I’ll be back later—around eight. How about we meet then?”

“Sure,” was her reply.

He continued, “Do you know where Luigi’s is on the Strip?”

“I do,” she said.

“Well, they have a nice back room there, jukebox and booths. How about we meet there at eight, tonight?”

“That sounds good,” she affirmed.

He now went for the proverbial kill.

“So, since neither one of us wants to waste our time, why don’t you repeat the plan back to me so we’re both on the same page?”

She repeated the plan, almost verbatim.

Once she had finished, he waited for the “dramatic moment” that was building to reach a sense of fullness.

“I want you people to stop calling. You are insulting my intelligence.”

He paused.

“Diane, there is no Luigi’s on the Strip or anywhere else in town. Don’t call me again.”

With that, he hung up.

Later in life, while living in Queens and working on a post 9-11 screenplay—about terrorism—with a buddy in Manhattan, it started with the “inactive” Con Edison and Verizon trucks parked in front of their respective dwellings for months; scripts in the mail which were wrapped in plastic and stamped “Damaged Upon Processing”; and then, after he moved upstate, the two female joggers—at four in the morning, while he was walking his dog.

They looked like Barbie dolls and were *very* friendly—instantly conversant.

The joggers tended to appear more often when his email traffic picked up on the screenplay or he had something published—usually humorous—about the administration.

He even turned one female encounter at the supermarket deli counter—the day before a Super Bowl game—into a short story about a beautiful redhead who wanted to know if he could teach her about football.

Of course, there were some males: the one guy—with sunglasses that he never removed—who stopped to talk because he had lived there as a kid (even though it took him over thirteen

years to drop by); heating and cooling technicians who were “filling in” for the usual guy who was out.

And, now—there’s this one.

So, let’s backtrack a bit to the beginning.

Yes, he liked her when he first saw her, and he liked her even more by the way she subtly came on to him, but then again, it was hard for him not to like stunning women who came on to him. He knew this and he knew that the “deep state” knew it, too.

So their rapport went on sporadically for a couple of years, with him all but *certain* she was an agent, but at the same time equally *uncertain* what it was about her that got her the assignment.

Until one day—at the print kiosk of the local Walgreens, as he was waiting in line to print—there she was.

Seated at one of the machines, she noticed him immediately and beckoned him over.

Conversation was light and simple at first, until she mentioned the facial treatment she was using.

“How does my face look?” she asked as she slowly ran her fingers and hands over her cheeks and cheekbones.

He looked—carefully—saw no flaws whatsoever and replied, “It looks good.”

She smiled, nodded, looked away, then quickly turned to him and announced, “I’ve been told I look like Jamie Lee Curtis.”

And, finally, there it was—she looked like Jamie Lee Curtis.

He looked at her, again—this time more closely—and realized that she was right—she did.

At the same time—save for a second or two of neural delay—the thought and then the realization swept over him that he was being set up.

She not only looked like Jamie Lee Curtis—she was a dead-ringer!

Yes! That Jamie Lee Curtis—JLC!

And—oh—in case I have forgotten to mention, in the deepest vaults of his mind, he always thought that Jamie Lee Curtis was—HOT!

Immediately, he was stunned not only by the way she looked, but perhaps more so with his own inability to wrap his head around the obvious possibility of what they knew about him.

A secret so personal and private that he had never—ever—uttered it to anyone at any time—but *they* knew.

Within seconds, the disbelief that they would send an agent who looked like she—JLC—did was quickly approaching the unfathomable.

There now was, between them, a silence approaching discomfort which led her to ask, “Don’t you think?”

Shocked, now, out of his mind-freeze, he began nodding as he voiced emphatically, “Yes—yes, indeed! It’s remarkable!”

They smiled at each other. Hers was a smile of affirmation. His was a smile of a memory of what JLC looked like in that little black dress in *True Lies*.

“It really is incredible,” he agreed, again, but with different words.

He maintained the smile on his face which hid the turmoil in his brain.

Conflicts over wanting to know things like, why me; what is it that I’m doing—or have done—that calls for this sort of mission; is there anything genuine about her; is she a cop; how far would she go to get what *they* want; what do *they* want; was their “by chance” meeting being recorded; were any of the other shoppers—like the guy standing at the other kiosk, behind him—in the store fellow agents. The questions fought for vocal supremacy over each other, but after a few more moments of wrestling with the two choices which were being distilled—asking questions or shutting up—he chose to silence himself and wait, postpone everything for now.

He sighed to close the internal dialogue, and then asked, “Do you get that a lot? You know, people coming up to you and telling you?”

She shrugged in a nonchalant way, and said, “Sometimes.”

He was now searching for an exit strategy that would get him out of there, but still leave the little they had, intact. (I mean, after all, she *did* look like JLC, and, by extension—she was equally HOT!)

It was then that her screen went dark. She turned back to it, to try and retrieve where she was in her bank of photos. He sensed a window of opportunity to leave. When the screen lit up—returned—he said, “Look, no sense you losing the time you put into what you’ve been doing and having to start all over, again. So, let me leave you for now so you can finish. Okay?”

“Yeah, you’re right. It would be a bummer to have to start all over. Sure.”

She paused before continuing to conclude.

“So, I’ll see you soon?” she asked.

“Well, seeing on how our paths tend to cross, I’m sure it will be sooner than later.”

She was now looking back and forth from him to the screen.

“I’d like that,” she told him.

“Me too,” he replied feeling as if he were saying it to the real JLC. “Me too,” he repeated, turned and left.

Back in his car, he started it up and sat there for a moment—almost bewildered.

Then, as he looked around the interior of the front seats, the disbelief evaporated once he saw the reddish-orange button on the passenger side door—it was in the open position. The car was unlocked.

Instantly, he became alert, locking the door, scrutinizing all that he could see in the three rear-view mirrors, then checking out the other cars in the parking lot.

“*I wonder if they bugged the car?*” he said to himself, then put the car in drive and slowly headed for the highway. “*But, then, again, if they know what’s in my mind...*” he further told himself, then stopped and allowed the conclusion of the thought to trail off.

Pulling into the flow of traffic, he realized that if they knew about J-L-C, they knew where he lived and probably already had the house bugged, compliments of those guys who serviced his A/C every now and then.

“I need a drink before I go back,” he told himself loud enough for those monitoring the bug in his car to hear.

I should go someplace and see if they either send her—again—or someone else—maybe even someone named—Diane! he concluded.

Knowing that he didn’t have to voice his plan out loud in order to put it in motion, he nevertheless offered it to the transmitter, “Yeah, I need a drink to sort this out. Where could I go at this time of day?”

He paused before continuing. “The bar at the Marriott on the Highway,” he informed them.

It’s amazing, he thought to himself, *how they are capable of knowing what we know before we know that we know it.*

With that, he began to relax, settled down now, almost anticipatory of playing a part in what could be the next chapter of his encounter with “the deep state.”

John Richmond has “wandered” parts of North America for a good portion of his life, from a city on the Great Lakes to a small fishing village (population 200), to Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina and then on to a bigger city on the Great Lakes—Chicago—then eventually, New York City. Since then, he has sequestered himself in his office in a small upstate New York town, where he divides his time between writing and discussing the state of the world with his coonhound buddy Roma.

*Recently, he has appeared in Birmingham Arts Journal (3), Adelaide Magazine (New York/Lisboa) (2), The Green Silk Journal (2), Front Porch Review, The Oddville Press, Rumble Fish Quarterly, Indian Review (India), Pudding Magazine, Ygdrasil (Canada) (2), Oddball Magazine, Lipstick Party Magazine, Hackwriters (U.K.), Quail Bell Magazine, StepAway Magazine (U.K.), The Potomac (2), Peacock Journal, Embodied Effigies (2), Streetcake Magazine (U.K.), Former People Journal (2), The Other Story, Nazar-Look (Romania) (2), Lavender Wolves, Indiana Voice Journal, Fuck Fiction, The Corner Club Press, Danse Macabre du Jour, The Tower Journal, Stone Path Review, Meat for Tea: The Valley Review, Rogue Particles Magazine, From the Depths, Flash Frontier (N. Z.), riverbabble (2), The Writing Disorder, Lalitamba, Poetic Diversity, Marco Polo Arts Magazine, ken*again (2), Black & White, SNReview, Voices de Luna, The Round, Syndic Literary Journal, Slow Train and Forge Journal.*