

**50¢ OFF
A PACK**



**\$5 OFF
A CARTON**

*Style's low price
just got lower.*

IN-STORE OFFER
GOOD WHERE AVAILABLE
WHILE SUPPLIES LAST

happen because it's not for me."

Wanda looked down at the table. "I suppose you're going to stop running around with me." All the brass and bravado drained out of her.

"Just no more Wednesday nights is all. I'm sure you can find someone else to go with you."

"What if I promise that I'll never make any more remarks about how you communicate with men?"

"Wanda, that kind of scene just isn't me anymore."

"It never was."

I couldn't believe my ears. "You mean that you agree with me?"

After lunch, there was a line at the cash register that wound half way around the dining room. We took our place at the end.

"This can't be my bill," I was saying to Wanda. "I didn't have iced tea or cheese cake."

"We'll straighten it out at the register," she assured me.

Suddenly a male voice came out of nowhere: "If you're looking for sex, you came to the wrong place."

I whirled toward the voice and in doing so, knocked Wanda off balance. Horrified, I grabbed for her, but he was there ahead of me.

"I'm sorry," he apologized as he helped Wanda up, "but when I saw you standing beside my table, I couldn't resist."

My face felt hot. "I don't blame you," I said, avoiding his eyes.

"Gabriel . . . Gabriel Langston," he offered, extending his hand.

"Karen Parker," I returned, putting my hand in his.

"Wanda Bromfield. Do you have a friend?"

Instantly, I was glad that I'd knocked her down. I wanted to do it again.

"Actually, I have several. Do you have any particular specifications?"

"Not many: male, reasonably attractive, no older than forty—"

"Wanda! Please!"

"Okay, okay, I can take a hint."

"No, that's all right," Gabriel laughed.

"How about dinner here tonight? My friend, male, reasonably attractive, no older than forty, myself, and the two of you?"

"That'd be great!" Wanda gushed. "What time?"

I tried nudging her with my elbow, but it didn't work.

I stood there while the avalanche buried me. All plans were made and approved without anyone ever again addressing me. There was nothing to do but go back to work and start getting nervous.

When five o'clock finally rolled around I was pretty jittery. Back home, I made trip after trip to the closet, dragging stuff out and putting it back. My cat, Mittens, followed me back and forth, meowing and begging for her supper.

"I'm sorry, Mitty. Mommy's got a lot on her mind." Cats are so understanding. Once she saw the bowl of tuna, she forgot how badly she'd been treated. I wish people were like that.

Wanda was picking me up. She was late

as usual. Why? Why was she late? That was an important question to ask yourself if you wanted to get really riled up.

When I got into the car beside her, I freaked. She was wearing a tight low cut sweater and a skirt that fit like a sausage skin.

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Why?"

"You look like a hooker!"

"Get out of here. This is the style. Why don't you look around sometime."

"The only place that's the style is on the street."

"Oh, yeah, well, you look like a nun."

"I'd rather look like a nun than a hooker on a blind date."

"It's not a blind date," Wanda insisted.

"It's not for me, but it is for you! You've never even met Gabriel's friend. What'll he think when he sees you looking like that?"

"He'll think he's going to get lucky, and he's probably right."

I don't know why I didn't get out then and there. When we got to the hotel, I accompanied Wanda with all the enthusiasm of someone going to be hanged. I could hardly look at her. I half expected someone to come up and offer her twenty dollars before we even got to the dining room.

They were waiting for us at the bar. When Gabriel's friend, Lance, met Wanda, his eyes almost exploded. I could have died. I knew exactly what he was thinking.

"I'll check and see if they have the table ready yet," Gabriel volunteered.

"There's no rush. I think I'd like a drink first." I had the feeling that the night would be easier to handle if I were fortified. Usually I had a glass of white wine.

Tonight I let the bartender talk me into something called a Purple Passion. Its main claim-to-fame seemed to be the sheer amount of alcohol it took to produce one drink.

I practically gulped it down in one shot and ordered another before we even got to the table. Since, as a rule, I didn't drink much, the first drink was all I needed and then some. The second finished me off.

"I can't tell you how glad I am to meet you, Wanda," Lance whispered, covering her hand with his own.

"I'll just bet," I sneered with a sharp sarcastic edge to my voice.

"Karen!" I could tell Wanda was shocked by the sound of my voice. Her face didn't actually come into focus.

I didn't even notice the waitress waiting for me to order. "Have you decided what you want, Miss?"

I hesitated only for a second. "No, I haven't, but I've certainly decided what I don't want. Why don't you ask Wanda what she wants. Or Lance? I'll bet they both know what they want."

Wanda covered for me quickly. "I'll have the pork chops, baked potato, house dressing on my salad, and coffee."

I laughed. "See, I told you Wanda knows what she wants. Problem is everybody else knows what she wants, too."

(Continued on page 62)

92206712