

*Her Part
to Play*

a novel

JENNY ERLINGSSON

“A charming debut. Erlingsson hits the mark with this fun Hollywood-meets-the-South tale of love and healing and finding purpose.”

Rachel Hauck, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Jenny Erlingsson’s debut novel delves deep into the faith of a Hollywood actor and a makeup artist. As they develop a tentative friendship, Erlingsson weaves redemption, grace, and love so masterfully, the reader will reach the end before they’re ready to. I’ll remember the gospel truths and this sweet romance long after the last page.”

Toni Shiloh, Christy Award–winning author

“Readers will care about these immensely likable characters from the very first page and find themselves emotionally invested in their love story and their personal journeys. Jenny Erlingsson has gifted us a romance that is equal parts celebrity glamour and small-town comfort, and while those two things don’t always mix, the true power of Adanne and John’s story is found in how beautifully these characters complement each other. I was deeply touched by this faith-filled story . . . and I also had a whole lot of fun. Fans of Denise Hunter and Toni Shiloh will not want to miss *Her Part to Play!*”

Bethany Turner, author of *Brynn and Sebastian Hate Each Other: A Love Story*

“In Jenny Erlingsson’s *Her Part to Play*, an unlikely pair have as much to learn about themselves as they do each other. What they discover is a powerful lesson in relationships— with the Lord, among friends, within a family, and, of course, between John and Adanne. Erlingsson digs deep in her beautiful debut!”

Robin W. Pearson, Christy Award–winning author
of *Dysfunction Junction*

“What a sparkling, stunning debut! Jenny Erlingsson weaves a Hollywood makeover tale into a hometown setting that warms the heart with—and opens the curtain on—star-crossed lovers faced with learning life’s deepest lessons about who they are in Christ. Then, by faith, they can find their way to the meaning of a lasting, true love that honors him. A modern romance with old-fashioned courage and depth. More, please, from Jenny’s pen!”

Patricia Raybon, Christy Award–winning author of the Annalee Spain Mysteries, including *Truth Be Told*

“Faith and romance are beautifully intertwined in Jenny Erlingsson’s debut novel, *Her Part to Play*. Jenny breathes life into Adanne and John’s transformative journey from conflict to connection, taking readers along for a unique ride with both Hollywood glitz and the warmth of a small town. Adanne’s humor and her undeniable romantic tension with John kept me cheering for them throughout the book. Their story is a testament to God’s faithfulness, a welcome encouragement that sits in your heart long after the last page.”

Michelle Stimpson, author of *Sisters with a Side of Greens*

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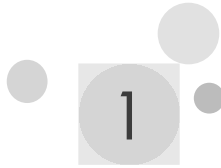
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To My Loves
—Bjarni, Nyema, Thor, Eyja, and Moses—
and to the Lover of My Soul.
John 12:3



Sleep didn't come easily to the brokenhearted. Which was ridiculous. Since said heartbreak was too long ago to count. And had been a long time coming—according to John's mom.

Buzzing took over the silent presidential suite for what felt like the hundredth time. John groaned, wondering why he even bothered to set the alarm clock. He swatted at the appliance, hoping he'd managed to hit the off button before it joined the chorus of his invisible phone.

Licking his lips, he reached for the bottle on his nightstand. The room appeared opaque as he raised the bottle to eye level, peering at his surroundings through the remnants in the glass. Nothing left there either but a few drops. Just enough to frustrate.

He'd been nursing this bottle since early morning. A gift from the production studio, nestled among other sponsored items that had crowded his week-old welcome basket. Congrats after a year out of the limelight. Before that call, he'd ridden the fumes of an independent film that had awards-season talk all over it.

He'd meant for the fizzy drink to stay unopened. Preparation for his role included a strict regimen and diet. Which meant limited sugar. Especially his favorite specialty spicy ginger soda. But certain news had a way of weakening one's resolve.

John lowered the bottle and glanced around for his phone. The buzzing continued, but he couldn't remember where he'd thrown it last night.

Why did I even read that article?

Engaging in the gossip mills the night before today's challenging shoot had not been his intention. But that didn't stop others from sharing the news that sent him spinning.

A shaky hand ran through his almost-shoulder-length hair. He didn't know who he was more upset with, his manager for sending him the article link or himself for still caring so much. In a more orderly world, this bit of news would be the perfect way to bring closure, wipe hands clean of the past. But it felt like a scab being ripped off once again. No matter how many years passed, the sting of rejection still lingered.

Ultimately, ending their two-year relationship had been the right thing to do, even though it was mostly her idea. Somehow that knowledge wasn't enough to defuse the impact of this current development. He should've known that eventually his ex-girlfriend would have someone new.

But did she have to get engaged in just two months?

The buzzing continued to resonate in John's ear. He could only guess who was on the other end of the phone that seemed to be lost in some abyss. He glanced at the clock. Time to get up before he ruined this new opportunity. As excited as the producers were about him joining the project, especially after his pivotal role in last year's critically acclaimed movie, he knew they'd replace him in a heartbeat.

That was the way of the industry he called home.

A glimmer of remembrance came over him. He stretched

his left arm out over the bed, patting the surface of the down comforter until he felt a hard object.

“John! You up and ready?” The chipper voice of his long-time manager blared into his ear as soon as he slid his fingers across the device to answer.

The night had started too late, and he’d woken up way too early for that level of enthusiasm this Friday morning. Did Mike ever sleep?

He cleared his throat to relieve the telltale signs of his junk-food binge.

“Ah, I see. I hear the remnants of too much sugar. Hope you didn’t already destroy all your preproduction work.”

John gave a loud cough and finally cleared his throat. A glance around the bedroom of his presidential suite revealed a pizza box, the empty bottles of the spicy soda, and his favorite European salted-caramel chocolates. His body was going to make him pay for this binge. The days of teenage metabolism were long gone, but sometimes his lack of self-control forgot that.

“Good morning, Mike.”

John placed the phone on speaker, scooting his legs to the side to ease out of bed while his manager continued talking. He paused on the edge of the firm hotel mattress, giving his head time to adjust.

This scenario would have looked completely different a few years ago. Back then, Mike would have already been pounding on John’s hotel door. Or grabbing a key from the front desk himself, assuming his client was hungover from actual alcoholic beverages.

All that had changed two years ago. *Thank God it changed.*

However, the surrender of his life to the faith he’d tiptoed around as a child led to more change than he bargained for. It set off the downward spiral of his longtime relationship with fellow actress and singer Katrina Daline.

Despite the cost, and the news from last night, he intended to remain focused on building his career back up. He would do his best to stay in the limelight and on the straight and narrow.



“Hey, you! Adanne, right?”

Her eyes flew open. *Oh no.* The bright sunlight filtering in through the branches of the tall oak had done nothing to keep her awake. Ugh, she should’ve taken the other makeup assistant up on her offer to grab her an espresso. It was a nice gesture, but she also may have been tired of Adanne’s tenth yawn in five minutes.

The blame for her physical weariness wasn’t on anyone but herself. For the third night in a row, she’d stayed up way too late cleaning at the community center. A good way to cut costs but not if she lost her job from falling asleep. Her role for most of the morning had been to stand by, making sure the extras’ makeup stayed in place, darting in for last looks as needed before the cameras started rolling.

“Yes, you. Come over here.” The assistant director motioned her over.

She squared her shoulders, making her way through the cast and crew gathered at different spots. She adjusted her makeup belt as she walked, checking her tools with just a few pats of her hand.

Despite the chilly January temperatures, the hum of her surroundings had lulled her to a light sleep as she leaned against the trunk of the wide-branched tree.

The movie set was a lot of hurry up and wait. Sometimes it was hard not to ignore the million other things on her list between applications, touch-ups, and everything else she had to do. And apparently, it was hard for her body not to think of dead time as a convenient naptime.

“Flying in,” Adanne mumbled as she approached. She scanned the faces of the people around her in various stages of wardrobe and framing. Everyone’s makeup was still in place, the key artist was posted by the monitors, and no one had called for last looks. She turned to the assistant director, Bo, which was short for something she couldn’t remember at the moment. He certainly couldn’t remember how to say her name. “It’s Ah-dah-neh. How can I help?”

“Stand at this tag.” Bo pointed to the cross-shaped gaffer tape stuck to the ground. “The lead is resting in her trailer. We need you to block a change to this scene so we don’t mess up the wardrobe of the extras.”

Her eyes rounded and her loose braids fell forward as she stared. “Do what now?”

“Stand here.” Bo took her gently by the shoulders, facing her toward the doorway of an old general store. “He’ll come from there, run out, grab your shoulders, and say, ‘It’s time. We are out of time.’ Then you’ll sway—not a faint. Just enough of a step back for him to keep you from falling. Got it?”

Adanne swallowed. How’d she go from a sleepy makeup artist to standing in as an extra? Most of the scenes were blocked before she finished applying the makeup. Surely someone else could do this with the stunt double instead of her standing in the last place she wanted to be . . . at the center of everyone’s attention.

Before she could come up with a better alternative, the stand-in sauntered out of an office building adjacent to the general store. Except, it wasn’t a double.

He approached her, adjusting the suspenders attached to his trousers as he listened to the production assistant who was walking beside him. Adanne blinked, swallowing down the bile rising in her throat. Surely the Lord would allow the Alabama clay to open and swallow her right up. Away from

the man she'd been grateful to avoid since she'd stepped foot on set. The careless actor whose antics got her fired three years ago.

When she glanced back, her eyes landed on the curious gaze of the supporting actor.

He looked more like himself today, at least the version she remembered. According to today's call sheet, he'd be acting as a younger version of his character for this scene. He wore starched pants, a button-down shirt, and a bow tie to accent his professor-turned-older-vigilante look. He reached up but paused midair. A wry grin crossed his face. He probably remembered that the hair department wouldn't take it lightly if he ran his hand through his locks. As he approached, his fake rimmed glasses failed to cover the weary look in his eyes.

Adanne couldn't deny the twinge in her chest if she wanted to. She was her mother's daughter after all.

"You good?" The hushed words slipped out before she could catch them. His condition was none of her business. But the nervous energy pulsing through her had loosened her mouth. He blinked at her in question and scoffed without answering.

"Okay, John!" The assistant director stepped closer. Adanne pulled her eyes away from the actor, squashing the pang of compassion that had no business infiltrating her chest. He didn't deserve it anyhow. "Adanne is standing in while you run the lines. Saves us having to search through the extras. And she's the right size."

If Adanne hadn't been in shock, she might have given the director a side-eye. It wasn't anyone's job on or off this set to size her up for anything. Why in the world was she positioned opposite John Pope of all people?

Bo pulled away from John, who retreated back to his starting position. Adanne shifted toward the general store. Her stomach tightened in rebellion against the path her thoughts

wanted to take. This should have sent waves of nausea or at least annoyance. Instead her core was tense with anticipation. John barreled out and stopped right in front of her. He grabbed her shoulders lightly and said the needed lines.

Adanne nodded, faltering the way she was told. Tingles rippled through her as John caught and lifted her, setting her firmly on her feet. She would not win a gold statue for this performance, but if it helped keep the schedule moving, she would continue. Because there was no drifting off after this. Her senses were awake and on high alert. Maybe it was a trick of the set lights causing the gleam in John's eyes of olive green.



“Okay, we’re ready to rehearse!”

John placed the woman on her feet for the fifth time. The lingering feel of her in his arms seeped through his long-sleeved shirt, her warmth still tangible on his skin. Her eyes were captivating, even with her gaze averted as much as she could manage.

A production assistant handed her a makeup belt. She snapped it around her waist, a slight tremor in her fingers. Having a stand-in block scenes was a typical part of the process. But something about her manner accosted his heart. And her question, “You good?” caught him off guard.

The wardrobe head stepped in, adjusting John's shirt while he chided himself for being immersed in the choices of his ex. Maybe his frustration wouldn't be obvious to a random makeup artist.

Of course his team wanted to make sure they prepped him for a response just in case. But there was no prep for having a Band-Aid ripped off of what you should be over.

And no reason why he should have been left reeling by

two words from a stranger with a disquiet in her eyes that seemed to match his own.

“Thanks for your help, we’re good now.” The AD placed a hand on the woman’s shoulder, his nod of dismissal giving her permission to exit. She pivoted before John could say anything. Or even ask her name.

His gaze lingered on her from within the mass of wardrobe adjustments and crew instructions swirling around him. He shouldn’t have been so distracted by her purposeful steps or the shoulders that looked like they carried a world of burdens. Or the warm press of her hand that still lingered on his arms.