

Pick Me

by Wendy Weiss

Nancy Jean resisted pushing the colorful, cube-shaped button in the center of the TV remote, but only for a minute. It was Sunday morning and the weather cold, but sunny. I should be outside, she thought, sweeping the porch or raking leaves. But the need to just do nothing, the anticipation of finding a new TV series that she could watch all day, was just too compelling.

She arranged the sofa pillows and kicked off her sneakers, then slid the ottoman in close. Her body slouched into the soft furniture and she tossed a blanket over her legs.

The menu of programs was extensive and overwhelming. Nancy scrolled and searched, stopped and selected, read the descriptions and exited to the next. She sighed. But then she scrolled one more time, and an image and title caught her eye.

"Pick Me," was a single episode, unique for this type of TV. A plain looking woman wearing an open trench coat stood with her hands in her pockets on an empty city street. The buildings loomed over her. *Were they falling?* This has potential, she thought.

Nancy pressed the remote button to select the program and read the description, but there were no words displayed, only the title, "Pick me." She pressed the select button again to play the single episode. The show began with no title, no credits, no producer, just the woman on the empty city street. She took a step forward and appeared to be looking directly at Nancy, slumped on her couch. Her coat was pulled back from the wind and Nancy could see her clothes, a simple pencil skirt worn halfway between her ankles and knees, and a white blouse. Her shoes were black, mary-jane style with a low heel. Her hair was coiffed in a fifties or early sixties style, and she wore bright red lipstick. *Was she the only character in the show?* She took another step

forward and then pulled her hand out of her pocket. *Was that a cell phone?* It was out of place, in the wrong time line.

The woman looked at her phone and tapped with her thumb. A moment later, Nancy was startled by her cell phone ringing.

"Jesus!" She scrambled off the couch, her legs tangled in the blanket and she lunged for the phone that sat on the kitchen counter.

"Hello?"

"Pick me." A woman's voice said.

Nancy listened in silence for a second and then said,

"Who is this?"

The woman repeated herself, "Pick me."

Nancy disconnected the call and set it back on the counter as if it was too hot to hold. A shiver ran up her back and she went back to the sofa then pulled the blanket over herself.

The woman on the TV was holding out her phone, aiming it at Nancy. *Was that her? This is crazy!* The woman took a few steps closer, and the buildings and street darkened behind her. She was so real, three-dimensional on the TV screen and the expression on her face was one of desperation. Nancy turned off the TV. She kicked off the blanket again and decided that watching TV was a bad idea. *No binge TV today. I'm going for a walk.*

She tied the laces on her sneakers and opened her coat closet, reaching for her black ski parka and spotted her trench coat pressed against the side wall of the closet. Her mind flashed on the creepy woman on the TV but before the coat could elicit a reaction, she was startled again by her ringing phone. She pulled her parka off the hanger and slid on the jacket walking back to the counter. The caller ID read, "Unknown." Nancy sent the call to voicemail.

She decided to take the twenty-minute walk to her sister's house and see if she wanted to have lunch together. Certainly, it was a better choice than watching some creepy TV show.

The cold air hit her face as she stepped onto the front porch. It felt good to be wakened from her laziness and a walk was exactly what she needed.

Nancy tapped her sister's image on the phone, and the call was answered on the first ring.

"Jen?"

Jen didn't say anything but Nancy could hear her breathing.

"Jen? Are you there? I can hear you breathing."

Still no acknowledgment. Nancy disconnected the call and waited a few seconds, intending to call her sister again, but the phone rang in her hand. She accepted the call without reading the caller ID.

"Jen?"

"Pick me." The woman's voice said.

The hairs stood on the back of her neck as the cold wind rustled the fallen leaves on the porch. Fear rose inside her.

"What is this? What do you want? Who are you?"

"Pick me." The woman was pleading, drawing out the "Me."

Nancy didn't know what to do.

"Okay, okay...I pick you. Now please stop calling me!"

She quickly disconnected the call and then tapped her sister's face on her phone. This time there was no answer. *Something's wrong*. She tried again, and the call connected.

"Jen? Is everything alright?"

She heard Jen breathing again, and she also heard something in the background, a faint voice, a woman's voice. THAT voice.

"Pick me."

"Jen! Turn off the TV now! Do it now!" Nancy screamed into the phone. But her sister didn't answer. She ran back into the house and grabbed the car keys. Tears broke free from her eyes, and she wiped one away from her cold cheek. Once in the car, she called her sister again, only this time she chose the facetime button. The call connected.

"Jen! Look at me!" But all she could see was the big screen TV with the woman in the trench coat walking toward her sister, waving her phone.

"Jen! Turn off the TV!" But then she remembered that the woman hadn't called HER back.

"Jen, say I pick you. Just say it...I... pick...you! Do it!"

Her sister didn't respond, and the call was disconnected.

Nancy drove as fast as she could in her busy, pedestrian neighborhood. She rounded the corner on her sister's street screeching the tires and noted a man on the corner waving at her to slow down.

She left the car engine running and rushed to the door. It was locked. She banged on the door with the bottom of her fist and rang the doorbell. No answer. *Where is she? The back door!* Nancy ran around the side of the house and climbed through the thick hedge. Her jacket caught on a branch, tearing the fabric. She wrenched her arm free and shimmied around to the back, pinning herself against the sliding doors, cupping her eyes to see inside.

There she is! Nancy slapped her hands on the glass door but Jen didn't flinch. Nancy screamed, "Jen, open the door!" No motion, no acknowledgment. Nancy moved to the far end of

the door to see where her sister's eyes were aimed. *Oh, my God! The TV, the woman on the TV with her fists buried in her coat pocket, is gawking at my sister.* Jen was frozen, staring. "Jen! Jen!" Nancy screamed. "Just say I pick you. Do it now! Jen, do it!" Jen was frozen, stuck in her stance, staring at the TV.

Nancy yanked the sliding door hard, and it popped open. She lost her balance as the door slid in the track, nearly falling, but she held firm on the handle with one hand and scrambled to her feet. *She's gone!* "Jen!"

No answer. Nancy ran toward the front of the house, to the living room and dining room. *Where is she?* She went back to the family room and looked at the TV. Sweat plastered her hair to her head, and her heart pounded in her throat. She picked up the TV remote and pushed the colored, cubic shaped button.

"Jen!" There THEY were. Walking together, hands buried in pockets. They looked back at Nancy through the TV and smiled.