

Chapter 1

What, Jas — *you're* going to be in charge of marketing instead? In case you've forgotten, you hate people."

Jasmine Santoro narrowed her eyes as she stared her brother down.

Basil snapped his fingers and leaned back in his chair. "I almost forgot. You also hate computers. So, I'd love to hear your marketing plans." He gave her a wide fake grin and drummed the laminate table. "Go ahead."

She surged to her feet and paced across the kitchen of the house the guys had moved into recently. The place was rundown, but the real reason they'd snapped it up was the massive backyard, perfect for the garden that would launch their new business in growing vegetables for retail. "Okay, maybe not me. But someone else."

"Jas, seriously. What's wrong with bringing Nathan Hamelin on board? He's back in Bridgeview, and he's got the creds."

She opened her mouth and closed it again.

“You’ve got to be kidding. He’ll bail out at the first sign of greener pastures elsewhere. The guy doesn’t have an ounce of staying power.” A fact she’d learned the hard way seven years back.

Basil rolled his eyes. “Give it up, Jas. He transferred to UCLA. That was a proactive move for his education. He wasn’t abandoning Gonzaga U.”

“So it’s just *me* he was abandoning?” The words spilled from her lips before she could choke them back.

“Oh, come on. You guys were kids. You expected him to give up a brilliant future and have babies with you straight out of high school?”

Jasmine raised her chin. “Other people have married their high school sweethearts and had a great marriage.”

“Like who? And don’t say our parents. Someone our age.”

“Marco.” She named their older brother.

“He was twenty-two. Still awfully young, in my opinion, but out of college.” Basil shook his head. “Millennials don’t get hitched until their late twenties. I don’t blame Nathan for heading to California. The guy needed some air from

you.”

She stiffened. Why was she planning to go into business with the least favorite of her four brothers again? Right. Bridgeview Backyards was their cousin Peter’s brainchild. Peter she could trust to make level-headed decisions. Only, why wasn’t he here shooting down Basil’s dumb idea to hire her former boyfriend? “There has to be someone else who can do a better job. Someone who’s up-to-date on the Spokane vibe.” Someone who wasn’t Nathan Hamelin. Anyone.

“Get over it, Jas.”

Voices outside grew louder. Boots stomped on the concrete back steps. The porch door creaked open.

No. She should’ve been gone before now. She couldn’t be caught here if that happened to be Nathan arriving with Peter. She shot a glance around the room, but the recliner Basil had inherited from Dad blocked the front door with unpacked boxes stacked around it. Besides, her boots and coat were in the entry.

Basil leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms, chuckling. It had to be Nathan in the porch, kicking off his boots, clanging the hangers.

Jasmine pointed at her big brother. “I don’t

even like you,” she growled.

He shrugged, and the door opened. Two men entered. Peter... and Nathan.

Her heart stuttered. This Nathan had matured, at least in looks. He'd filled out some — but not too much — looking self-assured in jeans and a light gray Henley. His blond hair was shorter than it used to be, and a trimmed beard softened his square jaw. His blue eyes collided with hers. Wariness seeped out.

She straightened to her full height, a solid eight inches shorter than his six feet, and managed to keep her arms from crossing protectively over her chest. “Nathan. What a surprise.”

“Jasmine.” His gaze ran the length of her before meeting her eyes once again. “You look good.”

Right. In her old jeans and a plaid shirt. If she'd known she'd be seeing him, she'd have dabbed on some makeup and worn that new — no. She'd have smeared dirt on her face and worn baggy sweats. That's what. His opinion of her didn't matter... though it might be fun to see regret on his face.

That would never happen. He'd had a new

girlfriend in L.A. within a week of leaving Spokane. There hadn't even been a backward glance to what he'd left behind.

Peter shifted from one foot to the other, his gaze flicking between them. "Hey, Jas. Didn't expect to see you here."

Really? She forced a smile to her face. "That seems obvious. I popped by to drop off a new supply of herbal tea, but don't worry. I was just leaving."

"No need to rush away." Peter took a step closer. "Let me put on a pot of coffee, and we can talk."

"I'm not sure there's anything to discuss." Jasmine eyed the path to the door, but she'd have to brush past Nathan to get there. So not happening.

"I just told her Hamelin's joining the team." Basil slung his arm over the back of the vacant chair beside him. "She seems to be hung up on ancient history."

A fierce spurt of red shot through Jasmine's vision, and she clenched her fists against her thighs. If only she could smack that smirk off her brother's face, but she wouldn't give Nathan the satisfaction of seeing how much effect he still

had over her. She breathed in and out to a count of five — twice, for good measure — and willed down the impulse. “Thanks, Basil. You’re the best brother a girl could ever want.” Too bad sarcasm leaked out with every word.

Basil tipped his head in acknowledgment, his grin widening.

Did her brother seriously live to tick her off? Was that his primary goal in life? And why hadn’t she run for the door already?



Awkward silence surrounded Nathan Hamelin as he stood in the doorway of his friends’ rental. Jasmine. She looked amazing, her long dark hair pulled into a low ponytail. She’d always looked great, no matter what she wore, but faded jeans and a plaid flannel shirt open over a black fitted T-shirt reminded him she’d never cared what others thought and looked fabulous anyway. She was all Jasmine.

Man, he’d been an idiot to bolt out of her life back then. They’d been an item for a couple of years, but her talk of weddings and babies

terrified him. No way had he been ready to settle down. Not by a long shot. But instead of explaining his feelings to her and trying to slow the relationship, he'd run.

Hadn't helped comparing the thick-as-thieves Santoro clan to the sparse and barely connected Hamelins. How did someone get any privacy with practically all their family living within a few blocks of each other and in each other's business every day? And Marietta, Jasmine's grandmother, ruled the roost. He'd been terrified of the outspoken Italian woman.

Now he was only terrified of Jasmine, but somehow his gaze had tangled up with hers. He took a step backward, his hand groping for the doorknob. "I, uh, I don't need to be here."

Peter and Basil exchanged a glance. "I think you probably do," said Basil.

Peter plucked a key ring off the kitchen counter. "I can show you the basement suite now."

"Pardon me?" Jasmine stepped closer, fists settling on her hips. "What did you say?"

Peter chewed on his lip. "Uh, Nathan might subtilt the lower level from us, but he needs to see it first."

“Of course.” Jasmine shot a fiery glance at Nathan. “Renting from you makes all kinds of perfect sense, since he’ll be working for you and all.”

“Yeah, that’s what we thought.” Peter’s shoulders relaxed.

Premature, Santoro. Didn’t you hear the tone?

“And you two didn’t think to run this by me?” She pinned her cousin then her brother with her gaze. “I suppose Alex knew, and no one thought I should get a chance to voice my opinion? Which is a bit unfair, don’t you think? None of the rest of you *dated* him.”

Nathan winced. She was certainly voicing her viewpoint now. Not that he didn’t deserve her wrath, but he’d hoped time would have helped her see how wrong they’d been for each other.

“I-I’m sorry?” Peter’s gaze ricocheted between them. “You were on that essential oil retreat at Green Acres Farm when Basil brought up hiring Nathan. He said your relationship was water under the bridge.”

Basil spread his hands. “It’s been years. I thought it would be.”

Nathan had thought so, too. Oh, he couldn’t

deny the mixed feelings that had stampeded through him when he'd seen the Santoro surname on her Facebook profile. Searching Jasmine out had only been idle curiosity, and her 'about' page had been sparse with her updates and photos locked down to friends-only, so he couldn't find out more. She'd have moved on long ago. He had, after all. There'd been Kendra and Pauline and then Rae, whom he'd thought might actually be The One before he'd discovered her addiction to gambling in hopes of covering her mounting credit card debt.

"I *am* over Nathan." She spit out the words.

Basil snickered.

"I just didn't think this was how we were going to run our business. I know I'm not slated to come on board full-time for another two years, but now I'm not sure I want to. Ever." She started for the door. "Excuse me, please."

Nathan shifted out of her way, but Peter stepped into it. "You're quitting because Basil hired Nathan? Look, we should have talked it through with you and Alex, but we didn't. I'm sorry. Really. Can we talk about this?"

Alex. Jasmine's younger brother was a CPA working for a big firm downtown, at least

according to Facebook. Nathan remembered him as a scrawny teen who'd hero-worshiped his sister's boyfriend. Nathan had kind of liked that. Which meant Alex would be just as happy as Jasmine to see him back in Bridgeview. Great.

"No, doofus. I'm not quitting because of *him*." She shot Nathan a scowl. "I'm out because we were supposed to be a team, and teams don't make decisions without discussion." This time Basil received the brunt of her glare. "And because my big brother thinks it's hilarious to hide things from me and mock me. I can't trust him as a business partner."

Basil rolled his eyes. "Oh, give it up, Jas. So I screwed up. Sorry. It won't happen again." The sardonic grin lessened marginally.

Jasmine shook her head, her ponytail swinging from side to side. "I'm leaving now. I'll talk to you guys later. Some of you, anyway." She sidestepped Peter and pinned Nathan with a glare, jerking her thumb sideways. "Excuse me, please."

He shifted out of her way as she strode past, the whiff of something sweet yet woodsy wafting over him. She smelled so... Jasmine. A minute later the porch door all but slammed shut. Then

silence.

“Man, that didn’t go over well.” Peter grimaced. “I should have trusted my instincts and found time to consult with her about this.”

“Why?” Basil stretched his long legs under the table and crossed his ankles. “It was so much more fun this way.”

Why had Nathan considered Jasmine’s older brother one of his keeper friends again? He’d known there was little love lost between that pair of siblings, which had seemed a good thing until now, or at least an okay thing. But Jasmine didn’t deserve to be treated like this. “I’ll find a different rental.” Where? Moving in with his dad, even temporarily, wasn’t an option. Nathan shoved the thought aside. “I’ll find plenty of work in freelance marketing, so don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine.”

Peter shook his head. “Splitting the rent one more way will make a big difference to our cash flow this first season. And we need someone experienced to help us figure out how to keep our numbers, not only in the black, but growing. Alex is doing our books. He’s given us our homework, but we need help with a plan to meet his projections.”

“Well, I say having Hamelin on board is more important than my sister.” Basil pulled to his feet. “We can get honey from any number of sources, and her herbs and stuff are no big deal. Anyone can grow them.”

Oh, boy. Good thing Jasmine couldn’t hear, or those glares would turn into fireworks worthy of the Fourth of July.

Peter shook his head, his mouth tight, as he tossed the keys from one hand to the other. “First things first. Let me show you the suite, Hamelin. We’ll give it a day or two and figure out what to do next.”

It wasn’t like Nathan had any other options for a place to sleep. Not tonight, anyway, but he’d better start looking. Being on the wrong side of Jasmine meant being on the wrong side of her grandmother, and that meant Bridgeview would be a mighty uncomfortable place to live. Just what he needed.

Wishes on Wildflowers

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