

Chapter 1

Jason tried to keep his anticipation in check. But he was revved, maybe even a little giddy. It was almost embarrassing. Then again, Brian was a good friend. Not just a good friend, a great one. Some friends hold that special title that make it okay to be giddy when you haven't seen them in a while. Brian was one of them.

So where was he? It was already after seven. He should have been here by now. Damn consultants. Throwing their travel plans into a spin at the mere mention of a billable hour. Jason took a seat at the bar, and his uncle greeted him by drawing a beer from the nearest battery of taps.

“Hi Carl. Brian isn't here yet?”

“No. Not yet,” Carl smiled. “Here, wait it out over a pint of Bass.”

Great, now Carl could tell he was giddy. He sure didn't miss much. Jason took a sip of the ale. Calm and sweet with a hint of caramel. Always comforting to the taste buds. Maybe a moment to himself wasn't such a bad thing.

He looked toward the entryway. So what was the game plan? He wouldn't hit Brian with the news right off. But he couldn't wait too long either. Once they had a chance to get caught up a bit, he would tell him.

What would Brian say? For sure he would be disappointed. That wouldn't be good. The last thing he wanted to do was to drag Brian down. Jason would have to manage that. Jesus, maybe, he was blowing this out of proportion. Stuff like this happens all the time, right? But still. It was a good idea to talk about it. Considering he hadn't told anyone. Not a soul.

Enough stress. Carl's was quiet, calm. Jason was about to meet up with an old friend. It was a perfect night for catching up. Maybe what he really needed was to come by here more often. The quieter times helped him unwind. Clearly he was the better for it, arriving home with an improved outlook on things. Yes, an after work stop at The Belgian was simply good medicine. If only he

could only get Stacy to see the therapeutic value of these visits. Jason's phone broke the silence. "Brian, where are you?"

"I'm running a little late. Flight was delayed."

"No way. How long?"

"Half hour or so."

"But you landed."

"Yeah. Getting in a cab now. You in a hurry or something?"

"Just get over here, already."

"Okay, keep your shirt on, Dag."

Jason couldn't help but smile at the nickname. His old handle. Talk about rusty. "It will be good to see you, my man. Later."

"Hey, Dag. Wait."

"What is it?"

"Can you do me a favor?"

"Yeah, what do you need?"

"Is it crowded?" Brian asked.

"Here at Carl's?"

"Yeah."

Jason looked around. "No. Not yet anyway."

"Good, that should make it easier. Do you see a girl with sandy blonde hair? Probably by herself. ."

Jason surveyed the tavern, and his eyes came to rest on a young woman sitting at the opposite end of the bar. "You there?" Brian asked.

"Yeah. I'm here."

"Any luck? Usually has her hair pulled up neatly. . Pretty eyes."

"There is a girl sitting at the bar." He looked at the young woman again, and she returned the look.

Where was Brian going with this?

"Good looking, right?" Brian asked.

"Yeah, I would say so. So what's up with her?"

"Nothing. I work with her. She flew in today, and I asked her to join us."

"You did?"

“Yeah. She's a sweetie.” Brian paused. “You're okay with that, right? With her joining us I mean.”

“I guess.” A wrinkle in his game plan. He would have to be patient. “That's fine.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. We'll have time to catch up later.”

“Absolutely. Anyway, would you let her know I'm running a little late?”

Jason glanced at the young woman again.

“Okay.”

“Good. I'm hanging up. I'll see you in a little while.”

“Okay. Hurry up.” Jason quickly spoke into the receiver. “Hey, Brian?”

“What is it?”

“You didn't tell me her name.” He waited for Brian's response. “Brian?”

“Trinity.”

“Trinity?”

“Yeah.”

“All right,” Jason said. “Later, Ivy.”

Jason rose to his feet. He looked around the bar one more time just to make sure that no other patron fit her description. He walked over to her and noticed she was looking at him as he approached.

“Hello, I'm Jason D'agastino,” he said, anxious to explain the reason for his intrusion.

“Hello.” There was a curious look in her eyes, which seemed to linger over his frame. The kind of look that made him self-conscious. It was something that he had never quite gotten used to - girls checking him out. He wouldn't go so far as to curse his tall, athletic build, but some days he felt he could do without it.

“I'm sorry to bother you, but are you Trinity?”

“Trinity? No, not me.”

“You're not?”

Now she seemed to be taking note of his dark hair. Next would be his eyes. “So you're not Trinity?” Jason asked.

“No. Sorry.” There was a trace of disappointment in her voice.

“You don't know Brian Ives?”

“Who?”

“Brian Ives. Tall, slim guy. Looks just old enough to be in high school.”

“No.”

“Oh, well.” Probably better to explain things. “I'm meeting a friend here and he works with a girl named Trinity, who apparently looks just like you. She's meeting him here, and I thought you might be her. Anyway, sorry.”

“That's all right. No worries.”

Jason started back to his chair at the other end of the bar.

“You can stay if you want,” she said. “While you're waiting.”

Jason's phone rang. “Excuse me a sec.”

“Did you find her?” Brian asked.

“No. There's a girl who looks like her. But it's not her. And I don't see anyone else that fits her description.”

“No way.”

“Nope,” Jason replied.

“It's her. It must be. She has a wacky sense of humor. Ask her again.”

“What? *No.*”

“I'm telling you, she's just messing with you.”

She sipped her martini and glanced at him. Jason looked away. “I don't think so, Brian.”

“She's good that way. Just ask her again.”

She certainly fit the description Brian had given. And Brian was right about her eyes. Much like the shade of clover. Jason turned to her with some reluctance.

“You're not Trinity? I mean, are you kidding with me?”

She smiled. "No. I'm not."

"C'mon. Admit it." Jason put forth a commendable effort.

"Really, I'm not. My name is April."

He turned back to the receiver. "Dude, it's not her."

"Care to place a wager?"

Jason sighed. "When are you going to get here?"

"How much?"

"You're not even here yet, and you're already starting wagers."

"We'll keep it light. Ten bucks."

"You really think it's her?"

"Yes."

Jason turned back to the girl. "All right. C'mon. Your cover is up. Brian tells me you're good for a laugh. He's on the phone now."

She sat back in her chair and folder folded her arms. "There is no cover. I don't know what else to tell you. Can we change the subject?"

Carl came over with Jason's beer. "You forgot this."

"Thanks."

He peered over Jason's shoulder and squinted toward the tavern's front windows. He crouched behind the bar for a second and resurfaced with two highballs and a bottle of Scotch.

The label caught Jason's eye right away. "Wow. Who's ordering that?"

Carl proceeded to break the seal. "I am."

"What?"

"Friendships are a better part of one's life," Carl said. He fixed his nephew with a rich smile. "And tonight, Jason, we are celebrating friendships."

"You can count me in."

The voice was all too familiar, and Jason turned to see Brian standing in the doorway. He was wearing a

mischievous grin and doing all he could to keep from rupturing with laughter.

“You've been here the whole time, haven't you?” Brian labored to keep a straight face. “Haven't you?” Now came the incriminating laugh. “You are such a dweeb.” He stuck a finger at Brian, and then swung toward the young woman. “So you *are* Trinity.”

“Will someone explain what is going on here? I am *not* Trinity. My name is April.”

Jason studied them. He didn't know who to believe. “Who is she, Brian?”

Brian shook with violent laughter. It was a fight for him just to get the words out. “I have no idea.”

“What?”

“I've never seen her before in my life.” Brian was wiping tears from his eyes. “I just saw her through the window and went with it.” He managed to compose himself for a moment. “But you should have seen yourself.”

“You devilish bastard.”

Brian lunged toward Jason and put him in a soft headlock. “Great to see you, my friend.”

Jason wriggled loose. “You bastard. I can't believe I let you sucker me.” He never saw it coming. Heck, he had other things on his mind. On a clearer day, Brian never could have pulled it off. “Bastard. You got me.”

“Hi Carl,” Brian greeted.

“Good to see you, Brian,” Carl answered. He handed Brian a glass. “Welcome back to The Belgian.”