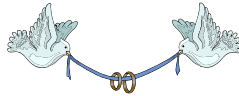


Chapter Two



“How did it go?” Danielle Pearce asked as Amy entered the travel agency which was a good six blocks from the Rudolph headquarters.

Amy placed her purse on her desk and sat in her seat. Tucking her hair behind her ear, she shrugged, “I don’t know. I think it went alright, but part of me thinks that my answers were dumb.”

“You always think you do poorly and end up getting what you’re striving for.”

“That’s the strange thing. I mean, I didn’t even apply for this promotion.”

“I guess the higher ups saw your excellent customer service report.” Danielle sighed and took a sip from her bottled water. “Lucky me. I let PMS get in my way of being pleasant all the time.”

Amy laughed. “Oh come on. You do fine.”

“I don’t know. There was Murphy.”

“Yeah, but Murphy was crazy. It’s not like you can go into the system and magically change the price of an airline

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ticket.” She logged into her computer. “What was the price he wanted to pay?”

“\$100 for a roundtrip ticket to Mexico.”

“Like I said, he was crazy.”

Danielle giggled. “Yeah, I guess he was. He had me rattled up so bad that it took my husband giving me two backrubs and making a hot bubble bath before I was able to calm down.”

Amy smiled and shook her head. “And here I thought the two day shopping spree we did at the mall did the trick.”

“Well, I admit that helped a teeny tiny bit.”

A woman with two children walked into the agency.

“Go on to lunch. I grabbed a bite to eat on my way back,” Amy told her best friend. “I’ll take care of them.”

Danielle eagerly picked up her purse. “Who am I to argue with the one who was interviewed for the new job?”

Amy playfully rolled her eyes. The ordeal would have meant more if she knew exactly what this new job was. All she’d gotten was an email from Tyler Jackson stating that the board members—whoever they were—had taken a look at her job performance and thought she might qualify for a job promotion. It didn’t say what the promotion was for, but there were rumors floating around that a position in marketing had just opened up, and Amy thought that could be fun.

Pushing her questions aside, she stood up and approached the clients. “Good afternoon. May I help you?”

The mother nodded. “Yes. My husband and I want to go on a cruise.” She glanced at her children. “The grandparents said they’d watch these two guys.”

“Then it really is a vacation,” Amy teased. “Alright. If you come this way, I’ll see what I can do for you.” She led the woman to her desk and got down to business.

What Nathan Wants

The afternoon passed by uneventfully, and just as Danielle and Amy were about to close the agency for the day, Mr. Rudolph walked into the place, followed by Mr. Jackson.

Danielle's eyes widened as she met Amy's startled gaze.

Amy knew what the look her friend was giving her meant, and Amy's heart did crazy flip flops. She must have gotten the job. After all, the president of the company didn't pay a personal visit just to tell the interviewee that he wouldn't hire her. But still, why would Mr. Rudolph come? Shouldn't he send her an email or have Tyler do that?

Mr. Rudolph walked up to Amy, a pleasant smile on his handsome face. He extended his hand to her, and despite her surprise, she shook it. "Congratulations, Amy. You should clear out your desk since you no longer work here. You have been chosen."

Danielle gave her a thumbs up sign.

Amy smiled. "Thank you, Mr. Rudolph. Exactly what is the new job?" She couldn't accept it until she knew what she'd be getting herself into.

"You will be my wife."

Danielle's jaw dropped and Mr. Jackson winced.

Amy stood there in shock, just shaking his hand.

"Take this week to pretty yourself up for the wedding." He released her hand and pulled out his business card. "If you need to ask me any questions before the 23rd, you can reach me at that number."

"Don't forget the email address," Mr. Jackson dryly added.

"Oh, right. Yes. Amy, you are certainly welcome to email me too. Now, I don't want you to worry about a thing, so I took care of all the wedding arrangements, including the ring. There is one thing you'll need to do though, and that is getting the dress. Just tell whatever bridal shop you go to that I sent you and they'll send the bill to me. I don't want to make this a big to do, so I will send a limo to your apartment and we'll get married at my house.

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Feel free to invite whoever you want. I will have my secretary give you more details in a package she's gathering together. Hopefully, that will be on your doorstep tomorrow before noon."

Danielle, who hadn't budged from her spot, still had her jaw lowered in shock.

Mr. Jackson just shook his head as if he couldn't believe this was happening.

And when Amy returned her gaze to Mr. Rudolph, she realized that he wasn't joking. Nope. He was as serious as could be. And not only was he serious, but he was grinning at her as if he had just announced that she won the lottery. Well, she was going to put a stop to this before it got out of hand.

"No," she said.

He blinked. "No what?"

"I'm keeping my job here."

"But it's against company policy for me to marry you if you work for me."

"Which is a good reason why you can't do this."

"Of course, I can. In case you aren't aware of the implications of marrying me, I have to fire you."

"Fire me?"

"Or you can quit. Either way, I think you'll find your unemployment package to your liking. You'll have access to my checking account and everything."

Her cheeks grew hot. "I don't want your checking account."

Danielle finally closed her jaw and mouthed the words, *He's rich.*

Amy already knew that, but she didn't care. "We do not have an agreement. I will not marry you. I will keep working here."

His eyebrows rose in surprise. "Why?"

What Nathan Wants

“Because I don’t like being told what to do, that’s why. I’m an adult. I’m not a child who needs my decisions made for me.”

“But you can’t do better than me.”

Behind him, Tyler groaned and rubbed his eyes.

Amy glared at Nathan. Tall, dark, good looking...and an ego to boot! “I’m surprised you don’t just club me on the head and drag me back to your cave.”

“Do you really prefer such hostile treatment?”

“I don’t see how what you’re doing is much better.”

His eyes grew wide. “I just offered you a good deal.”

Crossing her arms, she said, “I’m not marrying you, and there’s nothing you can do that will make me.”

“But the arrangements are being made as we speak. I even got tickets to visit your parents.”

“My parents are in on this?” she asked in horror.

“No. They don’t know yet. I meant that we’ll go see them for our honeymoon.”

“Feel free to go, but I won’t be joining you.” In a huff, she grabbed her purse and stomped past him. “Come on, Danielle. Let’s get out of here before I shove something up his butt.” *Like my foot.* Really. The nerve! How dare he treat her as if she were an object he could purchase from a store? Congratulations, indeed! The man was a big oaf! She reached the door, turned and realized that Danielle hadn’t budged from her spot. “Danielle!”

Danielle bit her lower lip and shrugged. “Are you sure you don’t want to at least think about it?”

“Danielle,” Amy growled.

“Okay. I’m coming.” Danielle gave Mr. Rudolph and Mr. Jackson a timid smile before she took her purse and joined her friend.

“This is ridiculous,” Nathan called out, looking bewildered. “I’ve chosen you, Ms. Watson, and I have every intention of marrying you.”

Ruth Ann Nordin

Fighting the urge to scream, Amy threw the door open and hurried outside. *I've chosen you, Ms. Watson, and I have every intention of marrying you.* He had a lot of nerve!

Danielle had to run to keep up with her. "You know, I don't mean to pry—"

"Good. Then don't." Amy reached her car and shoved her key into the lock.

"But he is rich...and gorgeous."

"There's more to a man than how much he makes or how he looks."

"True. But you could have your own house with all the money he makes. Think of all the shopping sprees you can have, and you don't even have to work for it."

"You can't be serious."

Danielle shrugged. "If it were me, I'd take him up on it."

She rolled her eyes and yanked her car door open. "And I thought you had standards."

"I do. I have plenty of standards. Like, a real diamond instead of a cubic zirconium. Real gold instead of the fake stuff. Spas, clothes that have labels I could actually show the public, fancy restaurants... What more could a woman ask for?"

Amy jumped into her seat and slammed the door. Rolling down her window, she shook her head. "You disappoint me, Danielle."

"What? Why? Do you really want to spend the rest of your life from paycheck to paycheck?"

"I'll see you tomorrow."

"Alright. Try not to get into an accident."

Amy caught sight of Mr. Rudolph talking to Mr. Jackson as they left the agency. She resisted the urge to run the rat over and sped away in the opposite direction.

What Nathan Wants

The next day, Amy returned to work, relieved when she saw that her stuff was still there on her desk. Good.

“Hey, girl,” Danielle called out as she stepped out of the backroom with a coffee cup in her hand. “Feeling better?”

“Yeah.” Amy placed her purse on her desk and sat down. She turned on her computer. “I still can’t believe the nerve of our boss.”

She shrugged and sat down, still holding the cup in her hands. “You know, you should be flattered. I heard he interviewed almost every single woman in his company, and he picked you.”

She rolled her eyes. “Yay for me.”

Giggling, she added, “That says a lot about you and you know it. You’re still attractive.”

“Like I said, ‘Yay for me.’”

“Must you be so negative? If nothing else, you could spend the rest of your life enjoying his money. I bet you could buy a car for each day of the week. Why, you could probably head out to Paris just because you wanted to have lunch there.”

“Too bad you married a teacher.”

“You know I wouldn’t give up Randy for anyone.”

“Yeah. I know, but I also know you’d marry Mr. Rudolph in a heartbeat if you were single.”

She didn’t deny it, which only proved Amy’s point.

The door opened and in walked a delivery man. He held an envelope and looked at their nameplates. Then he went over to Amy. “Are you Amy Watson?”

Amy could tell that Danielle was biting back a sarcastic retort. How could the man look at her nameplate and then ask her that question? But Amy decided to ignore her friend’s amused expression and nodded. “Yes, I’m Amy Watson.”

“This is for you. Will you sign here?” He handed her an electronic clipboard.

She hesitated for a moment but finally signed it.

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“Thank you.” He handed her the envelope.

After he left, she opened it.

“Who’s it from?” Danielle wondered before sipping her coffee.

“Thompson & Thompson Law Firm.”

Danielle’s eyes grew wide and she straightened in her chair. “Is someone suing you?”

“I don’t think so.” Apprehensive, Amy pulled out the document and started reading it. Color drained from her face. “Oh no.”

“What?” Danielle leaned forward, as if she were about to watch whether or not her winning team would get a touchdown.

“I can’t believe he did this!” Amy jumped out of her seat, her heart racing in a mixture of anger and horror.

“Did what?!” She jumped up too. Though some coffee spilled from her cup, she didn’t seem to notice.

“This can’t be legal!”

“What? What can’t be legal?”

Amy glanced from her friend to the document and flipped through the pages so she could make sure she understood it right. This couldn’t be happening. It had to be a sick and twisted joke! “He just can’t do this!”

Danielle finally put the cup down and loudly groaned. “Will you please tell me already? The suspense is killing me!”

“Mr. Rudolph married me by proxy.”

She gasped, her eyes bulging out even more, which Amy didn’t think was possible. “Nathan Rudolph?”

“Is there another Rudolph?”

“But how did he do that?”

“I don’t know, but he did!”

“Wow!” Danielle took the certificate and stared at it. “Wow!”

“Wow? Is that all you can say?”

“Well...I mean...This is just so...Wow!”

What Nathan Wants

Amy groaned and rubbed her eyes. How could her day get any worse?

As if on cue, two men came into the agency.

“Is there an Amy Rudolph in the room?” one of them asked.

“Amy what?” she nearly screamed.

Danielle—the traitor—pointed at her.

The men approached her, making her take a step back. They were tall and strong. What did Mr. Rudolph do? Hire goons to drag her to his home?

“Ma’am, here’s your notice.”

“Notice for what?” she demanded, unwilling to take the envelope he held out.

“You’re fired.”

The color drained from her face. “Fired?”

“As of 8am this morning. It’s against company policy for you to work for Mr. Rudolph if you’re married to him. We’ve been ordered to clear your desk.”

“Wow,” Danielle said again, sounding shocked.

“Is that all you can say?” Amy snapped. The walls were closing in on her. It was getting hard to breathe. She shook her head, unable to believe this was really happening. She pinched herself. Nope. She wasn’t having a nightmare.

“We’ll take these things to your new residence,” the man said as he started putting her things into an empty cardboard box.

Amy stamped her foot on the floor. “I’m not married to him!”

The other man shrugged as he took her name plate and threw it into the trashcan. “We just work for him. If you want to work this out, you’ll have to deal with him personally.”

“I’d just as soon take a walk through broken glass!” She grabbed her purse before the goons could take it and took the wedding certificate from Danielle. Then she stormed out of the building.

Ruth Ann Nordin

Danielle ran after her. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going straight into his office and rip this up right in front of his face."

"Wait!" Danielle grabbed her arm and turned her around. "Let's think this through."

"I'm not staying married to him...if this is even legit."

"Oh, of course, you won't. Though I would if I were in your shoes."

"Danielle." Her voice held a hint of warning in it.

Danielle shot her an apologetic smile. "No. What I meant was that while you are the very wealthy Mrs. Rudolph, you should do what rich wives do."

"Sorry. I'm not interested in having an affair."

"No. Not that. Look, what fun is having money if you can't spend it?"

"You want me to go shopping?"

"Sure. That'll show him! And to add insult to injury, I'll be happy to come and help you blow as much of his money as possible." Danielle clapped her hands, her eyes twinkling. "And think of all the damage we can do in one day."

"That's exactly what he wants me to do. Once I spend his money, he'll take that to mean I want to be his wife."

"Oh come on, Amy. I really need a hot tub."

"You do not *need* a hot tub."

"Fine." She rolled her eyes. "I want a hot tub."

"Well, you'll have to keep saving for it. I'm not staying married to him." Amy glanced at the document. "I have to see a lawyer to make sure this thing is even legal."

Her friend groaned, her shoulders slumped. "You don't have enough fun. Ever."

"I'm not touching a cent of Mr. Rudolph's dirty money."

"Who do you think pays your wages?"

What Nathan Wants

“Paid. In case you haven’t noticed, I now qualify for unemployment checks.” Amy reached her car and unlocked the door.

“At least get a new car first. I mean, that thing is on its last leg.”

Amy glanced at her rusty Toyota. “Hey, these things were made to last.” She ignored her friend’s eye roll and slipped into her seat. “I’ll call you once I get everything straightened out.”

Danielle sighed. “Alright. Though we could have some serious fun first.”

Pretending she didn’t hear her, Amy closed the door and headed for her lawyer’s office.