



The line at The Mudhouse was out the door. For the first time since Jaymie and her best friend had opened the little café six months ago, she was convinced it was going to be a hit. It didn't hurt that it was crazy-hot out and they were offering large iced coffees for only two dollars a cup.

The crowds were larger on the weekend when the city people from Toronto drove up to their cottages on the lake. Even though she had studied in Toronto and forced herself to work there for a few years, she would always be a townie and proud of it. She hated the city, hated the late hours she'd put in at the magazine, resented the commute from downtown to the suburbs where she'd lived with another graphic designer and two additional roommates.

She'd been biding her time, skipping the parties and the clubs and saving her pennies until she could move home to Port Ellis. That she'd opened a coffee shop and bakery was entirely an accident of fate. It had been her best friend's idea. Mel had had the know-how and Jaymie had had the capital. After finding what Mel called the perfect location, it had all fallen into place with ease.

The Mudhouse was located on Founders Street, the town's main road. The shop itself was, to put it plainly, a hole in the wall—or maybe a closet. The coffee bar and bakery case were on one side with a row of tables against the other wall. The front of the café was also wide open to the sidewalk, with doors that could be retracted for the summer. What had convinced Jaymie that the location would work was the large deck off the back. It was the width of their shop and half of the florist's next door and had direct access to the boardwalk.

"You've done a good job at reinventing yourself here," Mel said, passing her a cup of iced tea.

"You mean co-owning a café when I neither bake nor drink coffee?"

"Ssh, we aren't telling the townsfolk about that. We'll lose the true coffee aficionados if they discover you scorn them."

“I don’t scorn them or the coffee,” she insisted, sipping her mango-pomegranate iced tea. “I just don’t worship at the altar of the bean.” They served a large selection of fair trade organic coffees, but Jaymie had made sure they also had the largest tea selection in Port Ellis.

“You don’t know what you’re missing.” Mel took a large gulp of her iced coffee.

They leaned against the back railing, watching as their well-trained staff moved people through the line quickly. Their pastries were all homemade. That was Mel’s passion, and while it would be better if they had a commercial kitchen on the premises, her partner seemed content to bake at home. Jaymie hoped they might one day be able to take over the florist shop next door and turn it into the kitchen of Mel’s dreams, but that was a long way down the road.

As director of finance, Jaymie was well aware of their fiscal realities. She also handled their human resources and marketing needs—all roles that did not require her to get up at the crack of dawn. She was not a morning lark.

“So Max keeps telling me.” Jaymie smiled. Like his sister, Maxwell loved his coffee.

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