



## Sisters Found

By Joan Johnston

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#### Hope

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#### Charity

Adopted at a young age, Charity Burnette never really had a home, and she's not one for putting down roots—even if it means shutting out the man who'd love to call her his wife.

When three sisters come together unexpectedly at Hawk's Pride Ranch, the sparks fly. But each woman is about to learn something about herself, about family and about the love of a good man.

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### Editorial Review

Review

"Romance devotees will find Johnston lively and well-written, and her characters perfectly enchanting."

-Publishers Weekly

"Absolutely captivating...a delightful storyteller....Joan Johnston [creates] nforgettable subplots and characters who make every fine thread weave into a touching tapestry." --Affaire de Coeur

"A guaranteed good read." -New York Times bestselling author Heather Graham

"Joan Johnston does short contemporary Westerns to perfection." -Publishers Weekly

"Johnston warms your heart and tickles your fancy." -New York Daily News

"Joan Johnston continually gives us everything we want...fabulous details and atmosphere, memorable characters, a story that you wish would never end, and lots of tension and sensuality."

-RT Book Reviews

### About the Author

Joan Johnston is the top ten New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling author of more than 50 novels and novellas with more than 15 million copies of her books in print. She has been a director of theatre, drama critic, newspaper editor, college professor and attorney on her way to becoming a full-time writer. You can find out more about Joan at her Website, [www.joanjohnston.com](http://www.joanjohnston.com) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/joanjohnstonauthor](http://www.facebook.com/joanjohnstonauthor)

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### *FAITH*

Faith Butler hadn't seen her twin sister Hope since shortly after they'd arrived at the party celebrating Jake Whitelaw's impending marriage to their former English teacher Miss Carter. Not that Hope's entrance hadn't been noted by one and all.

The afternoon gathering that was supposed to be held inside Miss Carter's two-story frame house had been moved into her backyard when a warm Chinook wind came through, making the mid-December afternoon feel like a summer day.

Hope had stepped out onto Miss Carter's back porch dressed in a tight black skirt barely long enough for decency and a formfitting, V-necked black cashmere sweater cut low enough to raise a man's heart rate. Ruby-red lipstick emphasized her full lips, and she wore enough mascara and eye shadow to dramatize a dozen dark, smoldering eyes.

Faith knew her sister's outrageous behavior only stemmed from desperation and determination. Because the

man Hope loved was about to marry someone else.

Nonetheless, Hope's getup had done the trick. She'd managed to attract the one pair of eyes she'd been hoping to snare. Jake Whitelaw hadn't been able to stop staring at her. Or maybe it was more honest to say *glaring* at her.

Faith sighed loud enough to catch her boyfriend's attention.

"What's wrong?" Randy asked.

Faith reached for Randy's hand without noticing that she did so with the prosthetic device on the end of her left arm, where a hand was supposed to be—but had never grown. Randy Wright's total devotion over the past three years had made it possible for Faith to forget sometimes that she wasn't perfect, like her twin.

"I wish Hope would give up and accept reality," Faith said. "Jake Whitelaw might be physically attracted to her, but—"

"Might be?" Randy said with a snort. "He practically paws the ground every time he lays eyes on her."

Faith lifted an expressive black brow. "All right, he's got the hots for Hope. But he's going to marry Miss Carter."

"It sure looks that way," Randy said, eyeing Jake, who stood with his arm around Miss Carter's slender waist. "Unless somebody does something fast."

"Hope has done everything she can to make herself into a potential wife for Jake. She raced through college in three years to get her degree in computer science from Baylor this past summer. And she's spent the past two summers traveling the world and experiencing as much of life as she can. But—"

"But she can never catch up to him, because he's lived too much longer than she has," Randy finished for her.

Faith sighed again. Jake Whitelaw might be only eighteen years older than Hope, but he was ages older in life experience. She didn't understand her sister's attraction to the older man, but Hope had fallen head-over-ears for Jake years ago, and was still tumbling even now.

"So what are you going to do to help her out?" Randy asked.

"What can I do?"

Randy grinned. "You might have acted like the shy sister growing up, but I know better. Whenever you want something and go after it, you get it. So, I ask again, how are you going to help Jake discover that he belongs with Hope?"

"Do they belong together?" Faith asked skeptically.

"Look at Jake," Randy said. "His gaze is constantly searching out Hope. And his behavior with Miss Carter is anything but loverlike."

"Oh," Faith said as she watched Jake's eyes scan Miss Carter's backyard, even though Hope was nowhere to be seen in the crowd. His arm was linked around Miss Carter's waist, but they stood a good six inches apart. And although they were physically together, Miss Carter seemed to be talking to everyone except Jake.

Faith watched as Hope appeared at one of the five entrances to the gazebo in the center of Miss Carter's backyard, laughing and flirting with one of Jake's hired hands. When Hope looked toward Jake to see if he'd noticed her, Jake quickly and carefully averted his eyes. Oh, Jake was attracted, all right. But it looked like he'd be damned before he'd let Hope know it.

"There's something else you may not have noticed," Randy said. "Check out Jake's younger brother Rabb. Look who has his eye."

Faith searched out Louis Whitelaw, who'd earned the nickname Rabbit as a kid, which had been shortened to Rabb as he'd grown older. Rabb was attractive, with chestnut-brown hair and hazel eyes, but nowhere near as good-looking as his brother Jake, who was easily four inches taller and broader in the shoulders, with chiseled features that demanded female attention.

It was amazing how they ended up being brothers. Zach and Rebecca Whitelaw had adopted eight kids in all. None of them looked much like the others, but they were as close-knit as any family tied together by blood. Maybe more so, precisely because there was no blood tie to bind them. Each kid had a different background, some more horrific than others, but once they'd been adopted into the Whitelaw clan, they'd cleaved to one another like ivy to oak.

Which made the situation Randy had pointed out to her all the more compelling.

Faith watched in fascination as Rabb Whitelaw stared with lovesick eyes at his older brother's fiancée. "Oh," she murmured. "Oh, my. That *is* interesting."

"Rabb has been eating Miss Carter with his eyes all afternoon," Randy said. "Surreptitiously, of course. He'd never poach on his brother's territory."

"So he'll let Jake marry Miss Carter, even though he loves her himself?" Faith asked.

"It looks that way," Randy said. "So you see, you'd be doing more than one person a favor if you helped break up this engagement."

"Believe me, I'm tempted," Faith said. "It's just too late. The wedding's in two weeks."

"Consider the fact that Jake and Miss Carter didn't set the date for their wedding until now, the exact time Hope finished school and has returned all grown up," Randy said. "What does that tell you?"

Faith pursed her lips and made a humming sound. "You think that Jake's only marrying Miss Carter to avoid his attraction to Hope? Is that possible?"

"Jake and Miss Carter have been engaged for three very long years. If they were in love, why didn't they get married a long time ago?" Randy asked.

Before Faith could speak, he answered his own question.

"Because Jake isn't in love with Miss Carter. Because being engaged to her has kept him 'safe' from acting on his attraction to your sister. You told me he believes he's too old for her. And he was married before to a younger woman, who left him when she got bored with ranch life."

"Hope loves living and working on a ranch," Faith said in defense of her sister. "She'd never get tired—"

"I didn't say she would," Randy interrupted. "But Jake got burned once. You can't blame him for wanting to

avoid the fire."

Faith frowned. "I have to admit I thought Hope was too young for Jake when she first told me she'd fallen in love with him. But her teenage crush hasn't gone away. If anything, she seems more determined than ever to have him."

"If they're meant for each other, you'd be doing them a favor throwing them together," Randy said, "before Jake marries the wrong woman. And if they're not destined to be together, it'll be better in the long run to help Jake get over this infatuation he has for Hope before he marries Miss Carter."

"But the wedding is in two weeks!"

"Then you'd better get started, sweetheart," Randy said, kissing her on the nose.

"Are you going to help me?" Faith asked.

Randy held up his hands. "Uh-uh. Not me. Matchmaking is for females."

"You just stood there and talked me into it!" Faith protested.

Randy grinned. "You were going to interfere anyway. I merely gave you the nudge you needed to get started."

Faith grimaced and then laughed. "All right. I admit it. I can't stand to see Hope so unhappy. Especially if there's something I can do about it."

"You go, girl," Randy said with a wink.

"I do love you," she said as she lifted herself on tiptoe and kissed him on the mouth. His arm slid around her waist and pulled her close, deepening the kiss as she leaned into his solid strength. When he let her go, she looked into his eyes, hoping he could read the gratitude she felt.

If she was no longer the shy person she'd been in the past, it was because she saw a beautiful woman reflected in Randy's eyes, not the imperfect person—the twin without a left hand—she'd been when they'd first met.

"I think I'll go get myself a drink," he said as he released her. "You have work to do."

He kissed her again, a quick, hard kiss that told her he wanted to take her somewhere and lay her down and make mad, passionate love to her. Then he let her go and headed for the open bar that had been set up in the wooden gazebo in the center of Miss Carter's backyard.

Randy was right, Faith thought, as she watched him saunter away. If someone didn't do something, the wrong people were going to end up married to each other.

She turned her attention back to the engaged couple. Maybe she should start by seeing if she could get Miss Carter interested in Rabb Whitelaw. Maybe if Miss Carter met up with someone who really loved her, she would be willing to give up Jake. The question was how to accomplish this miracle in two weeks!

There was no time to waste. Faith contemplated her surroundings and plotted the best way to create...a ruckus.

Rabb Whitelaw had fallen in love with Amanda Carter long before his brother had come along and gotten engaged to her. Rabb had first noticed Amanda when they were both in the ninth grade. All through high school he'd admired her from afar, because he'd never felt like he was anyone she'd be interested in. Amanda was smart; he hadn't done well in school. And Amanda was tall. He hadn't caught up to her in height until he was a senior.

The long and the short of it was, he'd never been able to work up enough courage to ask her out. He'd figured she'd want to talk about Shakespeare and Moliere and Faulkner and Hemingway, and reading was difficult—make that *excruciating*—for him, because he was dyslexic. She'd dated lots of different boys, but he'd always been grateful that she'd never settled on any one in particular.

When Amanda had pursued her teaching degree at the local university, Rabb had been in agony worrying that she would fall in love with someone else. But she'd finished her education unattached and gotten a job teaching English at the local high school.

During the years Amanda had been in college, Rabb had found his niche working with his hands. He'd started small, making kitchen cupboards for his mom and then graduated to a bedroom suite for his sister Jewel and her husband Mac. Most recently he'd made a baby crib for his brother Avery and his wife Karen.

He took pride in his work, and now made a very comfortable living creating unique pieces of wood furniture that were in demand across the country. About the time professional success had given him the self-confidence he needed to pursue a relationship with Amanda, her mother had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and Amanda had become her mother's nurse.

He'd asked her out anyway. She'd gone to the movies with him once, leaving her mother home alone, because at the time Mrs. Carter's disease wasn't very far advanced. But Amanda had come home to find her mother distraught and confused about where she was. Amanda had been so upset that she'd hurried inside. Rabb hadn't even gotten to kiss her good-night.

He'd asked her out a number of times after that, even offered to come over to her house with some popcorn and a rented video, but Amanda always refused.

But he hadn't stopped loving her. He'd figured that at some point Amanda would put her mother in a home where she could get round-the-clock care. But Amanda had never sent her mom away. She'd hired a nurse for the days when she was teaching high school. And spent her evenings at home.

Mrs. Carter had survived a long time. She'd died only three years ago. And Jake had swooped in at a vulnerable moment shortly after the funeral and asked Amanda to marry him. She'd said yes.

Rabb had felt like punching his brother's lights out. Instead, he'd swallowed his anger and wished both of them well. He'd been miserable, wondering how soon he would have to sit in church and watch the brother he idolized marry the woman he loved.

But they'd never set a wedding date, and Rabb had begun to hope it would never happen.

Two years ago, he'd volunteered to build a gazebo for a charity raffle, and amazingly, Amanda had purchased the winning ticket. He'd spent far longer working on the gazebo he'd built in her backyard than was necessary. But it had given him the opportunity to get reacquainted with her.

He would never forget the hot summer day she'd come out back with a tray of lemonade and oatmeal-raisin cookies. She'd been wearing one of those summer dresses held up with a couple of skinny straps over the shoulders and sandals that showed off toenails she'd painted pink. Her brown hair was cut in a short bob that

made her look more like a teenager than the nearly thirty-year-old woman he knew she was.

"Thought you could use something cold to drink," she'd said, setting the tray on the un-painted steps of the gazebo.

He'd started to reach for his shirt, but she'd said, "You don't have to cover up for me. I've lost my modesty where the human body is concerned."

It was a strange thing to say, but he knew that, at the end, she'd taken care of the most intimate duties for her mother. He sat down beside her on the steps, took the glass of lemonade she handed him and drank most of it down. When he lowered the glass, he caught her staring at him.

She blushed and said, "I'm sorry. It's just that...you look so...healthy."

"My job keeps me in shape," he said matter-of-factly.

To his amazement, she reached out a hand and traced the corded muscles from his shoulder, down across his biceps, all the way to his forearm. She seemed totally absorbed in what she was doing, unaware of the response it was eliciting in him.

He waited, keeping himself totally still, wondering when she would realize what she was doing, not wanting her to stop. When she traced a small scar at his wrist, his hand reflexively clenched into a fist.

"Oh," she said, looking up at him with startled eyes. "I'm sorry."

He caught her hand before she could flee. "No problem. I liked you touching me."

"You did?"

"It felt good."

## **Users Review**

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