

"I want you to have big dreams, big goals. I want you to strive to achieve them. But I don't want to see you beating yourself up every time you make a mistake." Kelley Armstrong, *The Gathering*

XX.

Jack felt nervous, which he knew was entirely ridiculous seeing as his brother had never wanted anything more than for Jack to get his life together. Well, perhaps coveting Grace might have been first in his wants, but Jack was a close second.

"I know you have been generous," Jack began awkwardly. Behind Adam, Jack could see the responsibility that was the Ashwood estate. Jack did nothing to aid his brother in its upkeep, and now he was feeling the immense guilt of what he was to ask. "But I need to talk to you about my finances."

Adam took a step backward and nodded seriously. "Of course. You're married now. Do you want a bigger allowance?"

Jack shook his head. His allowance, given to him by Adam, allowed him to live in London as a gentleman. And it was suddenly occurring to Jack just how ridiculous that was. "I don't want an allowance. I want a legacy," Jack said simply. "I want to have something to pass on to my child ... if and when we are blessed with one."

"I haven't thought it over, and the idea has only just come to me. It was sparked from a conversation I was having with Claire in Hyde Park the other day. Adam, I want to establish a publishing house."

Jack couldn't believe the words had escaped his mouth, or that he felt such conviction over a potential career. He was a hopeless writer, but there was a career for a seasoned reader. Jack knew nothing about publishing. He knew nothing about running a business, and he certainly didn't have the funds or collateral to establish one. But if he could but succeed at something, at this, then he would have made something of himself. He would be able to independently support his family. He would have something to leave his child.

Jack didn't want to be a failure anymore.

"Publishing?" repeated Adam, raising his brows, before remaining quiet for a minute, mulling over the idea. "What does Claire say to this?" he asked suddenly.

"She doesn't know," replied Jack honestly. He would tell her if Adam approved of his idea, and made it financially possible, but he had just a little too much pride to tell her such an idea before confessing it failed for lack of funds.

"Publishing?" Adam said again, turning around and heading back behind the desk. He opened one of the drawers in the desk and began to sift through papers, clearly searching for something.

"If you think it is an awful idea, please put me out of my misery," Jack insisted, his feet still glued to the spot. Oh, it was a stupid idea and Adam knew it. Jack didn't know the first thing about publishing, and it probably wasn't at all how he imagined it. He would no doubt fail at it as he did everything else. He would just cause embarrassment and it would be yet another thing for his mother to shame –

"For when Jack finds the greatness that I know is within him. Love, Father."

Adam's voice interrupted Jack's panic, and his eyes flashed to his brother. Adam was holding a card attached to another sheet of paper. Jack stared at Adam as he suddenly realised that he had read a letter, something from their father.

"What did you say?"

"I found this in Father's desk not long after you left when he died," replied Adam, holding up the note. "It was in and amongst his things. You know, Mother's trust, Susanna's dowry ... and this. With it came a letter for me, telling me to hold onto it until you came to me, like you have today. I think Father knew you better than you thought." Adam walked back around the desk and brought Jack the note. He practically had to place it in Jack's frozen hands.

Sure enough, there was a note written in his father's hand. It was dated the 26th of November 1806, which would have been a month before he had died. The letter was attached to a promissory note, totalling –

"Oh my God!" exclaimed Jack as he laid his eyes on the amount.

Twenty thousand pounds? Peregrine had given Jack twenty thousand pounds.

"I had to go back in the ledgers a little," commented Adam. "I was curious as to where he'd found such a sum. Do you want to know when he put that away for you?"

Jack looked up at him in disbelief. "When?"

"1789," chuckled Adam. "When you were but six years old. Father sold a small land and property and tucked the sum away. Hid it from Mother, of course. His annotation in the ledger made me laugh. I shall have to find it for you. He wrote: £20 000 – JB is no clergyman, but he will be great." Adam laughed lightly. "Father knew even then what I've known all along."

Jack needed to sit down, and for lack of a chair in his immediate vicinity, he all but collapsed onto the floor, clutching the promissory note, and his father's missive, in his hands.

Adam knelt down beside him. "You don't need my permission, Jack. You don't need my help. Father ensured your future years ago and made it so that when you were ready to take it, you had everything you needed."

Jack knew that his brother was right, but he couldn't help but wish that his father had told him about this years ago. Peregrine knew he would amount to something when he was but six and terrorising the house? Had Jack known the faith his father had in him; he couldn't help but wonder if that might have changed things.

But it was no use wondering. In his hands was his ticket to a legacy. Jack would be able to support Claire, their child ... and he would have something to bequeath.

"I just can't believe that everything could work out like this," Jack remarked.

Adam grinned. "My brother, the publisher," he said proudly.

Pride, Jack heard it in his brother's voice. He had heard it before, of course, but often etched with sympathy or hope. This was complete with confidence, and Jack could feel his own pride building. He thanked God and his father that he would now have this opportunity to build a legacy.

Nothing, Jack mused, nothing could spoil his mood.

"Publishing?" cried Claire excitedly as they sat together on the bed in the Rose Room that evening.

Jack could see the genuine delight in Claire's eyes as she read over the note from his father.

"I couldn't think of anything more perfect for you! I know of no one with a better love of literature," declared Claire, before pausing. "Well, I suppose that is because most of the people in my acquaintance do not have the time to read, but if they did, I would still wager –"

Jack interrupted her with a laugh. "I know what you mean," he assured her. "Now, you must keep this to yourself. I've asked Adam to as well. This will take a lot of time and research ... and if it fails –"

"It will not fail," Claire said emphatically. "Jack, I cannot tell you how pleased I am for you."

And she was sincerely happy for him. Jack could see Claire's kindness as though she were wearing it on her sleeve. She genuinely cared about him, and that gave him a different sort of thrill.

"For us," he corrected. "This will be ours, and one day, our child's." He motioned to her belly, though it was still flat.

Claire's eyes became glassy and her lower lip trembled for a moment before she regained her composure. "I suppose we ought to go to sleep," she uttered.

They had long been left in their rooms by the servants who had prepared both bedrooms. The suite itself consisted of five rooms. Two enormous bedrooms, two dressing rooms, and a washroom containing a large bath and a privacy screen. All had interconnecting doors. Both Claire and Jack had enjoyed exploring their new quarters, and Claire had declared their rooms were larger than her house in the village.

But now begged the question of where would they sleep?

Claire had taken pity on Jack for the remainder of their honeymoon in London. She had allowed him to sleep beside her in the bed. It was large enough that they would have their own space without the stress of questions and whispers from the servants.

But now it was not expected. Married couples had separate bedrooms. There was a perfectly good room turned down waiting.

And yet, Jack didn't want to sleep apart from Claire. In just a few short weeks, she had become perhaps the closest friend he had. The trust between them was unlike anything he had previously experienced.

His attraction to her was obvious, but it was something that he kept at the very back of his mind. She was not ready. Though it was often quite difficult when she was staring at him with blue eyes as big as saucers and her dark hair down and cascading over her shoulders.

She was waiting for him to say something.

"It would be awfully strange for a couple to sleep separately, don't you think?"

"Yes! I quite agree!" Claire exclaimed, a little too loudly, a fact that made her cheeks flush.

Jack grinned. A legacy, and a bride.

The following fortnight flew by, and Claire found herself shadowing her sister quite closely. Claire watched how Grace behaved and how she occupied herself. Claire knew that she had a lot to learn.

Cecily still bothered Grace incessantly with tips and tricks on how to ensure a baby was male, and Claire watched as Grace expertly handled each one. Claire watched, learned, and wondered if she would ever have the gall to speak to her mother-in-law the way Grace did. Cecily did not pay much heed to her mother, but perhaps that was because she was often as quiet as a mouse in her presence.

As the day to announce her pregnancy approached, Claire found herself watching how Grace mothered Perrie quite closely. Once it was known, she would be able to seek advice from her own mother, but for now, she had a daily lesson, as though she was back in school.

Claire was just not expecting Grace to guess before the announcement was made. A few days before the winter assembly, they both were seated in Perrie's nursery alone. Grace sat with Perrie on her lap as she combed her hair into a ribbon. How she managed it with a pregnant belly, Claire didn't know.

Claire was starting to notice her own figure changing already.

"Are you with child, Claire?"

The question so shocked Claire that she nearly fell out of her stool. To make the answer completely obvious, Claire looked down at her stomach, checking to see if the tiny, rounded protrusion she had noticed underneath her chemise was visible through the fabric of her dress.

"I thought so," murmured Grace nonchalantly as she tied Perrie's ribbon into a bow.

"How did you know?" Claire asked anxiously.

"The servants," replied Grace. "I was once one of them, so I know the gossip that goes on downstairs. Ruby told me that the maids have been keeping an eye on your sheets."

Claire flushed a deep red. She remembered Jack leaving blood on the sheets on their wedding night to fool the servants. She felt terribly embarrassed to know that the servants were discussing whether or not she had bled.

"The housemaids from Ashwood Place work through winter at the house, and apparently they have reported that your sheets were clean throughout your honeymoon. It has been a month," Grace continued casually. She shifted Perrie off her lap once her hair was fixed. Perrie darted over to her collection of dolls to play.

Claire was in a panic. Did Grace know? Was she about to ask her a question that would require a direct lie?

But Grace smiled. "Well?" she said expectantly. "Don't you want congratulations?" She laughed lately. "This is good news, isn't it? Does Jack know? Is he excited?" She stood up from her chair and made her way over to Claire, wrapping her arms around her sister once Claire had stood up as well.

Relief flooded through Claire as she received her sister's hug. If Ruby had relayed the message to Grace about the clean sheets, then she prayed Ruby had passed on the message of the sheets on the wedding night. Grace believed that Jack was her child's father. "Yes," confirmed Claire. "It is early," or eleven weeks along, "but he is excited. We were going to tell everyone on Sunday when Mama is here."

Grace cupped Claire's face. "I am pleased for you. I can't tell you how pleased I am. I won't lie, I was very worried about you. When I saw you at Perrie's birthday, I thought the worst." She sighed. "I can't tell you what I worried over ... and I did doubt Jack. I hate that I did, but I have been watching you two since you have returned. I suppose I owe you and Jack an apology."

"Whatever for?"

"I don't think I have seen two people who so clearly belong to one another before," Grace murmured peacefully.

Perhaps they're not as good at lying as they think ;)

I sure hope nothing will spoil the good things they have going ...

We've cleaned out our garage and I found a bunch of my old school reports, including my report from when I took a Creative Writing elective back in good old 2009. I remember my teacher hated me and I don't know why. I can remember hating her class because she would tell us what to write and that didn't work for me. I wanted to write what I enjoyed.

As you know, I write books I want to read ;)
But in my comment she said, "Laura has a natural writing ability" :DDDDDD awww shecks Miss.
Other than that, my report read like I was a delight hahaha
Except for PE where my teacher wrote "Laura has spent much of the semester injured" ... I used to run an underground business of sick notes in my year's mum as I had the best handwriting hahaha. I could forge anyone's mum's writing, or make it look official. I honestly thought my teacher would have thought I was heading for a double hip replacement by the end of the year haha.

Ah memories.

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