

Chapter Sixteen

Carrying Jamie as he pushed the cart down the aisles Nicolas headed to the baby section first in search of car seats. He relied on Jamie to choose a seat similar to the one his mother had back at home. With his main goal achieved Nicolas headed to the toy aisles where they both gravitated to the large selection of *Transformers* toys.

Nicolas chose an *Optimus Prime* to add to his collection while Jamie wanted *Bumblebee*. As they wandered they found a *Hot Wheels* track that would let them race each other as well as a *Lego* castle set they could have fun putting together. Before heading to the checkout Nicolas swung by the Sporting Goods department in search of gloves and baseballs.

Jamie gave him a curious look.

"Ever play catch?" Nicolas asked.

"No." Jamie shook his head.

"Want to?" Nicolas asked. "We can have fun in the park just like in *the Sandlot*."

"What's that?"

"What's what? *The Sandlot*? You've never seen that

movie?"

Jamie shook his head.

"Well, we'll have to fix that!" Nicolas declared. "It's my favorite movie and I promise you'll like it too."

Selecting gloves Nicolas headed to the checkout once again carrying Jamie instead of placing him in the cart. Nicolas found he couldn't stand to set the boy down wanting the tactile reassurance that his son was not a mirage.

The cashier seemed to do a double take when she saw them but greeted them with a smile as Nicolas unloaded the cart one-handed. She winked at Jamie asking, "How's it going, sugar?"

"Daddy's are fun!" Jamie answered.

She glanced at Nicolas to see him proudly smiling before she said, "Well looks like you are gonna have a lot of fun."

"Yep!"

Nicolas chuckled. He already had more fun in the last few hours than in his entire life. Paying they headed back to the car where Jamie had to talk him through how to buckle in the car seat. Settling Jamie in the seat Nicolas noted it was better but didn't change the fact they needed another vehicle all together.

The trunk was full of luggage and the backseat full

of toys. They'd have to head back soon but they still had more stops to make. Nicolas took out his phone and found no messages. It was probably safe to assume Aubrey was still asleep.

"So what do you say to breakfast?" Nicolas asked as he settled in the driver's seat again.

"Yeah! I'm hungry."

"It's only nine-thirty...how about *McDonalds*?"

"Yea!" Jamie threw up his hands in celebration. It was a rare day he had *McDonald's*. As much as he loved his Ya-Ya's cooking there was something exciting about going to the famous fast food restaurant. Nicolas laughed at his excitement before checking the map on his phone for the nearest one.

Jamie was practically bouncing when they arrived and his father carried him in. It seemed his father was always carrying him as if afraid he would disappear. Jamie didn't mind as it gave him a chance to hold onto his dad too. He loved his mother and Ya-Ya so he never voiced his desire for a father figure. That didn't stop him from seeing other kids at the park with their dads and also wanting one. In fact the only ones he told about his wish were Jim and Santa. But he never received a definite answer from either.

Sometimes he wondered if it was his fault his dad

had left. Perhaps his father wasn't interested in kids. That thought made him sad because he knew his mother was often lonely. But he wasn't the only one without a dad. Zoe didn't have one so that made it a little better at least until they arrived at the party.

Seeing Zoe in the arms of a man who had to be her father was shocking and Jamie felt a sting of envy but then suddenly there was a man hugging and kissing his mom. His mom looked so happy he knew it just had to be his daddy...but what if his daddy didn't want him?

Jamie snuck a glance at the man carrying him. No. This man definitely wanted him. He wouldn't buy all these toys if he didn't want them to play together. They even had baseball mitts now and you couldn't play catch by yourself. If this man was afraid he would disappear then Jamie was just as worried he would vanish. So he clung a little tighter as they walked across the parking lot and entered the restaurant.

Jamie glanced around as his dad ordered and noticed the play area. There were already a few kids running around and it looked like fun but... what if he joined them and his dad disappeared while he played? Jamie tightened his embrace and hoped his dad didn't notice.

"Welcome to McDonald's. How can I help you?"
the clerk smiled as Nicolas stepped up to the counter.

"I'll have the Big Breakfast with hotcakes and coffee for myself. And hotcakes and sausage and apple juice for the little man," Nicolas glanced at

Ads-free >

the menu wanting to stick to healthy options for Jamie.

"Will that be all?"

"Yeah," Nicolas nodded feeling Jamie tighten his embrace as he paid. "You okay, bud?"

The boy nodded and gripped him tighter. Still

concerned Nicolas gave him a squeeze while they waited for their food. Carrying the tray and the boy to a table Nicolas set up Jamie's meal cutting up the pancakes and arranging everything so they were within easy reach before setting up his own meal.

Nicolas watched as Jamie quietly ate chewing each bite carefully. All morning the boy had been full of energy and comfortably chatting with him. Now he was suddenly quiet and contemplative. It worried Nicolas that he had said or done something wrong.

"Hey, everything okay?" Nicolas tried again. "You want to play with the other kids?"

Jamie shook his head not meeting Nicolas's gaze. Reaching across the table Nicolas tapped the boy's hand until Jamie finally looked up.

"What's wrong? I can't help unless you tell me."

"Do you...really like my mom?" Jamie finally asked. "You didn't leave because of me, right?"

"No." Nicolas said. "I promise what happened between me and your mother had nothing to do with you. If I had known you were out there...I would have found you a lot sooner. Now that I found you both I'm not letting either of you go."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

"Pinky promise?" Jamie held out his hand with his pinky out.

"Pinky promise," Nicolas curled his much larger digit around the boys. "Forever."

Jamie hesitantly smiled. Zoe taught him pinky promises were sacred. They couldn't be broken. Did his dad know that? It looked like he was taking it seriously.

"Which is why..." Nicolas said. "After we're done here we are going to go car shopping."

"You're going to sell Bumblebee?" Jamie exclaimed.

"Ah...no. No I'm not going to sell my car," Nicolas chuckled. "But I do think we need a car that's better suited for a family. What do you think?"

Jamie thought about it. It was difficult to get in and out of the *Camaro* and it didn't have a lot of room for their stuff either. It would be more convenient to have another vehicle. As long as they kept the Bumblebee car it would be all right to get another.

"Auntie Sarah has a Jeep," Jamie said after some thought. "It has a lot of space."

"Jeep. You mean like an SUV," Nicolas said.

Jamie nodded.

"I like it. We'll get one too. After breakfast."

Jamie smiled picking up his fork again. He liked this. If this was what daddies were like he was happy to have his. In fact no one could be better than his daddy.

"You want to play with kids for a bit now?" Nicolas asked seeing he was a better mood.

Jamie smiled and nodded. Nicolas grinned. Eventually he would erase and ease away all the boy's insecurities. They were a family and nothing would change that. The most precious gifts in the world had been given to him and he was not letting them go.



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