

Lost Me, Gained Regret (Jane and Bryant Ferguson)

Chapter 301

As soon as the words left my mouth, I grabbed my bag from the chair and turned to leave.

"Slut!" Dorothy's voice seethed with rage behind me. I clenched my hand, pretending not to hear. My only thought was to get away.

But unexpectedly, as I walked through the estate, I went lost. I wasn't sure how many turns I had taken when something caught my eye. It was a courtyard that felt strangely familiar. Though large and pristine, the yard had an air of neglect, as if it hadn't seen life for ages.

Compelled by some unseen force, I stepped inside. The moment I did, the door behind me slammed shut. A tall figure pinned me against the door, his familiar scent enveloping me, leaving no escape. I looked up, shocked, into his deep eyes.

His distinct and long fingers gripped my waist as he looked at me with a tender, entwined gaze. "What brings you to the Myers Mansion?"

"Mind your own business!" I shot back, struggling to break free, but it was useless.

Bryant held my gaze steadily. "Have things been okay these few days? Dorothy hasn't been bothering you, has she?"

I scoffed at him, "Considering you almost had me killed on her behalf, what could she possibly want with me?"

He suddenly fell silent, his grip on my waist tightening, a frown creasing his brow. "You've lost quite a bit of weight, haven't you?"

I replied calmly, "I'm just slimming down to celebrate the divorce, welcoming new love."

In truth, work had been hectic, affecting my appetite and sleep, hence the weight loss. But admitting that felt too much like seeking pity, as if life had been unbearably hard without him.

His features tightened, his gaze darkened, and his lips pressed together. "Celebrate? New love?"

"What else?" I lost my temper and my words came out icy. "You're the one who announced your engagement to someone else. You're the one who told me to get the divorce papers. What more do you want from me? Am I supposed to sit at home, grieving and wearing black for months and years?"

"I'm not asking anything of you." His shoulders drooped, a subtle desolation surrounding him, "It's me. I'm the one who feels terrible."

I blinked. "Bryant, stop with the nonsense. You couldn't be faithful in our marriage. At least have the decency to disappear cleanly now."

I thought, 'Don't disturb my life anymore. I won't deny that I still need some time to erase those scars and heal.'

Bryant's grip remained firm, his gaze almost obsessive, "Jane, please wait for me. I'll sort everything out."

"Why should I wait for you?" I asked, puzzled, a smirk spreading across my lips. "To be your fallback when things go south with Dorothy? Is that how little you think of me?"

"Then don't wait." His face edged with conflict, softened as he pulled me into his embrace, his chin resting on my head, his voice clear and compelling. "I'll send you abroad, okay? Jane, please listen to me. Leave this place."

"Is that Dorothy's idea, too?" I felt a chill, struggling fiercely in his arms, my efforts futile, almost on the verge of breaking down. "Bryant, rest assured, as long as you both stay away from me, I won't be a thorn in your side!"

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Whether it was announcing an engagement or filing for divorce, I was always on board, thinking that would be the end of it and that we could finally go our separate ways.

But unexpectedly, my existence became unbearable for them.

Bryant held me tightly as if trying to merge me into him, whispering soothing words, "No, Jane, that's not what I meant. Please calm down for a moment."

"What do you mean, then?" I struggled to keep my trembling body under control, my voice dripping with sarcasm. "Are you going to say you never thought of marrying Dorothy? That sending me abroad was for my benefit?"

I wondered, 'What about that bullet you fired in my direction or your defense of Dorothy before Ramona? Was it all just a joke? Or did I deserve it? I can't and won't believe it anymore.'

The harsh yet truthful words of the Myers women echoed in my mind. Bryant and I were worlds apart. I had once attempted to bridge that gap because of Timothy, but it was nothing more than a fleeting illusion. Even living under the same roof, Bryant and I were like two parallel lines that would never meet.

At my words, Bryant paused, loosening his grip and resting his forehead against mine, his gaze intense. "Just believe in me, one last time."

It felt like a scorching touch, making me instinctively want to pull away. Yet, something made me hold Bryant's gaze. "Believe what? That after three years of marriage, you didn't even want to have a child with me?"

The words he had spoken the day we went to file for divorce stung like a thorn in my heart. It wasn't about me but about the child that could have been.

His eyes filled with regret and helplessness, and he hesitated before speaking but was interrupted by a knock.

"Who's in there?"

There came Gregory's voice, which was stern and different from his usual carefree demeanor. It was the Myers family's territory, and Gregory was close with Dorothy. If he found out and mentioned it to Dorothy...

The last thing I wanted was more trouble with Dorothy after the divorce. I pushed Bryant away forcefully, but he remained unmoved, his voice low, "What's going on between you and Gregory?"

"What's it to you?" My frustration boiled over, glaring at him. "Let me go! If Gregory sees you with me, your plans to marry Dorothy will be ruined."

The moment I finished speaking, Bryant let go. The man who seemed desperate to make promises a minute ago feared his fiancée discovering our entanglement.

I couldn't help but smirk bitterly as I watched him leave, feeling a slight pang in my heart. Turning around, I opened the door to Gregory's scrutinizing gaze.

He looked past me into the yard, his voice cold and ominous, "What are you doing here?"

"I, uh, I finished breakfast and got lost. Then I suddenly needed the bathroom and saw this door open..."

Gregory didn't press further, returning to his usual laid-back demeanor. "This isn't a place for you. Don't come in here without reason."

I shouldn't have said anything, but perhaps feeling guilty, I asked, "Why not?"

He answered, "Because it's not for the likes of you."

His hand rested on the door, gently pulling it shut and changing the lock code. He was methodical and earnest throughout the process, as if worried about damaging something.

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It seemed he was planning a big event. To those in the know, Gregory was changing the locks. But to others, he might look like he was engaging in some ancient ritual.

I finally put two and two together. "Is this... your missing fiancée's garden?"

Gregory's thick lashes fluttered as he shot me a glance. "You know the answer, so why ask?"

"You..." I couldn't help but blurt out, "Have you ever considered what if you can't find her?"

He stared me down, his eyes narrowing, a mischievous smile on his lips. "Then I certainly won't settle down for anyone, including you."

"Stop flattering yourself." I nearly choked on my words. "Someone like you? I wouldn't take you even if you were the last guy in the world."

Having been burned by Bryant's unrequited love once was enough for me. From then on, I'd steer clear of men haunted by the ghost of a past love.

And who was he? The heir of the Ford dynasty, a legacy five generations deep.

As a divorced woman, what right did I have to even dream of becoming part of their family? Besides him, his family would probably chase me out with pitchforks.

"Mr. Ford, Ms. Webster." The butler ran over, out of breath. "I've been looking everywhere for you two. Lady Ramona was asking for you."

When we returned to Ramona's garden, Bryant and Dorothy were there, too.

Dorothy was on the verge of a meltdown. "Grandma, you're seriously not attending mine and Bryant's engagement party?"

"Marriage is a matter for the parents to attend." Ramona waved at me elegantly as I walked in, showing no interest in the festivities. "I'm getting old and don't enjoy these loud events anymore."

I nodded slightly and walked over, Ramona pulling me to sit beside her.

Fuming, Dorothy looked like she wanted to crush her coffee cup. "What if it were Lilliana's engagement party?"

"You've always compared yourself to Lilliana." Ramona didn't directly answer, but her point was clear.

Lilliana, the granddaughter who shared a quarter of Ramona's blood, wouldn't just be another guest. She'd take the reins and make it an event to remember.

Not entirely witless, Dorothy caught the implication and felt slighted. "How could I not compare myself to Lilliana? Even the servants reminisce about how quirky and smart Lilliana was as a child! But no matter how great she was, she's gone now. Why can't you praise me for once... Ah!"

Before Dorothy could finish, with zero regard for gentlemanly conduct, Gregory flung a cup of warm coffee right at her.

Unperturbed by his lack of decorum, Gregory's smirk grew wider. "Dorothy, what right do you have to compare yourself to her? Her influence is why you're here commanding attention."

That single statement had metaphorically trampled Dorothy into the dirt. It was as if he was saying an imitation daring to compare itself to the original.

Bryant, who had once stood by me, stepped forward to protect Dorothy, his gaze icy. "Mr. Ford, regardless of your thoughts, she is my fiancée."

"Is that so?" Gregory's laugh came with implication. "If she truly manages to marry into the Ferguson family, I might respect her."

Bryant's eyes widened, and he quickly changed the subject before Dorothy could catch the hidden meaning. "Whether you respect her isn't the point." "Oh." Gregory seemed unbothered, his gaze sweeping over me before resting on Dorothy with a half-smile. "Do you think he's that into you?"

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Nature had its way of showing favor. Otherwise, why would Bryant flip his stance so fast, from marriage alliances to divorce papers flying? And Dorothy was on the same wavelength as me. Even more confident, she lifted her chin, "Otherwise? I am far better than Jane, right?"

Shit! I got caught in the crossfire for no reason.

Thankfully, a servant hurried in soon after, announcing, "Lady Ramona, Miss Dorothy, Mrs. Myers has returned."

Dorothy stood tall and proud, grabbed Bryant's arm, and couldn't wait to complain to her mother.

All I could think was, 'This is not the place to stay.'

One Dorothy was troublesome enough, let alone Susan adding to the mess. Sitting straight, I turned to Ramona, whispering, "Ramona, I need to head back to RiverCity today. I'll visit you in Vista Town another time."

Ramona seemed disappointed, but she didn't say much, only asking me to follow the butler to fetch something, leaving Gregory to chat.

Gregory had just left the living room when I returned with the item. Walking over leisurely, he glanced at the jewelry box in my hand. "What did Ramona give you? Let me see."

I didn't have the guts to open it in front of the butler. He just said it was a little something from Ramona. Upon seeing a gem bracelet inside, I quickly closed it, heading back to Ramona's quarters. It was too valuable.

Gregory said, "Keep it."

I refused, "It's too expensive."

"Wholesale." He caught the back of my collar, stopping me from returning to Ramona, his voice tinged with melancholy, "Over the years, whenever Ramona encountered a girl around Lilliana's age she took a fancy to, she'd give a gift."

What? I didn't understand the world of the wealthy. "Do all gifts cost this much?"

Though not as pricey as the pendants Timothy prepared for my child, the sentiment differed. The great-grandfather was gifting his great-grandchild a birth gift. Naturally, it had to be the best. But Ramona giving away gifts like that?

The bracelet in my hand was worth a small fortune. Giving away a dozen or so could almost match the price.

"Not really." Gregory released my collar, walking out with me, leisurely adding, "Yours is probably the most expensive. Just wear it. She's got plenty of money. I guess this is her way of finding some comfort." On the way back to RiverCity, with the driver at the wheel, Gregory didn't fall asleep this time, staring out the window, lost in thought. I gently twirled the smooth bracelet on my wrist. "You and Ramona must have faced a lot of disappointments over the years, huh?"

They had done decades of searching without finding her. I could almost feel the cycle of hope and letdown they must have endured.

"Not disappointed." Still facing the window, his profile sharp yet softened by memories, his voice laden with undefinable emotion, "With every person we rule out, I'm one step closer to her. Why feel disappointed?"

I felt a pang of emotion, unsure if it was envy for the unseen Lilliana or being moved by such genuine affection. It was like watching your favorite character in a drama, separated by circumstances beyond their control.

"I'm also looking into you." Gregory glanced at me, a smile on his lips. "I've even thought about what I'd do if you were her."

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"What should we do about it?" I knew it couldn't be me and just replied out of habit.

Gregory squinted dangerously, a rebellious smirk forming on his lips, "It's time to deal with those who've wronged you. They need to face the consequences."

I chuckled lightly. "And then what?"

"No 'then what'." Gregory pursed his lips, leaned his head against the headrest, and his eyelashes cast shadows that hid all his emotions, "You've always been on the Webster family's tree, even before Lilliana disappeared. You were the Webster family's Jane.

"But for some reason, I got attracted to you, just like Ramona did."

I instantly tensed up, watching him warily.

He laughed, his tongue flicking against his teeth, "What's with that look? You think I'd go for just anyone?"

"I wouldn't put it past you." I laughed, pulling my jacket closer around me, trying to lighten the mood in the car.

He yawned, dismissing me with a single word, "Childish."

Then, out of nowhere, he pulled out a sleep mask and fell asleep.

The following day was the grand opening of Jane Dream. The new employees arrived early with full enthusiasm, instantly changing the company's atmosphere.

Molly stood at the door of my office, knocking before poking her head in. "Jane... Ms. Webster, the friend who took you to the concert, has sent flowers for the opening."

I found her endearing as I stood up, indulging her, "You can keep calling me Jane in private."

Her eyes sparkled as she nodded vigorously. "Okay!"

As I walked out, I saw Mark approaching with a warm smile, joking, "Ms. Webster, best of luck with your opening. Remember, friends know us in good times, but we know our friends in tough times." Amused by his words, I said, "Please don't tease me."

He was slowly taking over the Larson family business. I could never match his level.

"Remember, in prosperity, our friends know us; in adversity, we know our friends," was more something I'd say to him.

Mark smiled. "Why didn't you tell me about your grand opening? I heard it from Christine."

"Today's Monday, and everyone's busy. I didn't want to bother you." As soon as I finished speaking, the new receptionist ran over excitedly., "Ms. Webster, one of your friends has sent many flowers. And the florist is waiting for you to sign for them."

"Who sent them?"

"Someone from RF Group sent 999 roses."

"What?" I was puzzled as I approached the reception, only to see the reception place and the hallway were all flowers! And more were being brought in from the elevator.

With such a large order, the florist was beaming, eagerly waiting for me to sign.

Christine also came out to see what was happening, amazed, "Who sent these? It is beyond generous."

"It seems to be York," I said.

Christine disagreed, "No way. He's not that close to us. He must've lost his mind to send so many roses."

I smiled. "Let me check."

Such a grand gesture deserved at least a thank-you call.

I pulled out my phone and dialed York, who answered quickly, "Ms. Webster, good morning."

"Mr. Carlson, good morning. We just received a bunch of flowers sent in the name of RF Group. Did you send them?" "Flowers?" York sounded surprised.

I felt awkward. "Yes, for the opening. The florist just delivered 999 roses."

"What? 999 roses?"

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I was utterly baffled. If not York, who else could have sent the flowers? We've only ever dealt with York from RF Group.

While pondering it, York's sudden realization came through on the other end of the phone. "Oh, oh, oh, it was me, all me! Silly me, I asked my assistant to handle it. He must have mixed it up. I meant to order 99, you know, to wish your company great success and longevity."

York sounded almost apologetic, "999 is admittedly a bit over the top. Didn't mean to cause you any trouble, did I?"

"Well..." Glancing at the roses crammed from the elevator lobby into our office, I managed a headache-induced smile, "Uh, not really. Maybe I could talk to the florist and see if we can return some? It's just too generous of you."

"No need. It's not a big deal for him." York blurted out and cleared his throat slightly, adding, "My assistant is here to gain some life experience. Loaded as can be. I'll deduct it from his bonus."

"Okay then." After expressing my gratitude and chatting a bit, I hung up.

Christine leaned in, curious. "So, he's the one who sent these roses?"

"Yep." I chuckled lightly, "But it was his assistant who goofed up. Turned 99 into 999."

Mark frowned, pondering. "How could one even make that mistake?"

"Ah, let it go. Isn't it nice to have flowers to brighten up the place?" As a flower enthusiast, Christine couldn't stop smiling at the continual delivery of flowers. "I need to snap a picture for my social feed. With this many flowers, our company would thrive."

"Go for it." Taking the invoice from the florist, I signed for the delivery.

Seizing the moment, Christine suggested, "Hey Jane, how about we throw a company dinner tonight? Celebrate our official launch and welcome the new faces."

I agreed, "Sounds great. I was thinking the same."

Looking toward Mark, I invited him with a warm smile, "Mark, free tonight? Join us?"

Having Mark involved was a gesture of gratitude. After all, he played a crucial role in getting JaneDream back to me. Dinner was the least I could do.

He was deep in thought, looking at the flowers, but offered a gentle smile upon hearing my invitation. "You're asking, and how can I say no?"

I smiled. "I'll send you the details once we've picked the time and place."

"Okay." Mark glanced at the time. "I should head back to my office then."

After seeing him off, Christine followed me into my office and sat across from me, wearing a teasing expression. "Spill it. How are things going with you and Mark now?"

"Nothing's changed." As I continued sketching the engagement dress for Dorothy, I replied.

Christine wasn't convinced, her skepticism evident. "No way. You're hiding something from me!"

I paused and looked up at her. "Mark and I made a six-month pact. Does that count as progress to you?"

"Definitely!" She was content, unable to resist prying further, "What's the pact about?"

I set down my pencil, lost in thought. "Mark will give up if I don't feel anything for him after six months."

Reflecting on the pact, I wasn't sure if it was right or wrong.

Christine nodded in understanding. "Having regrets?"

I asked, "Regrets about what?"

Christine looked at me, saying, "Making that pact."

"Not really." I shook my head, feeling a bit lost, "I agreed to it, hoping it would make him move on sooner. But now, I wonder if it could have spared him sometime if I had been clearer from the start." "Oh, please. Mark couldn't let go even when you were married."

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Christine shook her head, clearly not buying into my reasoning. "Plus, you're divorced now. Do you think a few words from you will make him back off? Setting a deadline is better."

At that moment, I had to admit she had a point. When I learned Mark had harbored feelings for the same girl for twenty years, I thought she must be lucky. But realizing that girl was me left me feeling more indebted than fortunate.

I struggled to find the proper response.

In the silence that followed, Christine leaned across the table, playfully flicking my earring. "Jane, why not give it a shot with Mark? It's rare to find a guy that devoted these days."

I sighed, "It's because he's such a catch that I must be careful."

I didn't want to toy with someone's heart. True devotion deserved true devotion in return. If I couldn't offer Mark that, it was only fair to let him move on and find someone who could. Unable to persuade me, Christine dropped the subject. "Anyway, how about we hit our usual spot for dinner tonight?"

By "our usual spot," she meant the upscale private club we often frequented.

I balked at the suggestion. "Isn't that a bit pricey?"

Christine said, "Don't worry. It's on me."

I couldn't believe my ears. "What, did money just fall into your lap?"

"It did." Christine stood up, her bright smile contrasting her red lipstick. "Steven's break-up fee. I didn't ask for it, but he dumped it all into my club account, and I can't get it refunded. Might as well treat everyone to dinner."

"Okay then." I couldn't help but smile. "Thanks, Ms. Jackson, for showing us a good time."

Thinking about the dinner, I clocked out at five. Christine and I each drove our cars, trying to snag seats just in time. Still, we got caught in the evening rush and arrived at the club to find Mark waiting. "Take it easy." Mark saw me hurrying and came over to offer a supporting hand, his voice gentle with concern. "It rained, and the ground's slippery. Don't twist your ankle."

I offered a small smile in return. "We called this dinner and made you wait. Sorry about that."

He waved off my apology. "Why so formal with me?"

"Not at all." I laughed, shaking my head.

Ever the whirlwind, Christine confirmed our private room with the host and led the way inside.

"Go ahead. I need to use the restroom." Passing by the restrooms, I veered off.

After taking care of business, I walked past a partially open door when laughter and teasing voices spilled out. "Ha! You're such a character. Who would send 999 roses for a grand opening? What are you doing, professing your love or proposing?"

My steps halted abruptly. That sounded eerily similar to the incident with York sending the flower arrangement that morning.

999 roses. It couldn't be a coincidence that someone else did the same thing today, right?

Another voice interrupted, "No offense, man, but if you're bold enough to do something that obvious, you should be brave enough not to let her take the fall!"

"Bro, since you're so blatantly supporting her, why not just lay it all out? Isn't a relationship all about moving forward together? It's not like we're 'birds of a feather that part ways when disaster strikes.' Besides,

it's not like we're at that point yet. If you're worried about her getting into trouble again, send her abroad. If she's unwilling to do that, maybe it's time to call it quits."

"Shut up." A sharp retort cut through the banter, its coldness silencing the room. The voice sounded eerily familiar.

Without thinking, I reached for the door handle and pushed the door open.

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Meanwhile, a gust of energy seemed to breeze through the door as I tried to peek inside, but the waiter quickly blocked my view.

"Privacy is a priority here," he seemed to imply with his stance.

"Good evening, miss. Are you a friend of Mr. Shaw's group?" the waiter inquired in a polite but curious tone.

Shaw? The name didn't ring any bells.

I shook my head. "No, I think I've got the wrong room."

As I turned to leave, I couldn't shake the feeling that eyes were piercing through me, sending shivers down my spine. When I glanced back, I found the door seamlessly shut.

Back in our private dining area, Christine had already ordered. "Check this out. Anything else you fancy?"

I replied, "I'm good. Whatever you guys have picked is perfect."

The incident lingered in my thoughts, puzzling me. It wasn't anyone I knew, but the bits I caught sounded eerily relevant to my life. Yet, I couldn't recall anyone with the surname Shaw among Bryant's circle. Sensing my distraction, Christine leaned in, whispering, "Penny for your thoughts?"

"Nothing," I replied with a forced smile.

It wasn't the time or place for such worries. Thankfully, the lively atmosphere in the room soon distracted me from my brooding thoughts.

Jeff, a designer at our firm, stood up with his glass raised toward me and Christine, his voice shy yet filled with gratitude, "Ms. Webster, Ms. Jackson, I'm thrilled to be part of Janedream... Thank you, truly, for giving me this opportunity!"

Among the recruits, he stood out due to his age and experience. Despite being a decade out of college with little to show for it, it wasn't for lack of talent. Jeff always stuck to his unique aesthetic, refusing to bow to market trends.

Naturally, companies hesitated to gamble on an unproven designer, making it increasingly difficult for Jeff to find work. But his portfolio caught my eye one day. It was a gamble, but one worth taking, in my opinion.

Raising my glass, I responded, "You deserve the opportunity. Everyone here earned their spot. Janedream is lucky to have you."

"Exactly," Christine said, clinking her glass against mine, "Now, sit. Let's all enjoy the night to the fullest."

Her words were our cue to cut loose, and pretty soon, everyone was raising their glasses to toast us.

After a few drinks, sitting by my side, Mark offered gently, "Ms. Webster can't hold her liquor. I'll take over from here."

The room erupted in cheers, led by Christine.

Molly clapped excitedly. "Mr. Larson, you're such a gentleman!"

I tried to protest, but Mark was firm. "You know your limits. Plus, you've been busy. How will you work tomorrow if you're hungover?"

"Okay," I gave in, moved by how thoughtful he was, "Just take it easy yourself. Don't overdo it."

His eyes sparkled as he reassured me, "Don't worry. I know my limits."

The atmosphere was electric, with Mark shielding me from further drinks and his easygoing nature making him a favorite.

Christine shot me a knowing look, whispering, "Be careful. You might have to take Mark home tonight."

Her quick wit made me laugh. "If it comes to that, so be it."

Mark was always sensible. There was nothing to worry about, even in a situation that could lead to misunderstandings.

But my phone rang before Mark could play his role as my knight in shining armor. It was Thomas.

Stepping outside, I answered, "Thomas, what's up?"