

**Excerpt Deleted from
“The Reunion Game”
Story 4 in *The Ladies of Legend: Finding Home Anthology*
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Note: Jane, the heroine, is pretending to be her twin sister Dawn, a famous actress. Graham is our hunky hero. Remember! This is unedited and the story changed when it became part of the anthology.

From her secluded seat near a large, leafy palm, Jane watched Graham and some gorgeous woman walk across the marble floor. She'd staked out the lobby all evening. Now her patience had paid off, much to her chagrin. She hadn't missed the woman's invitation, the kiss, or her decided air of ownership. Although just a small town girl, she was savvy enough to pick up on those proprietary vibes coming from this other woman.

Lacing her fingers over her stomach, Jane tried without success to quiet its quivering. Her insides rumbled with dismay. It had been silly of her to think she'd find Graham alone in New York. And even sillier to expect him to do a complete about-face once he heard her proclamation of love. It was a naïve kind of illusion someone from Pine Valley might bear.

Jane shut her eyes at the futility of her mission. She took a deep breath. She'd come too far from Pine Valley to go home now. Her heart beat more rapidly at the mere thought of returning empty-handed and then trying to explain her failure to Dawn.

And she'd have plenty of time to explain things to her sister, because as Dawn had driven her to the airport outside of Knoxville, she'd been on her cell phone to her Hollywood attorney. Seems as if Dawn wanted to pursue changing her custody arrangement with Matt's father. She'd called a local realtor too. Dawn Montgomery was coming home. Maybe not forever, she'd told Jane, but long enough to get her personal life straightened out and to capitalize on her renewed relationship with her son — and Clint.

Jane hadn't settled in her mind the prospect of having Dawn in Pine Valley once more. She couldn't handle that just yet. Not when her life was in such disarray. But maybe Dawn was due for a happy ending. She sure hoped so.

Opening her eyes, Jane looked past the ornate and opulent marble lobby. She looked deep into her heart and realized she couldn't give up. If Dawn weren't giving up on Matt, she wouldn't give up on Graham. Not until she heard from his lips the rejection she'd always feared.

Graham had taught her how to find the woman inside herself, the woman she never knew existed. She wasn't about to let a little competition beat her without first waging a good fight. Hadn't she cut in on Dawn at the high school reunion?

Jane stood up, letting out the breath she hadn't been aware she was holding. With trembling fingers, she smoothed the lines of her short navy skirt and matching blazer. She had dressed the part of a businesswoman, crisp and sharp, with spiked heels and a tiny, shoulder-strap bag. It gave her confidence. Even though she might not be dressed as trendy as Dawn, she knew she looked her best. She was comfortable with herself and her sophisticated image. Chin high and eyes straight ahead, Jane set out to find Graham in the restaurant.

"May I help you?" the maitre d' asked politely.

"A man just came in with a tall woman in red. Where are they seated?"

"Over there." He indicated with a nod of his head.

When he moved to accompany her to their table, Jane waved him away with her hand and a self-assured smile. "Don't bother. They're expecting me."

He deferred to her request, leaving Jane to pick her way alone through the tables of diners. She heard the gentle strains of a violin and the tinkling of fine china. She also noticed how the hum of conversation seemed to stop as she advanced deeper into the restaurant. But the hammering in her heart overpowered all other sounds, causing her to focus solely on her goal. Graham Winchester.

As she approached, he spotted her and set down the cup he held. Surprise registered in his eyes and then their dark depths beckoned to her. The intensity of his gaze bore into her, causing blood to rush to her head. Throwing her shoulders back and raising her head higher, Jane came toward him slowly, deliberately.

The woman must have noticed Graham staring. She turned in her chair to look over her shoulder. "Oh, my gosh, it's Dawn Montgomery!"

Jane heard the mistaken identity and her steps slowed. Tremors shot through her stomach. She wanted to cry out "No! I'm me. Jane Smith." But her mouth was strangely dry, her lips immobile. Her gaze shifted from the face of the woman back to Graham. Their gazes met. Hot passion shimmered in his eyes. It took her breath away, and she stopped dead in her tracks.

"Dawn!"

"No, I'm. . . ." she began.

Graham rose and quickly came around the table to grasp her hands in his. "Dawn, I haven't seen you since high school."

He squeezed her hands firmly and kissed her tenderly on her cheek. "I know who you are," he whispered. "Play along with me."

Slow on the draw, Jane looked from the twinkle that now danced in his eyes to the woman whose mouth had literally dropped open. And then back to Graham. His eyes darkened a moment as if he was worried she wouldn't go along with him. But she did. She squeezed his hands to signal her understanding, and felt the returning pressure that tied her to him in an act of conspiracy.

For whatever reason, Graham wanted her to be Dawn. And for the first time in her life, it was okay. Something profound had changed now that she had accepted herself as Jane.

Tossing a curl away from her eyes, she drawled loud enough for several tables to hear, "Graham Winchester, I heard you were in town, and just had to come congratulate you on your successful novel."

"Won't you join us?" Graham pulled out a chair.

"I think I will."

Graham couldn't believe his good fortune. From the moment she had started turning heads and stopping conversation as she walked toward him, he had known it was Jane. Only Jane could carry herself like a queen but retain that sincerity and simplicity of expression. Even dressed provocatively in a classy suit he'd never seen, she hadn't the world-weary look of her twin. He saw that now so easily -- now that he'd made love to her.

Graham's heart turned over in his chest. The woman he seated was not the girl of his childhood. There was something different about her. A look of sensuality. An air of purpose and steely intent. He wondered why she had come. As he returned to his chair, he hoped he could somehow rid himself of Tracy so that he could have the pleasure of finding out.

"Hello, I'm Dawn, and you are?" Jane was saying to Tracy.

"Tracy Johnson. I loved you in Winter's Day."

"That's nice," Jane dismissed her with a regal nod, and placed her left hand on Graham's sleeve. "Graham and I were sweethearts, you know?"

Tracy's ingratiating grin dropped into a smirk and her eyes narrowed.

Jane tilted toward Graham, who was having a hard time containing his mirth. "I do believe that's one reason Graham never married," she said, and then favored Tracy with a knowing look. "I broke his heart, you know."

"He could have fooled me," Tracy shot back.

Graham covered Jane's warm fingers with his. Little imposter. She had certainly come to play, and her words held double meaning for him.

"You did break my heart," he whispered, "but I don't think I knew it at the time."

In that instant they were alone. The glaring gaze of Tracy, the dulcet sounds of the violin, the chattering patrons were a thousand miles away. Graham sensed a hot, blazing desire flaring between them. The hard edge of his arousal caught him off guard, but he relished it. Just as he reveled in Jane's sultry blue eyes and enticing, but unassuming smile.

On impulse, he raised her hand to his lips to gently caress it with a kiss. Her eyebrow arched and that come-on look flashed into her eyes. He remembered the look when she had pretended to be Dawn.

Tracy noticed it too. She cleared her throat, popping him back into the present.

"So what brings you to New York?" Tracy asked, her voice spiteful. "I thought you were in Tennessee licking your wounds from your divorce."

Jane leveled a straightforward gaze at the other woman. "Seems as if the tabloids keep you well informed." Her smile was too sweet. "You shouldn't believe everything you read," she added with a shrug and turned back to Graham.

Heat rushed through Graham's veins, and he couldn't help chuckling. He liked the new Jane. Moreover, his male ego enjoyed the catfight. What guy wouldn't like provoking two beautiful women to spat over him?

Tracy stiffened. "Wait a minute here." She directed an indicting gaze toward Graham. "You said you haven't seen her since high school. You were just in Tennessee for your high school reunion."

"Yes," Graham admitted.

Jane shook her head and clucked like a protective mother hen. "Graham, it looks as if she's found us out." She turned to Tracy. "My dear, you seem to have a future as a tabloid reporter."

"Now look, Graham is my date," Tracy snarled, leaning forward to threaten Jane with a glare.

Jane lifted a brow. "Really? Well, you must be mistaken. He's my new fiancée."

Jane didn't know what perverse notion had compelled her to claim Graham as her fiancée. The words had just tumbled from her lips like the other things she'd said in front of that witch Tracy. Fortunately, her pronouncement did the trick, for in a huff, the woman climbed to her feet.

Placing her red polished nails on the table and leaning toward Graham to give him an evil glare, she said in an aside to Jane, "Well, you can just have the two-timing bastard."

Graham roared with laughter, but Jane winced, mortified by the use of such language in a public place. Her genteel mother must have turned over in her grave.

The nasty woman ignored Jane's sudden silence, only concentrating on Graham as he choked for breath. Evidently, she didn't care much for his sense of humor. After uttering an offended "oh!" she turned sharply and stamped out of the restaurant.

"Jane, you're wonderful." Graham lifted a hand to signal the waiter. "I just love you! Let's get out of here. We need to talk."

Jane didn't miss Graham's declaration of love. What woman would? Nervous electricity charged through her body, but hope was tempered by caution. After all, this was the man who had been angry because he thought she'd lied to him. This was the man who insisted on leaving Pine Valley.

Graham didn't act angry now. In fact, he seemed jovial, light-hearted, as if the weight of the world had lifted from his shoulders. Jane didn't get it. Not when her own insides felt tight like a cat ready to pounce.

As they escaped the restaurant, Jane finally became aware of the commotion her appearance had caused. A well-dressed woman boldly stopped her to ask for an autograph. Embarrassed, Jane signed Dawn's name with a flare, much to the continued amusement of Graham, who placed a warm hand on her shoulder.

They went upstairs to Graham's hotel room. Looking up at the fourteen-foot ceiling, amid the ambiance of the marble fireplace, crystal chandelier, and old-world luxury, Jane collected her thoughts. Always practical, she knew this was the time to get the answers she'd come for, and the moment to admit the truth to Graham. She loved him. Always had. Always would. She must now place all her cards on the table and hope for the best. . . .

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