*A Forge World Novelette*

by Meghan March

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## Chapter 1

"What do you mean, he took it all? How? I don't understand."

Jericho Forge's attention immediately shifted from the conversation Jack was having with him to the doorway of Forge's home office and the high-pitched questions coming from beyond it. Jack went silent.

"He drained the accounts and emptied my workshop. It's all gone. Every bolt of fabric. Every piece of lace. Every cent. Gone." A woman's wail carried through the house.

"Shit," Forge said. "That's Indy's little sister. I gotta go deal with this. You mind waiting here?"

Jack shook his head and leaned back in the most comfortable chair he'd ever sat in. "Not a problem. Take your time."

"Thanks," Forge said as he stood and crossed the room.

Jack couldn't help but listen in on the conversation taking place down the hallway. Their voices, understandably, were loud and occasionally shrill.

"How?"

"I trusted him! I thought … I thought he loved me." The hysterical woman—apparently his boss's sister-in-law—sounded like she was sobbing.

Poor girl, he thought. Trusting the wrong people is a hard lesson to learn.

"Who do we need to kill? Or I'll get the cops on it."

Jack couldn't help but grin at Forge's solutions. He hadn't gotten to where he was without being ruthless.

"Jericho … I've got this. It's …"

"I'm so sorry," the woman cried. "It was your money. And it's all gone."

"It's okay, Summer. Don't worry about the money," Forge replied. "You can start over again. No big deal."

"I don't even want to." She sniffled. "I don't want to make wedding dresses anymore. I just want to get married and be happy."

That caught Jack's attention. He had just been discussing with Forge that he wanted to resign from his role as ship captain and come back to shore life for that very reason. He was never going to meet a woman to settle down with when he was spending damn near fifty weeks per year on board a ship of all male crew. And the last thing Jack wanted was to find himself fifty or sixty and still be a bachelor.

"Really?" This came from Forge's wife. "You never said …"

"That I want what you have? What Alanna had? A home, with a husband? I don't even need kids. I'm tired of casuals and fuckboys. I want real. I want more. I don't want to keep dating for the rest of my life."

Jack silently rose from the chair, walked through the doorway, and down the hall, where the voices came from the room beyond. He knew Forge's wife was a lovely woman, but he was suddenly curious about his boss's sister-in-law.

He also didn't feel the least bit guilty about peering around the wall. After all, maybe he could be the answer to her prayers, and vice versa.

Holy shit. How is she still single?

The woman was stunning from this angle. She had thick blonde hair and a slim figure.

Like he had the instincts of a jungle cat, Jericho Forge glanced over and caught Jack's gaze. Jack shot him a grin, and Forge's eyebrows rose, as if he knew his thoughts and replied, Really?

Jack nodded.

"You sure that's what you want? Relationships take work, Summer. Your sister and I didn't exactly have it easy."

"But you love each other. I want that."

"Then you're going to have to quit picking fucking losers," Forge said matter-of-factly.

"Jericho," his wife snapped.

"What? It's the truth. She has shit taste in men."

"He's not wrong," Summer said as she wiped her eyes. "I do have terrible taste. You guys can just pick someone for me. I'm done trying. I give up."

"Summer …" her sister started.

"Perfect," Forge said, catching his eye with a wink. "I've got someone. He's a good guy. He'll take you out tonight. That way, you won't spend all night wallowing in self-pity. For the record, it doesn't help."

Jack took a step back into the hallway, just in case the women looked in his direction.

"Seriously?" Summer asked. "Just like that?"

"Yeah. Perfect timing, like you wouldn't believe. You'll thank me. He's got his own money, and he happens to be looking for a wife."

Jack couldn't help but grin. Sometimes, life was all about being in the right place at the right time.

"Jericho. Seriously." That came from India, who sounded like she was going to protest.

"I'll go." Summer didn't sound like she was crying anymore either.

"Summer—" her sister replied.

"If Forge says he's a good guy, then I'm in. I'm done with booty callers, social climbers, assholes, jackwads, frat boys, stag douches, and the rest of them too."

Jack tried not to laugh. She is funny.

"I can't believe this is happening," India replied.

"You trust me, Ace?"

"With my life and our children's lives."

“Then trust me on this. You’ll love Jack.”

“Jack? Ooh. I like his name already,” Summer said, and he grinned.

“He’s American. Been a ship captain for over a decade. Reliable. Hardworking. Solid.”

“Wait,” India said. “How old is he?”

Jack braced himself because he knew he was probably not old enough to be her dad, but damn close.

“Old enough and in the right place to give your sister what she needs, but not too old to have fun.”

“So, like, your age?” Summer asked.

“Yeah,” his boss replied.

“Perfect,” she said. “I am done with men my age. I want an older man. Someone who knows what he wants in life. As long as he doesn’t want me to call him Daddy.”

Jack almost choked, and laughter rang out in the room beyond the hallway.

“I think you’re good there. And if he does, I don’t want to know,” his boss replied.

“Are you sure about this?” his wife asked.

“I am,” Summer said, and he liked how willing she was to dive into the unknown.

“Totally,” his boss replied. “And if it doesn’t work out, we’ll find you someone else. Just give him a chance.”

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