

## The Weekend

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Fourth installment in the series of Meant To Be. Erica and Jack go to the mountains for a weekend of "roughing it" along with Janet, Trevor, Amanda, Bianca and Leo. Erica's luck apparently didn't end in Las Vegas. PG rating

### *Chapter 1*

"This was a wonderful idea," Janet said as she and Trevor arrived at the mountain cabin. "It's so nice to get away from Pine Valley for the weekend."

"It was great of Jack and Erica to ask us to join them," Trevor answered.

"I'm surprised they aren't here already. Wow, would you look at this? Only Erica Kane would call a house this size a cabin. The rest of America would call it an estate."

"Does this place even get cable?" Amanda asked.

"No complaints" Trevor told her. "We didn't come up to the mountains to watch TV."

Just then they heard Jack's SUV coming up the gravel drive. "Sounds like they made it," Janet said, going to the door. Jack was unloading luggage while Erica unfastened Nicholas from his car seat.

As soon as she put him down he spotted a squirrel and raced after it. "Doggie!" he shouted. Erica started after him but Amanda stopped her. "I'll watch him Erica." She took off after Nicholas. "No, Nicholas that's not a doggie. It's a squirrel. You can't play with squirrels."

"How long are you planning on staying up here?" Trevor asked as Jack kept unloading the SUV.

"Don't you start," Erica said laughing. "Jack's already read me the riot act for over packing. I just believe in being prepared for anything."

"The Allies didn't take this much stuff ashore at Normandy," Jack grumbled, finally reaching the last of the bags. "We're spending a weekend in the mountains not moving to a third world country."

"Where's Bianca?" Janet asked.

"She's driving her own car up. She had some things she needed to do first. I think Leo may be coming with her. He's been at loose ends since he broke up with Greenlee," Erica answered.

Jack cleared his throat. "Erica, do you think you might help me get some of these bags into the cabin, considering that they're almost all yours?"

"But darling, I married you so that I wouldn't have to carry my own luggage," she said,

her dark eyes sparkling. "It's not my fault the mountains don't have bell hops."

"I'll help you," Trevor said, picking up one of the bags. "My God, what's in this one?"

They all went into the cabin, followed by Amanda and Nicholas. "Sweetheart, did you catch the squirrel?" Erica asked him.

"No," he said shaking his head. "Doggie's gone."

"Nicholas, I don't want you chasing everything you see up here," she told him. "Some animals might bite."

"I hope the fish are biting tomorrow morning," Trevor said. "I want to get an early start."

"You're not expecting me to get up early and go fishing are you?" asked Amanda.

"No, I wouldn't dream of it," Trevor told her.

"I'd like to take Nicholas with us," Jack said. "Not tomorrow morning but maybe just for a little while in the afternoon."

"Jack, no, he's too little," Erica protested. "I don't want him in the boat."

"I'm not talking about taking him in the boat honey." Jack put his arm around her reassuringly. "We'll just stand at the edge of the lake and let him put a pole in the water. You know I'll watch him every minute. I just want him to experience his first fishing trip."

It was dinnertime when Bianca and Leo arrived. "Hey, this looks great. I'm starving," Bianca said, sitting down and filling her plate. She hesitated, then said, "Mom, you didn't cook anything did you?"

"No," Erica said smiling. "I offered to help but your father and Trevor told me to stay out of the kitchen."

"That's good," said Leo. "We're miles from the nearest hospital."

"Very funny," Erica told him. "Just for that, I won't get up and cook breakfast in the morning either."

"Who's joining Jack and me for fishing in the morning?" Trevor asked.

"I'll pass," Janet said.

"I think I'll be a good hostess and keep Janet company," Erica laughed.

"I want to go riding in the morning," said Bianca. "There's a stable about a mile from here where you rent a horse for the day. But if you go back in the afternoon, I'd like to go."

"We'd love to have you," Jack told her. "What about you Leo?"

"Sounds like fun," Leo said, to everyone's surprise. "What time do we leave?"

"Five thirty," Jack said.

"OK, I'll be there."

"Uh Leo, five thirty comes in the morning too," Bianca said as everyone laughed.

"I want to go," Amanda piped up.

"I thought you didn't like fishing anymore," Trevor told her.

"I changed my mind," she answered.

The conversation around the table continued throughout the meal and afterwards. Leo was a little quieter than usual, still missing Greenlee even though he knew their breakup was inevitable. Amanda kept sneaking looks at him across the table, convinced that he was the most handsome man she had ever seen. The girls at school would die when she told them about the hunk she had spent the weekend with. Maybe he didn't know she was only 13.

Later that night, Erica slipped into bed next to Jack and snuggled up against him. "I forgot how much colder it is up here in the mountains," she said.

"If you ask nicely, I'll warm you up," he said, pulling her closer. "Is Nicholas all settled in?"

"He's sound asleep," she answered. "Bianca, Leo and Amanda are watching horror movies. Did you notice how Amanda was looking at Leo? I think she's got a major crush on him. She'll probably spend the weekend trying to catch his attention."

"I was hoping to discuss your major crush on me," he said, his hands tracing their way down her body. "Maybe you could show me what you plan on doing to catch my attention."

"What about this?" She moved on top of him and began trailing kisses down his body. "Oooh, I think I have your attention now."

## *Chapter 2*

"It's really such a waste," Erica said sleepily as Jack finished getting dressed the next morning.

"What is?" he asked.

"The way you look in those jeans. No one but the fish to see how sexy you are." She got out of bed and came over to him, wrapping her arms around him.

"You look pretty sexy yourself," he said, bending to kiss her. Barely awake and wearing only his shirt from the day before, she was still the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. "Whoa, don't do that," he laughed pulling her hands away from the top of his jeans. "Trevor's waiting for me."

"And the fish, don't forget the fish," she said, unbuttoning the shirt he had just buttoned. "You don't want to keep them waiting do you?" She wound her arms around his neck. "Such a dilemma Jack, me or the fish. Which do you want more?"

"Sorry I'm late Trevor," Jack said when he finally made it downstairs.

"The alarm didn't go off on time."

"You really need to get a new alarm clock," Trevor said grinning, obviously not buying Jack's excuse. "This happens to you a lot doesn't it?"

Jack looked embarrassed. "Yeah, it does. Anyway, let's get started.

Where's Leo?"

Trevor pointed to the couch where Leo had fallen back asleep. Amanda came out of the kitchen just then. "I made lunches for everyone. Are we ready?"

"Should we wake him up?" Jack asked.

"Of course we should," Amanda answered. "Leo, it's time to leave. Wake up!"

Leo didn't move.

"Let him sleep Amanda," Trevor said. "I don't think he wanted to go that much."

"But...." Amanda was now faced with the prospect of a morning of fishing and no Leo. Just then Leo yawned and sat up.

"I'm ready if you guys are. What kind of fish are we looking for?"

Erica and Janet carried their coffee out to the porch and sat down on the swing, watching Nicholas play in the leaves. "This is quite a cabin Erica. It's funny though. I always thought your idea of a weekend get away would be a Manhattan co-op."

"The cabin was really Jack's idea," Erica said. "He loves being able to come up here and get back to nature. It makes him happy and I don't mind roughing it once in a while."

Janet laughed. "Roughing it? Six bedrooms, five bathrooms, a gourmet cook's dream of a kitchen and a home gym is what you call roughing it?"

"Doggie!" Nicholas shouted, running after a rabbit. "Doggie!"

Erica jumped up and ran after him, carrying him back to the porch swing upside down as he giggled. "That's a rabbit sweetheart. What did mommy tell you about not chasing the animals?"

"I guess we should have brought Smokey with us instead of leaving him with Myrtle," Janet said. "Then Nicholas wouldn't have to chase the wildlife."

"Bye Mom, I'm going to the stables." Bianca hurried past them on her way to her car.

"Be careful," Erica called after her.

"Mom, I've been riding horses all my life"; Bianca rolled her eyes. "Are you going to tell me to be careful every time I leave the house?"

"Probably," Erica said to Janet as Bianca drove away. "Am I too overprotective?"

"I'm the wrong one to ask," Janet said. "Amanda says I drive her crazy."

"It's nice to have a day just to be moms instead of cosmetics tycoons isn't it?" Erica said smiling.

Janet nodded. "We'll have to rough it like this more often."

### *Chapter 3*

The fishermen returned right before lunch, having had a successful morning. "Look at these," Trevor said. "We'll have plenty to eat tonight."

"Just remember, if you catch them, you clean them," Janet told him.

"Baby, I'll not only clean them, I'll cook them. Cooking over a campfire is my specialty."

"Man, I'm glad I didn't catch anything," Leo said flopping down on the porch. Nicholas grabbed his hand and started trying to pull him up. "Come on," he said.

"Not now Nicholas, I'm tired." Leo closed his eyes. Nicholas pried one of them open. "Come on," he insisted.

"I guess I'm taking Nicholas for a walk," Leo groaned, standing up and following the little boy off of the porch.

"I'll go with you. I'm good at keeping up with him," Amanda said.

Janet and Erica watched her with amused smiles. "She's got it bad doesn't she?" Janet said.

"What's for lunch?" Jack asked.

"I made sandwiches," Erica told him. "I thought that was safest since we're so far from any fire departments."

"Good thinking," he said grinning at her.

"Doggie!" Nicholas said, taking off in a run with Leo right behind him. "Every animal isn't a dog Nickster. That one is a ....oh my God!" Leo scooped Nicholas up. "Stay still Amanda. It's a skunk!" The skunk eyed the little group curiously for a minute then wandered back into the woods.

"That was close," Amanda said. "How did you know to stay still Leo?"

"That's what they did with the dinosaurs in Jurassic Park. I thought it should work for skunks too."

"You're so smart," Amanda said admiringly.

"Doggie gone," Nicholas said sadly.

"I thought I'd take Nicholas down to the lake for a little while and let him fish," Jack said after lunch. "Why don't you come with us honey? You can bring the camera and take a few pictures."

"All right," said Erica. "As long as I don't have to get too close to the fish."

They walked with their son down to the lake where Jack had left his fishing gear on the bank. "Here Nicholas, you pick out a worm for Daddy to put on the hook," Jack told him, opening up the container of bait. Nicholas squealed with delight at the sight of the worms. Erica kept her distance. Jack took the worm Nicholas picked up and put it on the hook. Nicholas picked up another one and ran over to Erica.

"Here Mommy," he said.

Erica looked a little pale. "No thank you sweetheart. You can keep it. Go back over to Daddy and he'll help you catch a fish." She glared at Jack who was laughing so hard he almost dropped the fishing pole.

Jack helped his son put the line in the water and handed the small pole to him to hold. Nicholas looked over at Erica. "Fish Mommy," he said.

"Yeah, fish Mommy," Jack said still chuckling. "I've got an extra pole."

"Forget it," she said.

"Fish Mommy," Nicholas said again looking at her pleadingly with his huge brown eyes.

"Well, maybe for just a minute," she said reluctantly.

"I knew you couldn't resist that look," Jack told her. "Here, take this." He handed her the pole. Suddenly the line began spinning out.

"What did I do?" she asked, startled.

"You caught a fish," Jack said. "Reel it in."

"You reel it in. I don't want it!" She thrust the pole back at Jack and backed up. Nicholas was thrilled watching his father reel in the huge fish. He threw his own pole down and tried to catch it as Jack brought it in. "Look at Mommy's fish Nicholas," Jack said.

"What's that rule again? If you catch it you have to clean it?"

"I'm not touching it," Erica said. "Throw it back in." She took several more steps backward away from the fish.

"Don't worry sweetheart. I'll clean it for you. But it's the biggest one anyone has caught so far on this trip. I don't want to throw it back. I can't wait to see Trevor's face when he gets a look at this."

#### *Chapter 4*

"I still can't believe Erica caught Big Billy. That fish is legendary," Trevor said shaking his head as everyone gathered around the campfire for dinner that night.

"I didn't catch him," she said. "Jack reeled him in. I was just holding the pole when he jumped on it."

"Jumped on it," Trevor snorted. "Some people don't appreciate their own luck."

"Did you catch anything this morning Leo?" Bianca asked.

"No, I fell asleep in the boat," he told her. "I don't think I'm cut out for all this outdoor stuff. But I did save Nicholas from a black doggie with a white stripe down it's back."

Bianca laughed. "I can just see Nicholas chasing a grizzly bear and calling it a doggie."

"Don't even joke about that," Erica said. "I'm glad he's not afraid of anything but I wish he wouldn't chase everything that moves."

Bianca moved closer to where Erica and Jack were sitting. "Mom, Dad, can I talk to you about something?"

"Of course honey," Jack said.

"I've been thinking a lot about college next year," Bianca began. "I know I've gotten a lot of information from a lot of schools but I've decided I'm just not ready to go away to school yet. I want to go to PVU, at least for my freshman year."

"That's wonderful!" Erica said, hugging her daughter. "I'm so glad you've decided to live at home a little longer."

Bianca looked down at the ground. "I didn't say I was going to live at home Mom."

"The dorms at PVU are pretty nice from what I've heard," Jack said. "I think you'll enjoy living on campus."

"I'm not going to live on campus either," Bianca said. "Laura and I are going to share an apartment."

"Oh Bianca, do you think that's a good idea?" Erica asked.

"No mom, I think it's a terrible idea. That's why I want to do it," Bianca snapped.

"Bianca!" Jack gave her the look.

"I'm sorry. But I don't understand why you have a problem with me sharing an apartment with Laura. It's not like she's my girlfriend or anything."

"That's why we're concerned," Jack told her. "Honey, you and Laura are just friends but I think you'd like it to be more. Isn't that true?"

Bianca looked a little sad. "It's never going to be more Dad. I know that."

"But living with her, you're just putting yourself in a position to be hurt.

You'll be watching someone you care about dating other people and it's going to be painful. I've been there Bianca." Jack reached over and took Erica's hand. "I spent years being your mother's best friend. Hell, I even went to one of her weddings. It's not easy and living with Laura will make it even harder."

"We just want you to be happy Bianca," Erica said. "It's only November now. You have months to decide where you want to live next year."

"I know what I want Mom. I'm not going to change my mind." Bianca got up and went over to the fire. Amanda joined her.

"Bianca, do you think Leo knows how old I am?"

"I don't know. Maybe." Bianca looked at Amanda curiously. "He's so cute, isn't he? I know you don't like boys but don't you think he's cute?"

"Amanda, he's way too old for you."

"I know I'm young but so was Juliet." Amanda was staring at Leo with a dreamy smile.

"Yeah, and look what happened to her," Bianca told her.

"Nicholas fell asleep before his head hit the pillow," Jack said later, coming in to their bedroom. He looked at Erica who was sitting on the floor by the fireplace. "Do you have any idea how beautiful you look by firelight?"

She tilted her head and smiled up at him. "Of course I do. Why do you think I'm sitting over here?"

Jack laughed as he came to join her. "Still the healthiest ego of anyone I know. That's part of why I love you so much." He kissed her, softly at first but then deeper and more intensely. He pulled her up to her knees, his mouth devouring hers, breaking the kiss only long enough to pull her sweater over her head.

"Oh God," she moaned as he laid her down and slipped off her jeans. "I hope this room is soundproof."

### *Chapter 5*

Anyone want to join us for one last fishing trip before we head back to Pine Valley tonight?" Trevor asked on Sunday morning.

"You should come with us Erica," Jack grinned. "You were pretty lucky yesterday."

"No thanks," she laughed. "I've had enough fishing for one lifetime."

"I'll go Dad," Bianca told him. "I haven't been fishing since summer camp when I was ten. How about you Leo?"

"I think I'll just take a nap," Leo said yawning.

"I'll stay here too," Amanda said, smiling at Leo.

"Outside Mommy," Nicholas said, climbing up on Erica's lap.

"Oh sweetie, not right now." Erica and Janet had found an old tearjerker on tv and were curled up on the couch with a box of kleenex between them. "Please," he begged.

"I'll take him out Erica," Amanda said. "This movie is pretty lame. Why didn't they just call each other instead of meeting at the top of the Empire State Building?" She took Nicholas by the hand and went outside with him.

She chased him for a while and made piles of leaves for him to jump in to. Then she noticed Leo coming out of the cabin. "Hi, Leo," she said walking over to the porch. "I thought you were taking a nap."

"I couldn't sleep. It's just too quiet out here. It's almost spooky."

"Like in that movie the other night when it's totally silent while all those birds come and are perched on the playground," Amanda said. "That was so much fun watching movies with you and Bianca."

"I thought you were going to hide under the couch for a minute there," Leo teased her. "So what are you doing out here?"

"Playing with Nicholas," Amanda said looking back towards where she had left the little boy. He wasn't there. "Nicholas, come back over here," she called. He didn't appear.

"Nicholas, no hiding kid, come here," Leo said, sounding a little worried. "Where could he have gone?"

"I don't know. He was right here a minute ago. Nicholas! Nicholas!" Amanda was starting to panic.

"What's going on?" Jack asked as he, Trevor and Bianca came back from the lake. "I was watching Nicholas but I can't find him," Amanda said, bursting into tears. "He was right here and now he's gone."

### *Chapter 6*

"What do you mean he's not here? You said you would watch him! I trusted you Amanda!" Erica and Janet had come out on the porch just in time to hear Amanda say Nicholas was missing.

"I'm sorry," Amanda cried. "I just came up on the porch to talk to Leo. I didn't think he'd leave."

"I have to find him." Erica started to run toward the woods but Trevor grabbed her back.

"Don't just take off honey. Let's get this organized so that we can find him as fast as possible. Janet, go get the signal flares out of the car. We'll split up and search in pairs. Who ever finds him will send up a flare so that everyone will know when he's safe. Now Jack and I know this territory pretty well. What about you Bianca? I know you went riding yesterday."

"I rode most of the trails Trevor. I have a good sense of direction too." Bianca was trying to be strong but she was very worried about her little brother.

"Good, you and Leo head north. Remember Nicholas probably won't stay on the trails. Keep calling out his name as you go." He handed them a flare and they went off. "Jack you and Erica go towards the lake. I'll take Amanda and we'll head west. Janet, you stay here and call the sheriff's department. Let them know what's going on and tell them to bring tracking dogs up."

"Jack, he's been gone nearly an hour. It's getting colder all the time. We have to find him." Erica was trying not to cry as they searched all around the lake. "What if he got close to the water. You know how much he loves it. He would have waded right in." She lost her battle against tears. "He doesn't know he can't swim."

"Sweetheart, we're going to find him," Jack told her, putting his arms around her. He didn't want to admit that his fears were the same as Erica's. "Come on now, let's go this way. Nicholas! Nicholas!"

They walked for another ten minutes calling their son's name. Then Jack spied something next to a tree. "Look!" It was Nicholas, curled up next to a dog, sound asleep.

"Oh my God, my baby!" Erica ran to her son and picked him up, hugging him tightly. The dog stood up, wagging it's tail.

"Hi Mommy," Nicholas said sleepily. "Hi Daddy," as Jack took him from Erica's arms and gave him a bear hug. "See my doggie."

"Let me send off the flare," Jack said handing the little boy back to Erica. "Nicholas this will let everyone know you're all right. We've been looking everywhere for you."

"Were you scared baby?" Erica asked, stroking his hair.

"No," he said matter-of-factly. "See doggie."

"Yes, I see the dog," Erica said, taking a good look at him. He was thin and shaggy, obviously a stray but he seemed to be very friendly. "Did you chase the dog sweetheart?"

Nicholas nodded. "I want down," he said, beginning to squirm in his mother's embrace.

She sat him down reluctantly.

"I don't think Nicholas knew he was lost," Jack said. "We're the ones who were terrified. He was having a great time." Nicholas started towards the lake and Jack stepped towards him to prevent him from reaching the water. But he stopped as the dog got between the little boy and the water, nudging Nicholas playfully in the other direction. Nicholas giggled and began to run the other way. "Did you see that?" Jack asked Erica.

"I think we know why he didn't end up in the lake," she answered, tears in her eyes. "It looks like our son has a guardian angel."

### *Chapter 7*

"Nicholas, you're all right!" Bianca grabbed her little brother from her mother and hugged him tightly. She and Leo had rushed back to the cabin when they saw the flare go up, followed within a few minutes by Trevor, Amanda, and the other searchers brought in by the sheriff's department.

Nicholas seemed unaware that all the fuss was for him. "See my doggie," he told his sister. It was obvious what he considered important.

"Where did you find you find the dog?" Bianca asked him, ruffling his hair.

"I think maybe he found Nicholas," Jack said, telling her how the dog had steered Nicholas away from the water. "It looks like we have ourselves a dog."

"Do you think he was lost, just like Nicholas?" Amanda asked, kneeling to pet the animal.

"It's more likely someone brought him up here and dumped him off," answered one of the sheriff's deputies. "It happens a lot."

"That's horrible," said Janet. "How can anyone be that cruel?"

"I think I'll take Nicholas inside now," Erica said, after thanking the sheriff's search team and watching them drive away. "He must be exhausted.

I know I am."

"Doggie come," Nicholas said.

"Of course the dog can come," Erica said.

"What if he isn't housebroken?" Leo asked.

"He may have saved my son's life. I can handle an accident in the house." Erica grinned at Leo. "Besides, it would be a chance for you to make yourself useful."

"I have a feeling that dog just landed in the lap of luxury," Trevor said laughing.

Later, after Erica and Jack had taken Nicholas upstairs for a nap, Bianca and Leo decided the dog needed a bath.

"Poor dog, he's so thin," Bianca said, pouring water over his head and down his back.

"Did you ever read that book "Ribs" when you were a kid? This boy finds a stray dog that's so thin you can see his ribs. Maybe we should name him Ribs."

"Maybe," Leo said. "I wonder what kind of dog he is. I've never seen one that looks exactly like this."

"He's what they call a duke's mixture," Trevor said, coming into the bathroom. " He must be part border collie, the way he was almost herding Nicholas."

"He's smaller but he might be part St. Bernard. Aren't they rescue dogs?" Bianca asked.

"That's it! That's the perfect name for him. Bernie." Leo said. "What do you think Bernie? How's that for a name?" The dog shook water all over the bathroom.

"I wonder if that was a yes or a no," laughed Bianca reaching for a towel.

"Erica, I'm so sorry about this afternoon," Amanda said, sitting down next to Erica on the couch. Nicholas was up from his nap and playing happily with Bernie in front of the fireplace. The dog was happy to reunited with the little boy and away from the bathtub and Bianca's blow dryer.

"I know sweetheart. I'm sorry that I was so harsh with you," Erica said. "I was just very worried about my son."

"I was watching Leo instead of Nicholas," Amanda confessed. "I'll never do anything like that again. Love makes you do stupid things doesn't it?"

"Sometimes." Amanda was totally serious and Erica was trying very hard not to smile. "But you learn from your mistakes."

She looked at Jack who was wrestling with his son and Bernie. "Then sometimes if you're lucky, you finally get everything right."

*THE END*