

Living the Wright Life

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Chapter One

Jamie Parker looked over as a group of women seated themselves near the window at the Midtown Café. Sitting across from her sister-in-law Sandy, she scanned the menu.

"I hope Ruth had a good time. I think she broke a record, only mentioned Cameron twenty times today. Guess she wanted to make sure I'd never forget she had a gorgeous nephew."

Sandy laughed. "You couldn't be more right on that one."

"Of course," Jamie flashed her pearly whites and gave her a devilish smile. "I always am."

"Brat."

"Yes, but you still love me."

"I admit nothing and declare my innocence." Sandy pushed her auburn curls away from her face.

"You forgot to bat your eyes like the most innocent southern belle."

"Behave yourself." Sandy playfully pointed her finger.

Jamie laughed. "You married into the family. You have to be good to me. As my sister-in-law, it's an integral part of your job description."

"I don't recall that in the wedding vows."

"Funny," she drawled as she patted her Sandy's hand, "I remember it quite well."

Sandy laughed. "You have an awesome imagination."

"It's my greatest gift." Jamie tilted her head and sniffed.

She snorted. "Along with always being right? Here comes Ruth."

"Did the waitress come?" Ruth Garrison bellowed and sat next to Sandy.

"Yes, Jamie ordered for you." Sandy clasped the elderly woman's hand.

“Thank you, dear. I appreciate you including me.”

“I enjoy your company.” Jamie corrected, “We enjoy your company.”

“I hope so, since you so kindly come to visit,” the older woman said, “Reading to me on occasion.”

Jamie arched an eyebrow. “Once a week isn’t ‘*on occasion*’.”

“It’s all the same if you’re not making it an afternoon ritual. Once you’re married...”

She enjoyed her visits with Ruth but realized silence was best. She’d started reading to her while she’d been recuperating from her chemo sessions.

It’d become so routine, neither one of them wanted to stop. However, one misconstrued remark and Ruth would surely find some way to manipulate a promise to visit every afternoon.

“What are you reading?” Sandy jumped in, obviously understanding where Ruth was leading the conversation.

“Potter,” Jamie replied. “Book seven.”

“It amazes me that you read them,” Sandy remarked. “I preferred the movies.”

“I’ve seen all of them at the theatre.” Jamie laughed. “And own the books, too.”

“Books are much more interesting, although, I do miss the old movie classics. No one comes close to the icons: Katherine Hepburn, Cary Grant, and Dean Martin. The list could go on.”

Jamie grinned. When she reached Ruth’s age, she wanted to be exactly like her—surly, brash, and not caring if she was politically correct. Only, her image was a cute little old lady with a tight bun, a cane, and a Tweety bird. Of course, one must not forget the cantankerous cat; a Maine Coon would be perfect.

She’d recently received her doctorate in Marine Archaeology. Enjoying her independence, she couldn’t understand the push on marriage from her mother and Ruth. What was the rush? Just because her brothers had married before they were twenty-six didn’t mean she had to marry.

No one could say Jamie was hopeless. She wasn’t from the most affluent family in town, but her trust fund would keep her content and secure.

The fortune hunters had made their attempts, which Jamie was always very cautious of falling into that trap, a category for impending disaster.

Her connections were admirable, her family influential. Her brother was, as their father before him, the CEO, and chairman of JB Parker, a nationwide commercial development company. If a person wanted to join forces with one of the most prominent families in New York, he could do a lot worse than the Parkers.

However, she didn't want to delve too deeply on how long it'd been since she had a legitimate date, never mind an offer of marriage.

If someone were foolish enough to attempt to manipulate her, Jamie would play the devil's advocate. Of course, she'd win the debate. It was a rare occurrence when someone outwitted or beat her in a verbal battle. She refused to act the coy seductress, batting the eyelashes, and pretending that the man was more intelligent.

She *was* growing a bit cautious. The breathtaking balls, the theme parties, the magical chase had been quite enjoyable, but it was the same people year after year. It'd become monotonous. It was rare that a ball or party created a rushing excitement. They were extravagant, the modern way of courting and searching for the perfect match. The excitement for her was gone.

Unfortunately, whenever she mentioned the tedium to her mother, her simple reply was to find herself a husband, a nice lawyer, doctor, or CEO.

Her mother had given up any subtlety of her youngest daughter's unmarried state. Instead, it had meandered into a quest. She could see her mother singing *The Impossible Dream*.

Of course, the impossible quest, the heavenly cause would be to see all her children happily married. Only she remained, since her brother Aaron had taken the deep plunge last year, joining forces with Sandy.

If she'd accepted any of her previous proposals, they'd have all been complete and utter catastrophes. Disasters of the tabloid form...paparazzi candy.

Those people would be like hounds, breathlessly waiting for the rare meat of scandal and divorce. Goosebumps shivered up her arm. It'd be better to stay single than shackled to a social climber. They'd already commented about her being a modern day spinster, hinting she needed to come out of the closet since no one sees her with a man. Just because she's waiting to marry does not mean she was gay. And...if she was, it was none of their business *anyway*. Even her mother, inveterate matchmaker that she was, couldn't argue that point.

She needed to kick her brother, Logan, hard for becoming an actor. They were already in New York society, now they had nationwide notoriety because of him.

They followed Logan and the Parker family like a pack of wolves, aching to find anything on them. It'd be better to remain unmarried than be with someone who made her miserable, creating a juicy scandal for the tabloids.

Ruth thumped her purse. "Where's that nephew of mine?"

"Which nephew?" Jamie asked.

She boomed a surly snort. "Which nephew? The only one I like spending any time with."

Jamie's eyes widened in surprise. "Cameron's coming to pick you up tonight? Why? I could've driven you home, you know."

"He is." Ruth beamed, not missing the whiplash of reaction from Jamie. "Hard to believe, isn't it?"

Jamie twitched. "He's coming because?"

"Did your little ears perk up?"

"Really," Jamie quipped.

"Very well," Ruth sighed, temporarily thwarted. "Blackmail, my dear."

Both ladies eyed her, doubt written on their faces.

"With a bit of strategically placed guilt."

"Why? What are you up to?" Jamie demanded.

"Nothing. Only wanting to spend time with my nephew."

"Mmm, a job well done." Sandy commented, tapping her iced tea and looking around. "Where's our food?"

Jamie shrugged. "Ah, your artful sense of drama and manipulation."

The older woman smiled coyly. "Yes, a talent you possess as well."

Sandy laughed. "Cameron hasn't been to a town meeting before, has he? We should get him to come next month."

"Unlike the two of you, the young tend to let the future of the town be decided by the older generation. I believe there isn't enough incentive for him to attend." The elderly woman rolled her shoulders. "No entertainment for him."

Jamie and Sandy laughed.

"No one with airborne reckless leg syndrome." Ruth was sometimes brutally honest. Out of anyone else's mouth, it would've been startling.

Jamie covered her blushing face, her shoulders bouncing up and down as she attempted to repress the laughter. Sometimes Ruth came up with such priceless edicts. She mumbled. *Airborne reckless leg syndrome*, she had to remember that one.

The long awaited food arrived and everyone was quiet while they enjoyed their sandwiches.

Handsome, gorgeous, drool-worthy Cameron Wright was coming to pick up Ruth.

In elementary school, she'd developed a wild crush on him; ending about the time she entered college and realized the direction Cameron's life was going. When she'd been growing up, she used to pretend Cameron and were getting married.

She'd play in the attic and dress up in her mother's wedding gown. Her imagination took her as far as memorizing wedding vows and exchanging them with her Ken doll/Cameron doll.

Her nephew was notorious for his womanizing ways and wicked reputation. Most men behaved in the same manner. They all wanted the same thing. However, they weren't living in the public's eye, handsome as *all* get out, a successful real estate tycoon, and a Wright.

For years, the sight of him had stolen Jamie's breath, his smile remaining in her memories the way no one else's ever had. It'd taken her years to get over him, to shake off the effects of his appeal. Well, not exactly *over* him, considering that he'd never shown her any sign of encouragement. Nevertheless, all through high school she'd put him in a neatly labeled section of her memories where he belonged—sweet, romantic, young fantasies.

Cameron was one of the most eligible bachelors and in high demand for escort to any society function. However, he was most careful with whom he was seen, making sure it was no one of proper marriageable qualities.

If it was someone respectable, he was careful to keep it open in the public's view and short-lived. It was intentional and strategically planned. If he gave them an inkling he pursued a permanent relationship, it'd be plastered all over the rags.

The reporters would've been shrieking as though they were about to collapse at any moment, thrilled to be the one digging up such good dirt; beating their competitors, the first one to print the exclusive story.

Of course, the papers loved the gossip that was always ready to explode on the scene when any of Cameron's ex's attended the same

function. They wanted desperately to know why the couple broke up. None of his ex's ever said a word about why. It was as if they'd all signed a gag order.

The entire situation created an air of intrigue to the already popular man. In Jamie's not-quite-so humble opinion, it captivated the ladies' curiosity, making the chase a challenge. Who'd be the lucky one to catch and tame him?

It was a peculiar situation to be sure. Some of the whispers heard at functions made her shake her head. Cameron would be finished with sowing his wild oats soon enough. Some mothers considered it a challenge and pushed their daughters shamelessly at him, trying for the conquest, trying to corner him. Others directed their daughters to a safer and more secure bond with bachelors who were more marriage conscious and less rebellious.

Cameron's brother had died a tragic death almost a year earlier, a victim of a robbery gone wrong. Frank had always been a serious, determined young man, knowing what he wanted and how to go about getting it. Cameron was the rebel, the black sheep in the family. Despite the difference in personalities, they'd been close friends, as well as brothers.

Now Cameron was the only heir to the Wright fortune. It'd only served to make him that much more of a catch. Last month, at the Sacred Heart Ball, a charity function for the hospital, Jamie had observed young girls falling all over each other to get a glimpse or gain his attention. It was appalling and inexcusable for this day and age.

She tried explaining to them that he was there only because his aunt had insisted. He preferred singers and actresses, avoiding the ladies he'd be forced into marrying if he compromised them. Nevertheless, they gaped starry-eyed, practically swooning at his feet.

As for her, Jamie wasn't ready for marriage. Just because her parents were stuck with old-fashioned, archaic beliefs didn't mean she was going to go along with their plans. Besides, no one had shown interest in her.

Her money? Yes. In *her*? No. That was fine. If the men of New York couldn't appreciate a woman who knew her own mind, that was their problem.

"I think I see him." Ruth squeezed her arm, shaking her out of her reverie. "Is that his car across the street?"

Jamie mumbled. "I don't hear any high-pitched screeching or see anyone fainting near the window."

Watching the door for her nephew, she queried distractedly, "Whatever do you mean?"

Sandy giggled.

"I don't think he's here," Jamie said.

"What?"

"He isn't here yet."

Ruth bottom lip projected in a pout. "No, the other statement."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"That's what I want to know." Nothing raised the older woman's hackles more than feeling left out or not understanding a conversation.

"Merely making comments about the ladies who swoon at your nephew's feet."

Ruth's face split in a proud grin.

Jamie grunted.

An amused, melodious voice sounded behind them. "Women swooning over me. What an antiquated honor."

Jamie turned slowly toward the jovial voice. He *had* arrived and had come through the back entrance.

"You sound like my aunt," Cameron Wright had evidently overheard a considerable amount of their conversation.

"She does, indeed," Ruth looked at her nephew. "She does bring me such joy."

"Yes, a joy...to seeing a group of little Ruth Garrison's walking about New York." His eyes creased with merriment.

"Sit." Ruth leaned away from the waitress who practically appeared out of thin air.

Sitting across from his aunt and next to Jamie, Cameron ordered some pie and coffee.

Ruth radiated in obvious glee.

"How was the meeting?"

"Good. Well, sort of. You need to become more involved in town issues."

Jamie groaned.

Cameron teased her with a lopsided grin before he turned back to his aunt.

He reminded her of a predator, the white tiger she'd seen a few months back that'd been restlessly pacing in its cage, filled with

energy. Tall and as graceful as that beautiful cat, he had an athletic stride full of strength.

Streaked with auburn highlights, his chocolate hair was styled to make him appear more rugged. Cameron had that chiseled masculine profile, not too much pretty boy but just enough to have the imperfect handsome poster boy seduction. His eyes were a startling blue, the deep blue right before sunset.

She could get lost in those eyes. Jamie inhaled sharply. She gave a little headshake.

Good Lord, she had to stop staring at the man.

“And did everyone have a great day?”

“Of course we did,” his aunt chimed in, “she wouldn’t have asked me to join them if she didn’t think we’d enjoy our day together.”

Jamie observed with interest and unfeigned amusement. Why was Ruth acting as if she needed to champion her?

“You’re right, Aunt Ruth.”

“Well, that was easy. I’m impressed.” She cleared her throat and clammed up before she’d say something more to embarrass herself.

“I’m humbled that I have impressed you.”

“Well, I—uh.”

“So much so as to leave you speechless, surely something that never happens to *you*.”

She clenched her jaw. He was teasing her. But she could still hear a smidgen of sarcasm dripping from his voice. She couldn’t tell if he was adding the inflection for humor or was mocking her.

She leaned forward to see if Sandy had heard, but her sister-in-law was distracting Ruth, a determined look on her face.

Jamie flinched, feeling singled out for something. Had Sandy joined in with her mother and Ruth in the quest to find her a husband?

Cameron had moved closer to keep the conversation between them, but hadn’t scooted back after he’d started eating his dessert.

She took her notepad and used it as a fan. The man was radiating heat. Oh, and he smelled so good. Jamie’s cheeks flushed a deeper pink.

“Hot?” he inquired, a tinge of amusement rang in his voice.

“No.” She licked her upper lip. “Yes, it’s warm in here. Don’t you think?”

His voice lilted in a singsong tone that told her he knew exactly what effect he was having on her. "I'm quite fine." Glancing at his aunt, he asked, "Is it hot in here?"

"I'm fine." Ruth tilted her head. "Are you comfortable, Sandy?"
"Quite."

Cameron's mischievous blue eyes landed back on her. "Must be me...I mean *you*."

"Must be." Jamie pushed back her hair, a calcified smile plastered upon her face.

She considered excusing herself to head to the restroom. She bit her lip. Sandy would hunt her down if she left her alone with Ruth and Cameron. She could use the need to cool off as an excuse. Cameron shifted in his seat, leaning against her in a way she suspected was intentional.

What kind of game was he playing?

"Can I get you something?" he offered.

Jamie waved her hand. "No, I'm fine."

She was about to stand and make a quick exit when the waitress brought the rest of the desserts. The moment of opportunity for escape was gone all too soon. There was no way she could bail out now.