

Joe's Story...

He hadn't moved fast enough!

"JOE!" his mother bellowed.

Instantly, Joe's shoulders stiffened and he froze. Looking over his shoulder, trying to determine if his mother could actually see him, his eyes collided with his mothers. Caught!

As she continued to glare at him, he went to plan B.

He turned on his heel, still trying to hide the pilfered product behind his back as he smiled down at his mother.

"Don't!" she snapped at him, pointing the clippers in her hands.

He continued to ramp up the smile. "Don't do what?" he asked, approaching slowly. Joe knew his mother pretty well now. After living with her for sixteen years, he knew when she was serious and when he could wiggle around her anger. He was fairly sure that he could do some wiggling here.

"Don't you dare turn on that cute, charming smile and expect me to ignore the fact that you just stole all of my flowers!"

Joe stopped. Yikes!

"But Mom...", he started off.

"Don't 'mom' me," she interrupted, those clippers pointed right at him. "You took my roses last week and they ended up in Darlene Callahan's house. The week before, right when my gladiolas were in full bloom, you pilfered those. I saw them, Joe! I saw my beautiful gladiolas in Marcy Jacobsen's house! Those were my flowers, Joe! You stole my flowers and you weren't even serious about the girls you gave them to!"

Joe tilted his head slightly. "I was serious about them!"

Samantha stared at her handsome son who was already a foot taller than she was. Didn't matter how tall he grew, he was still her Joe. "Joe, you've dated a different girl every week this month."

He shrugged, careful to keep the flowers behind his back. No need to remind his mother about the original issue if she was willing to move on to another. "Define 'serious' then."

Samantha shook her head. "Joe, stop stealing my flowers!" she told him angrily. Well, she was trying to hold onto her anger.

"But Mom..."

She lifted her hand, palm out to stop whatever it was he was going to say. "No! Joe, you walk inside right now and put my flowers into water. If I don't see those flowers in the center of the table at dinner time, you're going to..."

Joe waited, a dark eyebrow lifting as he waited to hear whatever dire threat she might come up with.

Samantha stared at her son, pressing her lips together. Her husband was so much better at this! But at her son's triumphant smile, she realized the perfect punishment. "If I don't see those flowers on the table tonight at dinner," she said softly, walking towards him and the confidence in his smile quickly disappeared, "then I'm signing you up for choir this fall," she told him.

Joe was unaware of his mouth falling open with that horror. "Choir?" he asked, his voice cracking.

Samantha smothered her laughter. "Church choir," she said, staring up at his handsome features.

Joe and Samantha turned at the snickering behind them.

Samantha just about burst out laughing when she spotted Halley on her horse and Fleur giggling on the front porch of the house. Oh yeah, Joe was really going to hate this, she thought. Both of his sisters even being a witness to his dire threat was pretty bad stuff.

Joe stumbled backwards, almost racing towards the house.

"Fine!"

A week later, Samantha sat down next to Charlie, snuggling against his side as his arm wrapped around her shoulders. "I still don't understand how you got Joe, Fleur and Halley to join the choir," he said into her ear, almost chuckling when she shivered against him.

Samantha put her hand on his thigh, paying him back for the seductive breath on her ear. "Joe's been stealing my flowers. I caught him one day and told him to put the flowers on the dinner table. He put half of them there, then filled up the vase with green stuff, thinking I wouldn't notice."

Charlie chuckled. "So this is his punishment? Singing in the church choir?"

Samantha sat back, a smug smile on her face as her brood filed into the pew behind her. "Yep!"

Charlie loved this woman! It was genius, actually. "So how did Fleur and Halley end up in the choir? They both hate to sing."

Samantha leaned forward, giving Droon and Vince "The Look", warning them that they would be up in the choir if they didn't stop tormenting their older brother. When they settled down, thoroughly admonished, she leaned back against her husband, waiting for the church service to start. "Fleur and Halley hid the flowers, trying to get Joe into more trouble."

Charlie looked at her, stunned. “Fleur and Halley?” he asked, then looked up at the choir where his little girls were sitting, both looking grumpy as they tugged at the neck of their choir robes.

It was unfortunate that the minister walked in at the precise moment that Charlie threw back his head, laughing at his children. Not only the minister, but the rest of the congregation turned to try and figure out why the handsome man with his arm around his lovely wife was laughing at the minister!

Kelsie’s Story...

The flashing lights created a strobe effect in the night air. Kelsie hugged her books closer to her chest, stepping back into the darkness. From experience, she knew that this would all be over in about an hour. The police would handcuff her father, wander around a bit as if they were looking for something else, but in reality, they were just waiting for her father’s acquaintances to stupidly meander onto the scene. Her father would be led out of the apartment building and stuffed into one of the police vehicles, then they would all drive away.

There was a fifty-fifty shot that her father would be sitting at the breakfast table tomorrow morning, acting as if nothing had happened.

Looking to the left, she saw the group of neighbors, her friends with their hands over their mouths. Most likely, all of them were talking about what was happening, speculating on why the police were arresting a tenant of their building. It wouldn’t take long before the girls would make the connection.

Kelsie accepted that she would be ostracized. Her mother and brother too. They’d had a good life here.

This time, it was her fault, she thought as her chin jerked higher in the air. This time, she wasn’t ashamed of her father being hauled out in handcuffs. She was proud of it.

Because, this time, she’d called the police herself. This time, she’d told them what was going on, what her father was doing. And she’d even given them the evidence of his crimes.

She was going to have to testify. They would have to move – again. There was no way she could finish high school here. Not after this spectacle.

But that was okay. Everything was going to be okay. This time.

Because her father was going away to prison. This time.