Summary

John goes to pick his son up from his first baseball game and meets the head coach of the team.

Notes

Based off an AU idea that crossed my Tumblr dash. Enabled by authoressjean because she’s a terrible person and I love her to pieces. xD

See the end of the work for more notes.

John grimaced at the unpleasantly moist grass squishing under his dress shoes. He’d have to work hard to get the mud off before work on Monday. Muttering under his breath about wasting water by overwatering, he glanced up, searching the baseball field for Jack’s familiar head of dark hair. He smiled when his eyes caught on the pitcher, ‘Thornton 27’ emblazoned on the back.

Sighing in relief, he finally reached the pavement next to the stands, raising his own cheer with the other parents when Jack struck out the batter. The boys on the field mobbed Jack, laughing and yelling. “Good job, Jack!” John called, smiling.

Jack’s head whipped around to spot him over his teammates’ heads and his grin got impossibly wider. “Dad!” he called back, waving.

Movement behind the crowd of boys caught John’s eye and he glanced up to see a woman not
much taller than the boys approaching them, hands held up. “Go get your kits, boys, your parents are waiting,” she said, hints of an accent in her voice.

Chattering excitedly, the boys gave her high-fives on their way past her into the dugout. John made his way over towards the dugout, waiting patiently for Jack to get his gear tucked away in his bag and to swap out his cleats for a pair of runners.

John’s eyebrows slowly climbed higher as the boys started filing out of the dugout, calling, “Bye, Sarge!” as they went with the woman responding back to each of them.

“She’s Sarge?” he whispered to himself, shaking his head.

“Your boy, Jack, started it,” the woman commented.

He twitched and looked away from Jack. “Started what?”

“The nickname,” she explained. “Sorry, Margaret Hale,” she introduced belatedly, holding out her hand.

“John Thornton,” he replied, shaking her hand. Now that he was seeing her up close, he could see she was a remarkably handsome woman. Her auburn hair pulled back in a ponytail pulled through the back of her baseball cap, yet still falling in wavy curls down to the small of her back. Her dark blue eyes regarded him with a hint of a smile echoed on her full lips.

“I know,” she answered. “Anyway, the second or so practice Jack called me a drill sergeant and the rest of the boys picked it up.”

John frowned, glancing over her shoulder at Jack who had slowed in tying his shoes and had his shoulders up around his ears.

“It’s all right,” Margaret assured him, touching his hand briefly to catch his attention. “I don’t mind the nickname and they mean nothing by it.”

“I imagine you have to work hard to keep these fellows in line,” John observed as he turned to regard the spattering of boys climbing over the bleachers while they waited for their parents.

“A firm hand and a loud voice help,” she said with a soft laugh.

“I thought Frederick Hale coached the team?” he commented, turning back to face her.

“My brother,” she began, with a hint of a laugh and a roll of her eyes, “Is at home resting. He broke his ankle trying to demonstrate how not to slide into a base at practice yesterday.”

“Did he now?” John’s eyebrows rose again and a huff of amusement escaped him.

She nodded, grinning. “So, after growing up with a brother such as him, these scamps are the least of my worries.”

“Do you teach them how to play as well?” he asked.

“I’m a bit better at it than my brother, actually,” she replied, brows lowering. “He’s mainly doing it because his son, Matthew, practically begged him to.”

For a moment, John felt that his brows would become permanently raised. His doubt must have shown on his face since a determined look came over her face and she turned to a boy on the bleachers. “Matt, you want to come catch for me?”
“Sure,” Matt agreed, pulling his mitt back out of his bag while Margaret grabbed a ball from the sack hanging on the fence in the dugout. The pair trotted out onto the field, Margaret to the pitcher’s mound, Matt to the catcher’s position just behind home plate.

John glanced down when Jack stepped up beside him, grinning. “What?” he asked.

Jack looked up at John, still grinning. “Nothing,” he replied before looking back at the field.

Frowning, John followed his gaze to see Margaret winding up. John barely saw the pale blur of the ball as it flew from Margaret’s hand to the glove, where Matt caught it with a sharp smack.

Again, John’s eyebrows rose when Matt pulled his hand from the mitt, flexing it with a wince.

“Who do you think taught me to pitch?” Jack asked.

With a soft huff, John caught Jack about the neck with his arm and pulled him in to ruffle his dark hair. “All right. My apologies, Miss Hale, I’m sorry I doubted you.”

Margaret smiled and shook her head. “Margaret, please. And I understand why you did. It just gets a bit frustrating after the fourth or fifth parent casts aspersions on your abilities to coach baseball. If men can coach softball, why can’t women coach baseball?”

“I never thought of it that way,” John admitted. “Thank you, for what you do and for being willing to do it. I know Jack enjoys playing. I’m just sorry my business kept me from seeing all of today’s game.”

“If you have the free time, we have practice on Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings, you’re welcome to observe. Both the boys and my own abilities as a teacher,” she teased gently.

“I’ll definitely come and watch, thank you,” John agreed, smiling, his voice low.

“Ugh, oh my god,” Jack grumbled as he squirmed out from under John’s arm. “If you’re going to flirt, I’m going to go wait in the car. Keys?”

John felt the tips of his ears heating even as he pulled the keys from his pocket and tossed them to Jack. “I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Sure,” Jack agreed doubtfully. “C’mon, Matt.”

The two boys grabbed their bags and trotted off towards the car park, casting glances over their shoulders at John and Margaret.

“Sorry,” John apologized, turning back to Margaret who was watching him with a faint smile.

“Was he right?” she asked.

“What?” he asked in turn.

“Jack,” she clarified. “Were you flirting?”

“Depends,” he replied, answering her smile with his own.

“On what?” She waved as the last of the boys and his parents called their farewells.

“On whether you want me to be.”

“Jack told me you and his mum are divorced?” Margaret inquired, moving to finish packing up the gear.
“We are, yeah,” John answered.

“Then I do want you to be flirting with me,” she agreed.

His smile widened. “I usually take Jack out for pizza after his games. Would you like to join us?”

“Mind if Matt joins us? He’s my nephew and I’m his ride back home,” she answered, slinging the bag of bats over one shoulder.

“He and Jack seem to get on well, so no I don’t mind,” he replied, unclipping the bag of balls from the fence.

“Maxwell Street Pizza?” she suggested as they started towards the car park.

“Sounds good,” he agreed.

“See you there,” she replied. “Matt!”

John climbed into the driver’s seat of his car, smiling.

“So, did you get a date?” Jack asked.

“Yes, cheeky,” John replied, ruffling Jack’s hair again, laughing when his son batted at his hand irritably. “She and Matt’ll be joining us for pizza.”

Jack groaned and covered his face with his hands. “You mean we have to sit through you two making moon eyes at each other?”

“I don’t do moon eyes,” John objected, starting the car and pulling out of his parking space. “And it’ll be no worse than you and Matt.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jack muttered, looking out the window, but there was a telltale flush at the tips of his ears, just like John got when he was embarrassed.

“I don’t mind,” John assured him quietly. “Did you really think I wouldn’t notice that you always talked about him when you came home from practice?”

“Whatever,” Jack mumbled, but John could see him smiling in his reflection in the window when he looked over at a stop sign. John couldn’t keep back his own smile when he glanced in the rearview mirror to see Margaret and Matt in the car behind them, both of them smiling, as well.

End.

End Notes

I imagine Jack is about 15 years old. Jack's full name is John Thornton Jr. He just prefers to be called Jack. His mum is Anne Latimer, she and John divorced years ago. Sorry, no pizza date, because I'm terrible at writing dates/flirting.

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