

Heat in the Kitchen

Elizabeth POV

“What are we doing here?” Matteo looked puzzled as his eyes scanned the empty kitchen. “Where are all the staff members?”

“I sent them home,” Elizabeth casually spoke, not looking at him. It was only him, Sophia, Rosemary and a male kitchen help named Luca—who had offered to stay until dinner was ready.

“You did what? Then who’s going to prepare dinner?” He asked, his expression changing from surprised to angry.

“We are. Thanksgiving is about family. What better way to show your family you are thankful for them than cooking them a nice meal?” She happily said. The look on Matteo’s face told her that he had an opinion about it, but he wisely kept his mouth shut.

“Now,” Elizabeth tied an apron, “everyone, make sure to wash your hands before we get started.” After everyone had nished, Elizabeth started placing the ingredients on the table.

“Luca, you can start making the tomato sauce for the pasta side dish? Rosemary, you can be in charge of making the lling and cutting up the cheese and meats for the Antipasto platter.” Elizabeth ordered. Getting to work.

“Matteo,” She used his rst name without permission again, taking advantage of the other people’s presence in the kitchen, “you can start cutting up these vegetables for the lasagna,” she said, pushing the vegetables toward him. He clenched his jaw but nodded, taking out a cutting board and getting to work.

Elizabeth had placed a stool near the counter for Sophia, as they made the dough for the pignoli cookies.

“Very good, Sophia,” Elizabeth encouraged with a warm smile as Sophia rolled balls from the dough.

The kitchen was soon lled with the sounds of oven doors opening and closing, chopping, mixing, and the delicious smells of the food cooking. Elizabeth wanted to leave the turkey till after lunch, since it had to bake for three to four hours. Thay way it would be ready on time for dinner, while she would only have to warm up the rest.

“There you go. Why don’t you go with Rosemary to get yourself cleaned up while I nish the turkey,” Elizabeth told Sophia. They’d all continued working during lunch, taking bites of the sandwiches Elizabeth had made for the group.

“Thank you so much for staying on, Luca. Have a nice holiday,” She told the young man, who said his goodbyes before leaving. That left only Elizabeth and Matteo in the kitchen.

Elizabeth had put the turkey on the counter, making sure it was room temperature before she began lling it.

“What?” She asked, when she noticed Matteo looking at her.

“You’re very good at this,” he said.

“This?” She asked, arching an eyebrow.

“You know, cooking, and teaching Sophia how to cook.” He smiled warmly, causing Elizabeth’s breath to hitch. He was a handsome man, even when he was brooding, but when he smiled... he was breathtaking.

“And you’re oddly good at commanding people,” he teased, his voice carrying a softer edge. Elizabeth paused, caught off guard by the rare glimpse of playfulness.

“What?” he asked, a crooked grin tugging at his lips.

“It’s just... strange to see this side of you,” she responded with a small smile, continuing to stuff the turkey. Though she focused on her task, she couldn’t shake the feeling of his gaze lingering on her.

Moments later, she jumped slightly as she felt the warmth of his body press close behind her. His proximity sent a shiver down her spine. Before she could react, Matteo’s hands cupped hers, his strong frame pressing gently against her back.

“I’ve never done this before,” he murmured, his voice lower now, almost intimate. “Am I doing it right?”

Elizabeth’s breath caught in her throat as his ngers laced with hers, guiding her hands over the turkey. Together, they rubbed the oil over its surface, but the task seemed to blur in her mind as the heat of his body and the sensation of his hands over hers consumed her attention.

“Yes,” she replied, her voice a little more strained than she intended. “You’re doing... very well.”

The simple action of preparing the meal became something far more sensual, the feel of his breath against her cheek, his closeness, turning the moment into something charged with an undeniable pull. Her pulse quickened as their hands moved in rhythm, the slickness of the oil on the turkey mixing with the subtle brush of their ngers over each other.

Before she realized it, her focus shifted from the task to the way their hands started moving over each other’s skin, a slow, unspoken dance that left her heart racing.

Elizabeth couldn’t help but take it a step further and pushed her backside against him. A smug smile pulled at her lips at the feel of his hardness.

“Elizabeth,” Matteo whispered with a strained voice.

“Yes?” she asked, moving her head to the side to look at him. His darkened eyes sent a thrill of excitement straight to her core. She pushed her ass against his erection again, taking in his reaction.

“You’re playing a dangerous game,” Matteo spoke, but his voice lacked any sternness.

“Am I? Are you going to punish me?” She didn’t know why she said that. She’d never said anything like that before in her life. Matteo’s eyes colored impossibly darker, before they icked to her lips. It was like an invisible magnet was pulling them together. Just as their lips were about to touch...

“Daddy!” Sophia ran into the kitchen with Rosemary, breaking the spell between them. Elizabeth, startled by the sudden intrusion, elbowed Matteo in the ribs. He quickly jumped back, holding his hands in front of himself, but not before Rosemary’s eyes landed on the bulge in his pants—her eyes widening.

“Oh,” She could hear Rosemary’s surprised exclamation, while Sophia stopped her running, her cute little face scrunching together, before her whole face lit up.

“Daddy and Ellie sitting in a twee, k-i-s-s-i-n-g,” she started chanting.

“Who’s that I hear singing?” An unknown female suddenly appeared in the kitchen, followed by a man who looked surprisingly like Matteo. Could this get any more embarrassing?

“Nonna!” Sophia excitedly exclaimed, jumping up and down before racing to the woman who warmly wrapped Sophia in her arms.

“Oh, my stellina, I missed you so much!” the woman, who Elizabeth now realized was Matteo’s mother, hugged the little girl, before her eyes landed on her son. (little star)

“Matteolino,” She affectionately spoke, approaching him.

“Mamma,” he smiled warmly, kissing the woman on the cheek.

“And who’s this? The new chef?” His mother asked, shorty glancing at Elizabeth before her attention was claimed by Sophia again.

“Actually, this is Elizabeth, Sophia’s nanny,” Matteo said, glancing at her. But his mother wasn’t listening, her attention completely on her granddaughter.

““Hey, old man! Still scaring the neighborhood with your glare?” Matteo chuckled, clapping his father on the back.

“You hear that?” his father asked her in mock surprise, “that’s how this one greets his papa,” Elizabeth smiled at their antics.

“Ciao!” A beautiful young woman with long shiny black hair entered the kitchen, a bottle of wine in hand. “I’m Caterina, this idiotino’s brother,” She ashed Elizabeth with a warm smile, which Elizabeth returned, introducing herself in return.

“Zia Cathy!” Sophia screamed in excitement, causing Elizabeth to inch. If Sophia kept this up, she would need a hearing aid by the age of thirty-ve.

“Hey beautiful,” Johnny grinned, popping up behind Caterina, a charming smile on his face. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Matteo’s attention had snapped to them.

“Hey, Johnny, how are you?” She asked.

“A lot better now that I’ve seen you,” he winked, being her normal irtatious self. Elizabeth chuckled, sliding the turkey into the oven.

“I’ll come and check on the turkey in an hour, and don’t worry, I’ll help Rosemary serve dinner tonight. Anyway, I’ll leave you and your family to it. If you need me, I’ll be in my room,” Elizabeth excused herself.

Elizabeth wished her family had the same warmth, the same laughter that lled this kitchen, but she’d given up that hope long ago. With a heavy heart, she quietly retreated, the sound of joy echoing behind her as she slipped away into solitude.