

Chapter 28: Heat

Tate
Dinner tonight?

I glanced at my phone, hesitating. I didn't mind him getting to know Maddy, but I was struggling to maintain my distance. The man I had fallen in love with so many years ago was resurfacing.

Piper
I guess so. You can come over at six.

Tate
Will do.

I set my phone down and tried to refocus on my work, but my thoughts kept drifting back to Tate. Every now and then, I'd catch George giving me a curious look. He knew something was up, but he wasn't about to pry.

Later that evening, I was putting the finishing touches on dinner when the doorbell rang. I opened the door to find Tate standing there, a warm smile on his face.

"Mr. Tate!" Maddy squealed, running into his arms.

"Hey there!" he exclaimed, scooping her up. "How was daycare?"

"Good!" she beamed. "Mommy says you're having dinner with us."

"Is that alright?" he asked, winking at her.

"Yep. But you can't eat all of the macaroni. It's my favorite," she warned as he set her down.

"Deal," he agreed, turning to me. "Hey, Piper."

"Hi, Tate," I replied, trying not to let my feelings show. I led the way back to the kitchen, with Tate following close behind.

"Need help with anything?" he offered.

"No, I've got it under control," I assured him, setting the food on the table.

The three of us enjoyed a lively dinner, filled with laughter and easy conversation. After tucking Maddy into bed, I returned to the living room to find Tate gone. I heard water running in the kitchen and discovered him washing the dishes.

"You don't need to do that, Tate," I told him, walking over.

"I kind of invited myself over, so it's the least I can do," he replied with a casual shrug.

I shook my head, smiling, and grabbed a towel to help dry the dishes. We worked side by side in comfortable silence, occasionally stealing glances at each other and pretending not to notice.

As we finished, I turned to put the cups away in the cabinet. I was startled to find Tate standing close behind me, his warm breath on my neck.

"Piper, I need you to know," he murmured, his face inches from mine as he rested his hands on the counter, trapping me. "I'm sorry for what happened. I shouldn't have let you go."

I looked up into his honey-colored eyes, feeling myself soften as he leaned in closer. I pushed away from him, needing space. "Thank you, I appreciate you saying that."

Tate smirked, clearly enjoying my discomfort. "Well, I should be going. See you tomorrow at my parents'?" He grabbed his things and headed for the door.

"Yep, see you tomorrow," I whispered, watching him leave. I leaned against the closed door, letting out a shaky breath.

I closed my eyes, trying to regain my composure. He was getting to me. Despite my best efforts to resist, I couldn't. He was still the man I had fallen for, and it both thrilled and terrified me.