

Chapter 29: Déjà Vu

“Come with me, come with me!” Josie exclaimed, her eyes twinkling as she took Maddy’s hand the moment we entered the house. “Can you guess what we’re doing?”

“We’re having dinner, silly,” Maddy giggled, her eyes wide with excitement.

“Not just any dinner! We’re having a picnic!” Josie sang, leading us through the back door and into the yard.

A beautifully set table awaited us, laden with mouthwatering barbecue and an array of side dishes. Josie turned to Maddy with a conspiratorial grin. “And, Maddy-girl, there’s a special surprise just for you!” She pointed to a corner of the yard where a cozy teepee fort had been set up, complete with blankets and toys—a little girl’s paradise.

“Yay!” Maddy squealed, dashing toward her special haven.

As we all settled around the table, sipping drinks and engaging in light conversation, I couldn’t help but watch Piper. She seemed so vibrant and happy, gradually becoming more at ease with my family. And with each passing moment, I found myself more and more captivated by her.

I had closed myself o after what had happened years ago, but after spending the past week getting to know the real Piper, I was in awe of her resilience. She was bright, beautiful, and everything I had fallen for four years ago, and then some. Her presence electri ed me.

Our conversation came to an abrupt halt when Francis appeared. “Mrs. Young, it seems a guest has arrived. Should I show her through?”

“A guest? Who would show up unannounced?” My mother hu ed, clearly displeased.

Moments later, Jamie emerged from the house. “Hello, everyone!”

My eyes widened at the sound of my ancée’s voice. I glanced at Piper, who had gone pale.

“I realized it was no fun sitting at home while Tate was here playing with you all,” Jamie continued, her voice dripping with sweetness. “So I decided to surprise you!” She approached the table and pressed a kiss to my cheek. “Oh, I didn’t realize you have company. My apologies.”

Her gaze fell on Piper, and her smile morphed into a scowl. “Piper, what a surprise to see you. What are you doing here?”

I stood up, my heart pounding. “Jamie, let’s go inside for a moment…”

“Jamie, dear, Piper is here as our guest, as is Tate’s daughter,” my father interjected, his voice rm.

I shot him a glare before turning back to Jamie.

“I’m sorry,” Jamie stammered, her eyes wide. “I think I just had a stroke. Did you say Tate’s daughter? As in, MY Tate?”

“Yes, dear, keep up,” my mother chimed in, taking a sip of her wine.

“Mommy?” Maddy’s soft voice broke the tension, her eyes icking between Piper and Jamie in confusion.

“Maddy, honey, why don’t you go play in the garden,” Piper suggested gently, sending Maddy out of earshot.

“Are you telling me you got that slut pregnant?!” Jamie hissed, her eyes blazing as she turned to me.

“Jamie, please, come in the house,” I urged, desperate to di use the situation.

“No,” she snapped, shoving me away. “I want to know what’s going on!”

I glanced at Piper, who had lowered her head, likely hoping this would end quickly. Taking a deep breath, I faced Jamie. “Four years ago, I unknowingly got Piper pregnant. I just found out this past week, and I’ve been here trying to—”

“Oh,” Jamie interrupted, her expression softening. “I see. You came down here to take care of it. She’s trying to get money from you, isn’t she? Sweetheart, I know one of the best family lawyers on the East Coast. I’ll just call him and—”

“No, Jamie. I’ve been down here to get to know Maddy,” I corrected her.

“Who’s Maddy?” she mumbled, her brow furrowed.

“His daughter…” Josie cut in, rolling her eyes dramatically.

“I’m sorry,” Jamie turned to me again, her voice shaking. “You mean to tell me that you’re accepting her as your daughter? Tate, who knows how many men she slept with after you. There’s no way she’s yours.”

I clenched my jaw, irritated that this was coming up again. “She’s mine.”

Jamie hu ed, her eyes narrowing. “Fine. Let’s say she’s yours. Even so, you didn’t know about her. You don’t have any obligation to that girl or her mother. We can just go back to New York and live our life.” She tugged on my arm, practically begging me to abandon my newfound family.

“Jamie, I can’t just—”

“Tate Young, that slut confused you and tricked you into getting her pregnant. She just wants your money, your connections,” Jamie spat, her voice dripping with venom.

The air around the table grew heavy as Maddy returned, her small hands clutching a handful of owers. She walked around the table, handing one to each person as we sat in painful silence. Finally, she approached me, o ering a ower before extending one to Jamie.

Jamie stared down at the delicate bud, her lips curling into a sneer. “A ower. Little girl, the grown-ups are talking. Go make a mess out of something, like how you’ve just made a mess out of my life.”

Maddy’s eyes lled with tears, and I watched as Piper shot up from her seat. She strode over to Jamie, her face inches from hers. “You will NEVER speak to my daughter that way. She hasn’t ruined your life. You are, by thinking a child is nothing more than an inconvenience and nuisance. I might be the slut that got pregnant, but you’re the one engaged to a man who can’t stand you.”

A mix of gasps and chuckles erupted from the table, and Jamie turned to me, gripping my arm tightly. “Are you going to just stand there and let her speak to me like that?!”

Piper addressed everyone before taking Maddy’s hand. “Thank you for dinner, but we won’t be staying any longer.” She turned back to me and Jamie, her voice unwavering. “And if this woman is in your life, we won’t be.”

We all watched in stunned silence as Piper and Maddy retreated into the house. The sound of their car starting and driving away echoed through the yard.

Josie stood up with a hu . “Well, there went a perfectly good dinner. Harris, let’s go inside.”

My father rose from the table, his expression dark, and followed my mother into the house.

I stood there, still reeling from the confrontation, feeling as if I were back in the Maldives. But this time, I was determined to have a di erent outcome.

“Jamie, leave,” I said, my voice steady.

She stared at me, disbelief etched on her face. “Excuse me?”

“I said leave,” I repeated. “Get your things out of my apartment and leave. You are no longer welcome in this family.”

“Baby, you can’t be serious. This is all just a giant mess. Let me help you. I’m a lawyer, I can nd some way to get you out of this and we can go back to our amazing life,” she pleaded, her voice cracking.

“That’s just it, Jamie,” I said, stepping away from her. “I don’t want to go back to that life.”