

Chapter 31: Epilogue

One Year Later

“Daddy, can I stay up to see Santa?” Maddy asked from the backseat, her eyes wide with excitement.

“No, hun. Santa won't come if you aren't sleeping,” I replied, glancing at her through the rearview mirror.

“Can I stay up anyway?” she persisted, her determination making me smile.

Piper chuckled beside me, taking my hand as we drove toward my parents' house. The snow-covered streets were illuminated by twinkling Christmas lights, setting the perfect scene for our holiday visit.

We pulled up to the house and stepped out of the car, stomping the snow from our boots before hanging our coats and scarves in the entryway.

“Hey!” I called out, announcing our arrival.

“We're in here, Tater!” Ari's voice rang out from the back of the house.

Maddy wasted no time, dropping her things and bolting through the house. “Nana!” she shouted as she ran into the sitting room.

“Maddy-girl! How are you?” my mother cooed, pulling Maddy onto her lap.

“Did you know tomorrow is Christmas?!” Maddy asked, her excitement contagious.

“I did know!” my mother grinned. “Does Santa come to your house too?” Maddy questioned, her eyes wide with curiosity.

“Of course! And I had to make sure and remind him to bring extra fun things because you are here!” my mother replied, her eyes twinkling as she looked up at Piper and me. “Hello, you two, Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas, Josie,” Piper smiled warmly, placing a hand on my back. She turned to Ari, who was sitting rather uncomfortably in the armchair, and gave her a sympathetic look. “How are you feeling?”

Ari let out a huff before rubbing her swollen belly. “Well, considering I'm due in a week, I'm alright.”

Piper sat beside her, engaging in conversation about all things baby-related. I couldn't help but smile as I watched them, feeling grateful for the family we had created.

My father entered the room wearing a ridiculous Santa hat and an equally outrageous Christmas sweater. “Ho! Ho! Ho!” he bellowed, carrying a tray of his infamous eggnog. He handed everyone a glass before sitting beside Maddy, his eyes twinkling with merriment.

We spent the evening talking, laughing, and playing games. I couldn't help but marvel at the transformation my parents had undergone since becoming grandparents. The once distant and cold individuals had blossomed into warm, loving, and doting grandparents.

As Piper approached me, I wrapped my arms around her and pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead. “Come take a walk with me?” I whispered into her ear.

She looked up at me with a curious smile. “It's freezing outside.”

“Oh, come on. When do we ever have a minute without kids and parents?” I teased, and she chuckled before taking my hand and following me out of the room.

We bundled up in our coats and stepped into the snow-covered backyard, the crisp air biting at our cheeks. “How long are we walking for?” Piper asked, her breath visible in the cold air as she pulled her coat up to her ears.

I laughed, taking her hand in mine. We walked a short distance before stopping, the snow-covered trees creating a picturesque backdrop. I turned to face her, my heart pounding in my chest. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” she replied softly, her eyes shining with love.

“Piper...” I hesitated, suddenly feeling nervous. I found myself dropping to one knee in the snow, the cold seeping through my pants, but I didn't care.

“I have never been happier than in the last year of being with you. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Will you marry me?” I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

Piper's eyes filled with tears as I pulled the small box I'd been carrying around for weeks from my pocket.

“Tate,” she whispered, her voice thick with emotion. “Yes, of course, I'll marry you!”

I stood, wrapping my arms around her and kissing her deeply. Our moment was interrupted by the sound of cheering and clapping from the house. We turned to see our family standing at the window, their faces alight with joy.

I looked back at Piper, my heart swelling with happiness, and kissed her again. My life was finally unfolding the way I had always hoped it would. I was going to have the wife, the kid, and the picket fence after all.

The End