

Chapter 6: Old Friends

Jason, my father, and I hurried back into the house and dashed upstairs to change, praying the women wouldn't spot us from the sitting room. I took a quick shower and donned a dark gray suit before racing downstairs. As I entered the room, I found the women glaring at us.

"We're not late," I mumbled, while Jason checked his watch with feigned innocence.

"You're lucky. We were about to leave without you," my mother hurried, adjusting my tie and giving me a gentle tap on the cheek with her perfectly manicured nails. She breezed past me and out to the line of cars waiting to take us to the rehearsal.

I couldn't help but stare as Piper approached me in a navy blue cocktail dress and heels. Her long auburn hair was curled and cascading down her back, her chocolate eyes shining brightly as she looked up at me.

"Ready?" she asked softly, leaning in to plant a tender kiss on my cheek.

I hadn't been expecting that.

As we all walked out to the car, I pulled Piper to the side, hiding behind the door of the dining room.

"What was that?" I whispered harshly.

She looked up at me, her expression serious. "Mr. Young, you paid me to come here and act as your girlfriend. We'll have to show a cation sometimes, or no one will believe it, and this will have all been for nothing. Calm down and let me do my job. I won't do anything more."

I exhaled, knowing she was right. We walked out to the car, only to be met with a chorus of teasing about keeping our hands to ourselves.

We climbed in and made our way to the rehearsal. As a groomsman, I had to participate. I stood at the front beside Jason as everyone else practiced their parts.

I caught glimpses of Piper every once in a while, and I couldn't get her out of my mind. The way she walked. The way she smiled. The way she continuously surprised me with her intelligence and boldness. I tried to shake the thoughts from my head. This was a business transaction. She was an escort, for heaven's sake.

At the dinner, Piper was bright and lively, enjoying the conversation and handling herself well against my ever-unimpressed mother and her never-ending questions. Thankfully, it kept all the questions and prodding away from me.

After eating, there was music and cocktails, and close friends of the family had been invited to join. I walked around with Piper, introducing her to family friends and business associates of my father.

"Excuse me," Ariana cut in, "Tate, can I steal your beautiful girlfriend for a moment?"

Piper smiled up at me before walking off with Ariana to do who knows what.

That was when I saw her.

Standing by the door in a little black dress was Jamie. Our eyes met, and she smiled brightly as she made her way over.

"Tate, I'm so glad to see you," she sang, drawing me in for a peck on the cheek.

"Jamie, what are you doing here?" I asked, my eyes darting around the room for someone, anyone who could save me from this situation.

"Your mother invited me, of course. I can't believe Ariana is getting married," she said with a smile and a flip of her blonde hair.

I could feel the room spinning. I hadn't expected to see Jamie, let alone have a conversation with her. It had been two years since she broke things off with me. Two years since I had seen her.

"Actually, Tate, I was hoping to see you... I know I—"

"Jamie!" Ariana interrupted, "You're here..." she said with wide eyes and a hint of sarcasm. "Tate, did you know Jamie was coming?"

I shook my head, "Mother invited her."

Ariana nodded in understanding. "Well, you look good, Jamie."

"Thank you, I—" she stopped as she saw Piper walk toward us.

"Hey Tate, Ariana just needed help with something," Piper smiled, threading her hand through my arm.

For some reason, it calmed me.

I looked down at Piper with a smile and placed a soft kiss on her lips. "There you are," I murmured.

Piper's eyes were filled with shock as I stared down at her. I looked up and nodded toward Jamie. "Piper, this is Jamie."

Piper smiled kindly at her, offering a hand. "It's nice to meet you, Jamie. How do you know Tate and Ariana?"

Jamie was about to speak when Ariana cut in, "Jamie grew up with us. She and Tate dated until two years ago when she left with no explanation and ripped his heart out."

Ariana turned to Jamie, "Do I have that about right?"

Jamie looked down in horror, and I saw Piper look at her with wide eyes before taking a deep breath and looking up at me.

"Well, I guess it was a good thing. Or I would have never met Tate. Dance with me?" she asked sweetly.

I nodded, excusing us from the group. We walked to the dance floor, and I held her in my arms as we swayed to the music.

"So, the ex is here," she said firmly.

"Yep..." I replied, distracted by the whole situation.

"I'm sorry, I can tell it's a painful situation for you. Just say the word, and I will not leave your side for the rest of the wedding," she winked.

I let out a huff, "That's not necessary. Whatever was between Jamie and me is long over."

"I can see that, by the way you showboated me earlier," she replied sarcastically.

"I thought you said we needed to show a cation," I mumbled.

"Mhm..." she chuckled, shaking her head at me.

We danced for a while, swaying to the music until it was time for the toasts.

We sat and listened, my arm comfortably resting on the back of Piper's chair. Once in a while, I saw Jamie staring, but I pushed it to the back of my mind.

I was not willing to go there ever again.

At the end of the evening, I walked over to the coat closet to get our coats.

"Tate."

I turned around to see Jamie standing behind me. "What can I do for you, Jamie?" I replied coldly.

"You can forgive me! You can tell me you still love me. You can tell me you miss us, that you want us back. Because I know I do," she said as she stepped forward, resting her hands on my chest.

I grabbed her hands and removed them. "Jamie. I did love you. I loved you with all of me. I wanted to marry you. You're the one who left. I still don't even know why! No explanation, nothing but an empty apartment."

She stepped closer, her body close to mine. Even though I hated her, I couldn't help the way I responded to her. "Let me explain," she whispered as she drew closer.

"Tate! There you are..."

I turned to see Piper standing in the doorway.

"Piper," I breathed out a sigh of relief as I stepped away from Jamie. "I was just grabbing your coat."

I placed it around her shoulders before taking her hand in mine, leaving Jamie standing alone.