

Chapter 8: Brunch

I could see the tension in Tate's shoulders as he thought about seeing Jamie again. I released a long breath, feeling the weight of the day's events as I sat in bed.

"We have the wedding brunch tomorrow at ten-thirty. My mother will have invited her most a uent friends, so we have to be on our best behavior," Tate said, his phone in his hand as he tapped away at some emails.

I turned toward him, propping my head up with my hand. "It's going to be a long day. Are you ready?"

He closed his eyes with a sigh, "No."

I sat up and pulled his pillow out from under him, his head landing on the mattress. "What the..."

"Roll over, onto your stomach," I said, sitting on my knees.

He gave me an odd look. "I'm not going to—"

"Oh stop," I rolled my eyes. "Now, roll over."

He rolled over cautiously, his whole body sti ening as I climbed above him, straddling his hips. "What are you doing?"

I rubbed my hands together before pushing down on his back, rubbing in small circles. I smiled as I felt him relax.

"What is worrying you about tomorrow?" I asked quietly.

"Have you met my mother?" he asked sarcastically.

I chuckled, pressing on his shoulders and earning a groan from Tate. "Yes. She seems to be the queen of passive-aggressive."

"That's an understatement. Nothing we do tomorrow will be right. Nothing I ever do is right," he said.

I gave him a look of pity, continuing to massage his back. "You're a successful businessman and seem like a good person. Why would she be disappointed?"

"The fact that I haven't settled down with a wife and children and a white picket fence to carry on the family name," he muttered.

I pressed down on his shoulders and shrugged, "Well, I'll be there as a bu er. I don't mind taking the brunt of it. You just do the heavy lifting," I teased.

He let out a sigh. "This whole week is torture, made worse with Jamie showing up. I can't believe my mother invited her," he grumbled. "And yet when I think about it, it's par for the course with my mother."

"What happened?" I asked in a hushed tone.

"Nothing," he replied bluntly.

"Hmm," I replied, accepting that he didn't want to talk about it. A few moments later he let out a sigh.

"She left. I was about to propose to her. She was the love of my life. At least I thought she was. She just broke things o and left, no explanation," Tate spoke, his voice at.

"I'm sorry," I replied.

We sat in silence for a few minutes as I rubbed his back, feeling the smooth rm muscles under my hands. I could feel myself responding to it and shook my head clear before hopping o .

"Feel better?" I asked as I crawled under the covers.

"Much. Thank you," he said quietly, o ering a smile before turning o the light.

"Goodnight," we both said, rolling over and drifting o to sleep.

The next morning, the house and backyard were lled with people bustling around, trying to get the nishing touches done before the brunch.

"We have three hours before guests start arriving!" Josie hollered at the family, minus the bride and groom.

"Everything is set up. We just need to nish decorating. The canopies are up and the tables are ready. Catering will be here in an hour. Everyone has their jobs—get to it," she ordered, walking o to order more people around.

"Well, let's get to it," I teased, taking Tate's arm.

"I'm not quite sure what 'adjusting the table settings' means," Tate shrugged as we walked into the reception tent.

"I'm pretty sure it means we just walk around and check for errors in the setup. I doubt we'll nd any. Catering seems to have everything handled," I chuckled.

"This is some event, isn't it," I said as I watched in awe at how much was being done.

"Everything is an event with this family. We have our status to uphold," Tate replied with an eye roll.

"Tate! Fix those owers on table four!" Josie yelled from the other side of the yard.

Tate looked around the space with a clueless glance, "Table four?"

I laughed, "We'll just 'x' all of the owers and she'll never know we had no idea what she was talking about."

After helping with the brunch setup, we made our way upstairs to get ready for the party.

I slipped into a yellow lace dress that fell just above my knees and some cute wedge heels and walked downstairs, meeting Tate in the sitting room.

I sat beside him with a smile and kissed his cheek softly. "You look handsome," I winked as I dgeted with his tie. His tan suit was doing all of the right things.

Tate's mother rushed in and looked around the room, "Good, we're all ready. Guests will be arriving any minute now."

"Let's all head to the backyard and behave ourselves," she said. "I don't want to nd anyone drunk like at Thanksgiving," Josie hu ed before walking out to the back.

I chuckled, "Who was drunk at Thanksgiving?"

"We all were," the whole room said in unison, causing everyone to erupt in laughter.

We stepped into the backyard and I held onto Tate's arm tightly as I saw Jamie approach us.

"Jamie, you look so cute in that dress," I smiled sweetly.

"Uhh... thank you," she replied hesitantly. "Tate, do you mind if I speak to you for a moment?"

"Actually, Josie asked us to go nd someone for her. If you'll excuse us," I interrupted, leading Tate further into the growing crowd.

"Who are we looking for?" he asked with a sideways glance.

"Anyone else but her?" I replied with a shrug.

Tate grinned with amusement, patting the hand I had hooked in his arm. "You've earned yourself a drink."

"I'd love one, thank you," I replied. I watched as Tate walked toward the drink table and grabbed us each a ute of champagne. He walked back, o ering me a glass before ushering us toward a table.

It was the longest three hours of my life, elding questions about our relationship and about my family. Everyone was quite confused about the fact that they didn't know my family's surname.

Finally, at the end of the party we walked inside, everyone exhausted from the day.

I slipped my heels o with a groan as we entered our room. I threw myself onto the bed, closing my eyes for a moment as Tate changed out of his suit.

When I heard him step out from the closet I stood from the bed and walked around it toward the closet. I was stopped when Tate stood in my path, his tall, muscular frame blocking my way.

I looked up at him with tired eyes and placed my hands on his chest without even thinking. My eyes widened as I realized what I had done and quickly pulled my hands away. "Excuse me."

He stepped backward, letting me pass. I changed out of my dress and into a comfortable pair of jeans with a nice blouse.

We didn't have anything going on until this evening, so I decided to take a short nap, not noticing that Tate had the same idea.