

Chapter 25: Lunch

I spent the entire evening trying to ignore the incessant ringing of my phone. My mother was relentless, calling every few minutes. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore and answered.

"Tate! Where on earth have you been? I've been calling all day!" she hushed.

"Sorry, Mother. I was on a business call," I replied, rolling my eyes at her exaggeration. It had only been a few hours.

"I suppose that's an acceptable excuse," she hummed. "Now, onto the matter at hand. Did you talk to Piper? Did you meet the girl?"

I rubbed my face in my hands. "Yes, Mother. I met her."

"And?"

"And she's my daughter," I replied.

"Are you sure? Did you get a paternity test ordered?" she pushed.

"No, Mother. I didn't get a test done. I don't need to. She looks just like me," I spoke with irritation, knowing this conversation was only going to get worse.

"Looks don't mean everything, dear," she replied haughtily. "So since you've decided that she's yours, what are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to have a relationship with her. I'm not going to hide her or abandon her. She's the most perfect little girl," I said, hoping her curiosity would end there.

"Well, I— oh just a minute, your father would like to speak to you."

I took a deep breath as I waited for the next round of questioning.

"Tate," my father spoke sternly.

"Yes, hello, Father," I replied.

"The girl is yours? You're sure?" he asked bluntly.

"Yes, she is my daughter. And her name is Maddy," I shot back, becoming irritated with this conversation.

"Well, bring her by tomorrow. We all want to meet her," he spoke gruffly.

"I'm sorry, but Piper won't agree to that," I said, knowing Piper would blow a gasket.

"Piper doesn't get an opinion. She's just as much our family as she is Piper's. Bring her by for lunch." My father said before hanging up the phone.

"Great..." I mumbled as I threw the phone on the bed.

I paced the room, trying to find a way to convince Piper that this would be okay. I took a breath, knowing I'd just have to get it over with.

"It's like sweet-talking a difficult client, that's all it is..."

"Hello?" Piper sang on the other end of the phone.

"Hey, Piper, it's Tate."

"Oh, hi, Tate. What's up?" she replied. Hopefully, that meant she was in a good mood.

"Well, you see, something has come up, and I know how you're going to respond but I really need you to agree to this," I spoke, suddenly extremely nervous.

"Okay..." she said hesitantly.

"My parents have invited you and Maddy for lunch tomorrow," I said quickly, shutting my eyes tight as I waited for her response.

"Uhh... no."

"Listen, Piper, I know you don't want her to be hurt or judged, but they are insisting on meeting her," I replied. "Besides, you and I will be there to make sure they behave themselves."

"Absolutely not, Tate!" she half-yelled into the phone.

"It's going to have to happen sometime; the sooner we get it over with the better," I shot back, hoping it would work.

"I don't like this..." she grumbled.

"Does that mean yes?" I asked hopefully.

"Fine," she hushed. "But the minute they start in on her we are out of there!"

"Deal," I quickly agreed, hoping she wouldn't change her mind.

"Here we are again..." Piper said softly as the three of us stood in front of my family's home.

"I have the same feeling I had four years ago as we stood here," I whispered.

"Same," Piper replied with a smile. I realized it was the first, genuine smile I had received from her since seeing her again.

"Mr. Young, please come in," Francis bellowed as we entered. We followed him to the backyard where there was a table set up for lunch.

"Ah! There you are, Tate! We were wondering if you were still coming!" My mother chided.

"We're only a few minutes late, mother," I replied as I kissed her lightly on the cheek. I stepped back and turned to Piper. "You remember Piper."

"Yes, lovely to see you, dear. And this must be Madasyn!" my mother chimed as she bent down to meet Maddy's eyes. "You are just the cutest thing!"

We followed her to the table and took our seats. The air was thick with awkward silence, nobody quite knowing what to say.

"So, Maddy, do you go to school?" my father asked as he took a bite of his food.

"I go to daycare," Maddy replied softly, still not sure about all of the new people.

"Do you learn a lot at daycare?" he asked.

"I learn all kinds of things!" Maddy replied with new excitement. "Did you know that dogs can hear things people can't?"

"I did know that," my father replied gently. "You are a smart little girl."

"Mom says learning new things is good for my brain," Maddy smiled proudly.

"Your mother is right," my father smiled before turning to Piper. "So she isn't in any preschool? Just a daycare?"

"She is only three. She will be going to preschool next year," Piper replied with boldness, clearly unhappy about having her parenting choices being questioned.

"So, Ari, are you two having kids any time soon?" I asked, hoping to change the subject.

My sister choked on her water. "Uhhh.. we aren't in any rush..."

"I find it interesting that you thought never meeting her father was good for her," Harris pushed.

Piper glared at him for a moment before turning to Maddy. "Baby, go see if you can find six different owners."

Maddy got up with a smile and skipped out to the yard in search of her owners, leaving the adults alone. Piper turned back to my father with a stern look.

"Not having her father around was good for me. Would I prefer she know her father? Absolutely. But the way I was treated by this family was deplorable and I was not going to come back here. As you can see, we are doing just fine."

"Ha!" Josie scoffed. "She should be in a top-tier preschool, not some slum daycare. She's a Young, for heaven's sake."

"She's a Manning," Piper shot back. She turned to me with fire in her eyes. "I told you this was a bad idea. We are leaving."

I shook my head at the group. "Now hold on a minute." I turned to my parents with a stern look.

"Both sides are at fault here. You pushed her out and I didn't stand up for her. She had a child and didn't tell us. Mistakes were made by everyone. Now, let's get over it and be civil, hmm?"

Piper looked at my parents uneasily until my mother spoke up. "I guess we could have been a bit more understanding. You have done well for yourself."

"Thank you," Piper said softly.

After the small spat, we ended up having a moderately successful lunch. As the afternoon wore on, we walked back inside and to the front door.

"Now, Miss Maddy, you make sure your mommy brings you back to visit us!" Tate's father spoke gently before looking up at Piper.

"Thank you for bringing her with you. We were so glad to meet her, she's a wonderful girl. You did such a good job raising her."

"Would have been better if Tate had helped with the raising..." Josie muttered before stepping forward.

"So lovely to see you again, dear." She kissed Piper on the cheek before hugging me. "We'll have dinner soon."

"That... wasn't horrible," Piper said as we climbed into the car.

"Is it bad to say I'm surprised?" I asked before driving back to their apartment.