

Chapter 26: Time

I'd been in Boston for almost a week, and my workload was starting to pile up. I was in my hotel room, trying to catch up on some work when the phone rang.

"Tate Young," I answered, trying to sound professional.

"Tate, darling, it's your mother."

"Hi, Mother. What can I do for you?" I asked, hoping this would be a short call.

"We just adored meeting your little girl the other day, and I wanted to know everything about her. I'm going shopping with Ariana," she said.

"Well..." I hesitated. "Mother, Piper doesn't want her spoiled. She insists on taking care of Maddy herself. It was like pulling teeth to get her to agree to let me help with daycare tuition."

"Nonsense," she hushed dismissively. "It's not spoiling if it comes from her grandmother."

I rolled my eyes. "I don't know her size. Let me call Piper, and I'll get back to you."

"Thank you, dear. Goodbye," Josie sang before hanging up the phone.

I looked down at my phone and quickly texted Piper.

Tate
Hey, my mother is going shopping with Ari and has requested to know everything about Maddy.

I waited a few minutes and chuckled to myself when she replied.

Piper
She really doesn't need to do that...

Tate
Yes, but according to Josie, it doesn't count as spoiling if it comes from her grandmother.

Piper
What do you want to know?

Tate
Clothing size. Shoe size. Favorite color. Favorite animal. Favorite hobby. Favorite food.

I waited a few moments as she texted back a list of Maddy's favorite things.

Piper
Size 3T, but she'll be growing out of it soon. So I'd go with 4T. Size 8 shoes. Favorite color is purple. Favorite animal is a monkey. Favorite hobby is riding her scooter. Favorite food is baked mac n' cheese.

Tate
Thanks, I'll pass it on.

I was glad to also know those things for future reference.

"Thank you, dear," my mother spoke through the phone. "You, Piper, and Maddy are invited to dinner on Tuesday. Six o'clock."

I rubbed my face in my hands. "I was hoping to leave Tuesday, but I can just y out late after dinner. I'll check with Piper to see if she's available," I replied, secretly hoping she wasn't.

I called Piper, needing to talk with her anyway. "Hey! I have a few things..." I began.

"Okay, shoot," Piper replied, and I could hear her shu ing through her apartment before settling on the couch.

"Alright. My mother has invited the three of us to dinner on Tuesday. If you are busy, it is totally—"

"We can be there," Piper interrupted, speaking bluntly.

"Oh, really?" I replied, surprised it didn't take any convincing.

"They showed me they can behave and seem to want to have a relationship with her. I'm ne with that as long as it continues that way," Piper replied.

"Okay then," I nodded before continuing. "Next, I know you have work tomorrow, and I was hoping you would agree to me pulling Maddy out of daycare early."

"We would go to your apartment, I wouldn't take her anywhere. But I'd like to spend some time with her before I leave."

Piper sat quietly on the other end of the phone for a few moments. "I guess that's ne. Stop by the gallery before you pick her up, and I'll give you the key and her car seat."

"Thank you," I smiled, excited for our little time together.

The next morning, I woke early, anxiously awaiting one o'clock to come around so I could go get Maddy.

In the afternoon, I pulled up to the daycare and walked inside.

"Mr. Tate!" Maddy hollered, running to me with a hug. "Mommy said we were going to have fun today!"

"We are!" I smiled before looking up at her daycare teacher. "Hi, I'm Tate Young. Piper should have told you I'd be picking Maddy up today."

"Yes, she did," Miss Fern smiled. "I just need to see some ID before you take her."

I o ered my ID, glad they were looking out for Maddy's safety. As we got in the car, I buckled her in, and we drove to their apartment.

"So, what should we do?" I asked as we walked inside.

"Let's make cookies!" Maddy said with excitement as she took her shoes o and ran to the kitchen.

"Cookies it is then..." I mumbled, not sure I even knew how to make cookies.

After looking up a recipe and getting a decent-looking batch of cookies in the oven, we sat down at the table to do some coloring.

"Do you like living here?" I asked as I drew a sad picture of a cow.

"I like it here. I like being with Mommy," she said quietly as she concentrated on her drawing.

"Your mommy works a lot, huh?"

"She works really hard. But she says it's so we can be safe and happy. She has to take care of me and take care of Grandpa."

Maddy paused for a moment before smiling, "I love her." Maddy spoke with pride as she continued on her picture.

I smiled as I watched her. Even at three, she knew how great of a person her mother was.

"She has to take care of Grandpa?" I asked, wondering what she had meant.

Maddy nodded her head as she continued to color, "Mommy says Grandpa's brain is sick, that's why he doesn't remember my name."

My brow furrowed as I listened to her go on, talking about visiting her grandfather in a home and how sometimes Piper would cry after visiting.

"Hey, I have an idea..." I grinned as I leaned across the table.