



# Time After Time

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# The first Friday

Hi Maya,

I'm Lucy. You don't know me—yet. But I'm here to tell you about the most amazing thing that has ever happened to me.

And to you.

I got this mysterious box in the mail, just like you did. I was dazzled by the bracelet inside, just like you probably are right now. And just like you, I got a letter that explained exactly what the bracelet was and how to use it.

I vowed not to make any of the mistakes that other people made with this magical (yes, that's right—*magical*) bracelet.

Things didn't exactly go according to plan.

I'm going to try my very best to explain what happened to me with this bracelet. I feel like I owe you that much. And the rest? That's up to you.

Everything started Friday, yesterday (though by the end of my story, simple words like *yesterday* are going to have a whole other meaning).

I woke up ten minutes before my alarm was set to go off and lay in bed listening to the *quiet*. The sunlight coming through the window lit up the shelves on my wall:

Shelf 1: Completed Lego model sets

Shelf 2: Fossils (mostly ammonites and bivalves, but also an *actual* trilobite!)

Shelf 3: Crystals

A place for everything and everything in its place—hold on. Something was off.

I slid out of bed and reached up to the top shelf to adjust my crystal prism . . . just . . . right.

The sunlight hit the prism and scattered tiny rainbows all over my walls.

I smiled.

I loved being at Dad's house.

My parents have been divorced since I was three, so I

don't really remember them together. Now I'm ten. I spend half my nights at Dad's and half at Mom's. I love my mom and my stepdad, Ben, and my adorable half-siblings, Kyle and Kaylee (they're twins). But the twins just learned to walk, and they shove everything into their mouths—including crystals. After a few days of diaper changes and baby slobber all over my belongings, I'm always ready to come back to the peace of Dad's place, where it's just the two of us.

I changed into the outfit I had laid out for myself the night before: my favorite red shirt, jean shorts, and the best part—my brand-new Swoop Max sneakers. The leather was so white that it made my eyeballs sizzle.

Mom hadn't wanted me to get them because she said all-white shoes weren't practical. But once I reminded her that if there is any fifth grader who can keep her shoes sparkling white, it's me, she relented.

I trotted down the steps, straightening the photo frames as I went. There are pictures of me and Dad at my yaa and bpuu's house in Krabi, Thailand, from every summer since I was a baby. I frowned as I passed the photo from three years ago, aka the Summer of the Bowl Cut.

Thank goodness my hair grows fast.

"Dad?" I called, rounding into the kitchen.

Dad stood at the counter, blending up his signature peaches-and-cream smoothie—my fave. “My Girl” was playing on Spotify.

“Lulu!” he said with a smile. “Come dance with me—they’re playing our song!”

I laughed as he spun me around, and we both sang along.

*“Talking ’bout m-y-y-y gir-r-l . . .”*

As I twirled, my hand bonked the smoothie glass and a glob of bright peach liquid sailed out and landed with a plop . . . on the floor *beside* my shoe.

“Phew! That was close!” I said, reaching for a towel.

“I’ll say. You can’t get your new shoes dirty on field trip day.” Dad grinned. “Excited?”

“*Beyond*,” I said. This was the day I’d been waiting for all year. Our fifth-grade class was going to my favorite place in the city: the Fort Worth Natural History Museum.

“And you’ll still let me be your special helper in the Hall of Gems?” I asked Dad, mopping up the spill.

“Of course! Who else knows enough about hexagonal crystal systems to be my assistant?”

Dad is the senior geologist for the museum. Normally, he’s too busy working behind a microscope in the geology



lab to lead school tours, but he's making a special exception today since it's my school. And the best part is that he got permission for me to help with the gemstone demo!

"Let's get going," said Dad. "If we leave now, we'll be ten minutes early to school. Grab your lunch. Did you bring your frequent visitor card?"

I nodded and patted my back pocket. "One more punch and that free ice-cream cone from Draum's is all mine." I drained the rest of my smoothie.

When I stay at Mom's, I'm usually gulping down a dry waffle as I run to beat the school bell. But this was Dad's, which meant everything went as smoothly as peaches and cream.

We drove through our neighborhood, past houses already decked out for Halloween and Día de los Muertos. Grinning jack-o'-lanterns hung from the twisty live oak trees and papel picado garlands were strung over windows.

"It's kind of cold this morning—seventy-five degrees," said Dad. "I hope you brought a sweatshirt."

"Dad! That's not even cold. Besides, no way am I covering up my awesome outfit." We pulled into the car line in front of my school. I gave Dad a kiss and hopped out.

“See you in a couple hours at the museum,” I said.

Dad smiled. And then he blushed the color of red garnet as he looked past me and did a little wavy thing with his fingers.

Huh? I looked to see who was standing behind me.

Oh, *gag*. Of course.

Dad’s girlfriend stood at the school entrance holding the door open and greeting families as they walked little kids inside.

Yes, that’s right. My dad’s girlfriend is Ms. Brock, my school’s librarian.

“Good morning, Lucy,” Ms. Brock said as I walked up. And then she saw Dad and she did that cringey little wave thing back. I looked at Dad, who was making a heart sign with his fingertips. Ms. Brock giggled and blushed.

Ugh. I seriously worried I was going to be sick. They thought they were being cute!

It’s not that I didn’t want Dad to have a girlfriend. After all, it’s been seven years since he and Mom split up. Dad had gone on dates before and I’d always been fine with that. But dating the librarian at my school? So awkward. Especially awkward because they met *at school*, when Dad volunteered to sell books at the book fair. And Ms. Brock? I mean, sure,

she dressed nice and was kind of pretty. That day she was wearing a striped yellow-and-white sundress and cute silver flats.

But honestly? She was way too strict.

“Lucy?” she called after me as I hurried to class. “Walking feet, please.”

Case in point.

I mumbled a “sorry” and slowed down as a couple of third graders blazed past me in a full sprint. I turned to see if Ms. Brock would call them out, but she didn’t say a word.

Correction. Ms. Brock was too strict *with me*.

I wasn’t going to let anything ruin my day, though. I was off to my favorite place with my very best friend in the whole world.

Olive Moore was waiting for me at the door of Ms. Hoffman’s classroom.

I threw my arms around her and we both started jumping up and down. “Today, today, today! Museum day!” we shrieked.

Olive’s hair was a mass of curls that went down her back. She tossed her curls over her shoulder as she gave me a salute. “You ready for this, partner?”

“Ready!” I saluted back.

This field trip was the kickoff for our science fair. Every fifth grader would do a project. Olive and I were partnered up, so of course it would be the best one of all. I had already picked out the perfect topic for us.

“All right, class, it’s time to line up and head for the buses!” called Ms. Hoffman.

As we walked out to the parking lot, Olive leaned in close. “I heard we’re doing a scavenger hunt and a dino dig at the museum. The team who does the best at everything today gets extra points added to their science fair grade.”

“Perfect!” I said. “I know that museum better than anyone. We’re definitely getting those points.”

Gabe Hicks and Martin Richardson, in line ahead of us, snickered. “You can give up on the extra credit now, Loser-thorn,” said Gabe. They high-fived each other.

“Let me at him!” said Olive, fuming. “He cannot make fun of your name like that!”

My last name is Thai, and it’s not exactly common. There are only two Usathorns in the whole United States: me and my dad.

“Let it go,” I said to Olive. “He’s not worth getting in trouble over. We’re just going to have to beat them.”

Olive and I climbed onto the school bus and my stomach sank. Ms. Brock sat halfway back, directing kids into this or that seat. I had forgotten that she was chaperoning our field trip along with Ms. Hoffman.

Olive and I started to take an empty seat together, but Ms. Brock pointed us each toward seats that already had kids sitting at the windows.

“But Olive and I are partners,” I protested. “Can’t we sit together?”

Ms. Brock paused like she might let us, then shook her head. “Please take the seat I gave you, Lucy.”

I should have known that would be her answer. I plunked myself down next to Jordana Russo, who took a blueberry yogurt and a plastic spoon out of her bag and started to scoop it into her mouth. I leaned over to talk to Olive, who sat across the aisle from me.

“Notice that Ms. Brock didn’t say anything to Jordana about not eating on the bus,” I whispered. “If *I* was eating, she’d tell me to stop.”

“Oh, come on,” said Olive. “She probably didn’t see the yogurt. Don’t be so hard on Ms. Brock. She’s nice.”

“To *you*, maybe.”



The bus started to rumble. We were on our way!

“So can I talk to you about something?” Olive asked.  
“For our science fair project, I’m a little worried that—”

“That Gabe and Martin will get first place?” I said.  
“Because there is no way their project is going to be better than ‘Texas in the Triassic.’”

“Um, well,” Olive said. “I mean, I do love your idea for using the fossil replicas from the Natural History Museum—”

“Right? My dad said we can even bring a cast of a dinosaur footprint! You think Gabe can beat that?”

“No, I guess not . . .”

“Definitely not!” I rubbed my hands together. “Trust me, we’re going to have the best project of all time. So don’t worry about a thing.”

Olive slid down in her seat. “Great. Cool.”

“I’m going to my mom’s tonight, so you can come over there tomorrow and we’ll get started.”

Olive turned and looked out the window. I hummed to myself as we drove along, past the park and the neighborhood with the good phở place, and then crossed the bridge over the Trinity River.

I turned to Jordana. “What are you doing for the science fair?”

She had taken a giant slurp of blueberry yogurt and her mouth was full.

“I’ll wait,” I said. We bumped along the road, getting closer. Only two minutes away now!

“I’m so excited!” I cheered. I glanced at Olive, but she didn’t seem to hear me. I turned back to Jordana. “Isn’t this exciting? And you didn’t tell me what you’re doing for the project!”

“I don’t . . . I don’t . . .” Jordana said.

“You don’t know yet?” I asked as we stopped in front of the museum. “Don’t worry, you’ll figure it out.”

“. . . feel well,” she finished, and then vomited blue yogurt all over my brand-new white sneakers.