

Chapter 24: Love at First Sight

I entered my hotel room, dropped my things, and collapsed onto the bed. “That little girl...” I whispered to myself.

Sitting up, I pulled my phone from my pocket and stood, pacing the room. “Hey!” Ariana sang on the other end of the line.

“Ari... that little girl is the most beautiful human I’ve ever met,” I confessed as I continued to pace.

“You met her?!” Ari squealed.

“I was in love the moment I met her. She’s so full of personality and goodness...”

“Just like her mom,” Ari said smugly.

I rolled my eyes at my sister, knowing what she was trying to do. “Ariana, I can’t believe I’m just meeting this girl and I’m already practically wrapped around her finger.”

Ariana laughed at me. “Well, what are you going to do?”

I shrugged. “I’m seeing them tomorrow and hopefully a few more times before I have to fly home on Tuesday.”

“And what about Jamie?”

“What about her?” I asked.

I could practically hear Ariana roll her eyes at me. “Have you told her?”

“No, I haven’t told her yet. I was going to wait until I got back to New York,” I replied, rubbing my face as I realized I would have to tell her and that she probably wouldn’t like it.

“Hmm, good luck with that...” Ari teased. “How is Piper?”

“I don’t know... I’ll guess?”

“Fine, you guess?” Ariana hummed.

“Okay.. she’s great. She’s made this life for herself and Maddy, she’s still strong and smart and kind,” I replied as I thought back on this evening. I paused when Ariana was silent on the other end. “Ari?”

“Yeah, I’m here. I was just thinking about how you just need to tell her you love her and get it over with already,” she chuckled.

“I’m not in love with her!” I grumbled. “Besides, I’ll be lucky if we end up as friends. She hates me.”

“I would too if you did to me what you did to her,” Ari shot back. She paused for a moment before speaking again. “So, Maddy is amazing huh? I only met her for a moment, but she seemed adorable.”

I let out a sigh. “Ari, she really is. I only spent a few hours with her and I already want to spoil her rotten and spend every minute I can with her. Is that crazy?”

“No, it’s not crazy!” Ariana hollered into the phone. “You love her. Maddy is your daughter. There’s something special about a father and a daughter. Enjoy your time with her.”

“Thanks, Ari,” I said softly as I gave up on my exciting pacing and sat on the bed. “And thank you for telling me. I’m sure if it were up to Mother I would have never known she even existed.”

“That’s the truth!” Ariana laughed. “Goodnight, brother.”

“Bye,” I smiled before I hung up the phone and tossed it on the bed.

I woke up in the morning to a text from Piper.

Piper
We are planning on heading to Mead Park at around 10 if you want to join us.

I smiled before replying and jumping out of bed. I had just over an hour.

I grabbed something to eat on my way out, arriving a bit early at the park in anticipation.

A few minutes later, I saw Piper’s car pull into the lot and I stepped out.

I leaned against the car as I watched Piper take Maddy out of her car seat.

“Mr. Tate!” Maddy hollered as she ran up to me, hugging my leg.

“Hello, Maddy. How are you today?” I asked with a smile.

“We’re going to play at the park!” she beamed.

“I know! Can I come with you?” I asked as she took my hand.

“Yep! But you’ll have to sit on the bench with Mommy. You’re too big.”

“Good morning, Tate,” Piper said softly as she approached us.

“Good morning,” I replied before following Maddy down the path toward the playground. We sat on a bench and watched as she climbed up toward the slide.

“Watch what you’re doing!” Piper hollered before leaning back on the bench.

I grinned slightly as I watched her play before turning to Piper. “Thank you for letting me come with you.”

She gave a small smile in response as she kept an eye on Maddy. We watched her for a while until she came running up to us. “Can we go to the pond?”

“Sure,” Piper smiled before standing from the bench.

Maddy ran ahead and we walked behind her as she zigzagged through the grass.

“At least for the foreseeable future, I would like to come out every other weekend to visit her, if that’s alright,” I spoke as we walked.

Piper shrugged. “I guess that’s fine.”

“Really?” I replied, surprised it had been that easy.

“Well, you were right. You have a right to see her,” she said quietly as she watched Maddy run around. “Even if it makes me nervous...”

“Why would it make you nervous? Am I really that horrible to you?” I asked, my frustration showing in my tone.

Piper didn’t answer for a minute; she just kept watching Maddy.

“You broke my heart, Tate. Granted, it was my own fault for falling for a client. I let you in when I shouldn’t have. That was my mistake.

“But I did, and it took me a long time to get over it. So yeah, I’m a bit hesitant letting you back into my life.”

Piper picked up her pace and walked ahead of me to reach Maddy. I watched them as they stood by the pond, pointing at ducks and little fish in the water.

I smiled as they laughed and then took turns attempting to skip rocks on the water.

“Is this what having a real family is like?” I wondered to myself as I stood by, wanting to keep this feeling of contentment forever.