

From Chapter 3

Ian rang the doorbell to the small, Spanish-style bungalow that was supposed to be Jasmine's house. As he waited for someone to come to the door, Ian noticed a couple walking their dog on the sidewalk bordering the house. They held hands as they walked together through the quiet neighborhood. The dog, a ghost-gray Weimaraner puppy, leapt and played behind them, sniffing at every bush and rock it passed.

"Can I help you?" A girl, not Jasmine, stood in the doorway. She nibbled at a crust-less peanut butter and jelly sandwich as she waited for Ian to speak.

"Oh, yes." He smiled at the pretty, gamine girl. "Sorry. My name is Ian Tate and I teach at the university—"

"The Mr. Tate?" She laughed and paused with the sandwich halfway to her mouth. "You're the one who's chaperoning Mina and the other girls to Ojai?"

He didn't know why she seemed so surprised. Who was this girl anyway? "I am. Is there a problem?"

She laughed again. "We'll see." The girl looked back over her shoulder and yelled out, "Mina! There's someone here to see you. And he didn't call first."

The girl turned back to him and Ian was struck again by how lovely she was with her short, natural hair, odd, pointy ears, and the wide, dark eyes staring unblinkingly up at him. She looked away as a sweat pants and t-shirt clad Jasmine bounded up behind her. His student seemed distracted.

"Hey, Mr. Tate. What's going on?"

"Sorry, but for some reason it never occurred to me to call." He produced her folder from his briefcase. "You left this in the meeting earlier tonight."

Her expression cleared. "Thank god! I've been looking all over for that." She hugged it to her chest, smiling. "Thank you! I wanted to look over those notes tonight and I was going crazy when I couldn't find the folder."

The other girl retreated from the door. Ian watched her slim back, left bare by a psychedelic print halter top, disappear as she slipped into the candle-lit recesses of the house. Something about her seemed vaguely familiar.

"No problem, Jasmine. Your house is not very far from mine. Anyway, I'll let you get back to your studying." He stepped back from the doorway. "Good luck with that presentation."

"Thanks." She started to close the door.

“Oh, by the way.” Ian turned back to the house. “Who was that girl who answered the door? I didn’t know you had a sister.”

“Oh,” Jasmine giggled, sounding a little like the girl who answered the door. “That’s my mom. She can be a little rude sometimes. Sorry about that.”

Her mother? “No, it’s ok. She wasn’t rude. I was just curious.” He gave her his professor’s smile. “I’ll see you on Friday afternoon.”

“Ok,” she smiled back and closed the door.

As he walked back down the path past their garage, he felt eyes on him. Ian looked around, then up. It was Jasmine’s mother. She sat in at the upstairs window, perched on the window seat like a cat, watching him. When she noticed that he saw her, she didn’t look away. If anything her look intensified. Then she smiled.

Ian got into his car and drove off, feeling her eyes on him the entire time. At home, he couldn’t shake her look. Or the feeling that he’d seen her before. He graded some papers, planned an itinerary for himself during the Ojai trip, then took himself off to bed.