

Meant for Me

Tay Marley

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A Beverly Hills event planner navigates her grief in Tay Marley's romance novel *Meant for Me*, about an impromptu trip that sparks healing.

Addie was raised by her half-sister Margo; rending flashbacks reveal both Margo's complicated feelings of longing and the trauma that Addie experienced as a teenager. As an adult, though, she self-protects; Addie also enjoys romantic stories in secret. But after Margo dies, devastated, vulnerable Addie boards a bus from California to Texas, carrying little more than her phone and backpack.

Once she's in Texas, Addie seems to be subject to the machinations of fate—though she also feels some ties to home. A compassionate policewoman, Raine, notices Addie wandering in town and invites her to her family's farm. There, Addie meets Zac, one of the farmhands. Both he and Raine are hospitable as Addie helps them with daily farm chores. Though she bonds with them, love isn't foremost on Addie's mind; instead, she finds respite in nature, horses, and her growing rapport with Raine's fiancé's daughter, a precocious girl who derives wisdom from avid movie-watching. Among this warm makeshift family, Addie begins to heal.

Zac is often present as a person who is concerned for Addie, and they develop romantic feelings for one another. While the novel's racy scenes are tonally at odds with their otherwise sweet romance, there are sympathetic parallels between Zac's experiences and Addie's—both sidelined their personal passions to maintain their family's businesses, for example. Their relationship and others are enriched by heartfelt conversations, practical instances of assistance, and people's willingness to grow.

Celebrating women's friendships, the stirring romance novel *Meant for Me* follows the bittersweet choices that a woman makes after a hard loss.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2024)

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