

## The Billionaire's Twins Play Matchmaker Book One: Chapter 27



Katherine was still riding high as she snagged another flute of champagne. Now she just had to wait for the fireworks to start. Soon that woman would burst out and make a big scene before running away. Then Katherine could swoop in to comfort a devastated Julius. Finally everything would be back on track. With all the press gathered tonight it was guaranteed they would end up on the front page of the gossip columns just in time for their wedding announcement.

As she wandered through the crowd waiting for the show to start a small group caught her eye. A trio of visitors, two men and a woman, stood in front of a photograph of an ant cleaning its antennae discussing the new series quite seriously considering the subject matter.

"Don't you think this a huge departure for M. Gray?" the tall, African-American man in a finely tailored suit asked.

"Well, Gray has always been inspired by nature," another man with an accent Katherine couldn't place said.

The second man was average height, blonde, with a wiry frame. Like his companion he also wore a black suit contrasting the woman in a silver gown nicely. It wasn't immediately clear how well the trio knew each other but they maintained their little conclave, sipping champagne and enjoying the atmosphere.

"I know, but this series. I mean, full color and insects? Most people find them creepy and wouldn't want to be this close," the black man argued.

"True, but that may be the point," the other man said. "This series is entitled A New Perspective so it's probably meant to challenge our preconceptions."

The woman with them chuckled as the pair argued back and forth. Her long, raven-black hair was straight and unadorned flipped over one shoulder. She wore a regal, silver gown with a plunging V-neckline with only thin straps over her shoulders. It was backless though she had a gauzy shawl that looped through her elbows.

Rolling her eyes she suddenly declared in a bold voice punctuated with a French accent, "If you want to know the reason all we have to do is ask."

Katherine suddenly realized why the woman looked so familiar. She rushed forward clutching her arm and saying, "Oh my god! You're Victoria Laurent! I saw your latest collection and absolutely fell in love with one of your dresses! I would love for you to design my wedding dress!"

\* \* \*

Victoria stared at the strange woman who suddenly accosted her. She had been surprised when the invitation for M. Gray's latest show arrived coupled with the grand opening of a new gallery devoted to Gray's art. It was an unexpected move but Victoria never missed a new exhibit and rearranged her schedule to make it possible to attend.

The last thing she expected was to be recognized as she never attended an event in America before. Frankly she found Americans overbearing and self-absorbed and the blonde in front of her was the perfect example. Tonight was meant to be a black tie affair and the blonde was practically wearing lingerie. Not only that but she had barged into a private conversation she and Paul were having with a new acquaintance they had met on arrival. Now she was practically demanding Victoria make her a one of a kind wedding gown. Was she serious?

Paul raised an eyebrow at the shameless tramp gripping Victoria's hand like a long lost friend. He had known Victoria since college and he never saw the blonde before so it was safe to say Victoria didn't know this woman either.

"I'm sorry, who are you?" Victoria finally asked.

"I'm Katherine Trent. My wedding is in six months and if I had a one of a kind dress by you I know I'd make the front page!"

"Right. Well, I don't take special orders. I'm afraid I'm much too busy."

Katherine's enthusiastic expression faded. "Oh, but you have to! I came here to ask M. Gray to be my photographer. It's the perfect opportunity for both of you."

"For both of us to...what?" Victoria asked somewhat amused by her assumptions.

"To get your names out there. I am a trend setter after all."

"If you already know their names I think it's safe to say they are both already out there," Paul snorted. "Franklin, is this how American woman usually are?"

Their tall acquaintance shrugged. Unfortunately there was plenty of her type in the world especially in New York high society which tended to be entitled and over-privileged.

"I wasn't talking to you," Katherine glared at the men. "This is a private conversation."

"Well, you're starting to attract a crowd," Paul noted. "And I think Victoria already answered your question."

"Tante Vicki!" excited shrieks interrupted as Aria and Caden ran up to them.

"Mes chéris!" Victoria exclaimed as the twins clamored around her.

They jumped up and down unable to control their excitement seeing their mother's best friend, their godmother and adopted aunt. Aside from their family they hadn't seen any familiar faces until now.

"Look at you!" Victoria declared. "Caden, you are such a handsome young man in that suit!"

Caden blushed at the compliment but grinned clearly pleased.

"And Aria, you are so lovely! Where's your mother? I've been looking for her."

"She's over there," Aria pointed to where Macey stood alongside their father talking to their aunt and uncle and other family members. "You want to say hi?"

"Yes, of course! Allons-y."

The twins giggled seizing her hand not occupied with a champagne flute and hurried her over to the small group of their family members. The others had no choice but to follow. They were still several steps away when Aria eagerly announced, "Mommy! Look who we found!"

Macey turned and immediately smiled, "Vicki!"

"Macey!" Vicki echoed coming up to her and kissing both cheeks in greeting. Macey mimicked the familiar gesture.

"I didn't think you'd make it."

"Ma belle, when have I ever missed any of your shows?"

Macey chuckled. From the very beginning Vicki was her loudest cheerleader and never missed a show featuring her work. Likewise Macey attended fashion shows whenever Vicki launched a new line. Still coming all the way to America was no simple feat.

"I wasn't going to miss this for the world," Vicki said, "and there is something I have to ask you."

"Okay."

"VogueFrance wants to do an exclusive on my new line."

"Vicki, that's fantastic!"

"I know...but I just don't trust their photographer. You know how they are in their little studios: lights, point, click, done. Weddings are all about mood, the ambience. I need a photographer who knows how to capture that. I know the great M. Gray doesn't do commissions but...I'll beg if you want me to!"

"Vicki! That will not be necessary," Macey laughed. "We have seen each other naked, you were there holding my hand when I had the twins. Do you really think you can ask me anything I will say no to? Yes, I don't do commissions, but a favor for a friend is completely different. Of course I'll be your photographer just tell me when and where. I'll tell Dillon to keep my schedule open."

"Merci! Merci beaucoup!" Victoria breathed a sigh of relief. "Vous êtes mon sauveur!"

Macey couldn't hold back her laughter at her friend's dramatic reaction, "Really, why are French so dramatic!"

"Wait! What?" Katherine suddenly interjected. She looked from Victoria to Macey. "You are M. Gray?"

"Yes, that is right," Macey said with a sigh. Her secret was finally out. She thought she'd be more self-conscious but surprisingly she felt at ease with it.

"And...you know each other?"

"Of course. We went to school together," Victoria said. "We would have graduated together if someone didn't have to take remedial French."

"Well maybe if I had a better tutor I wouldn't have needed it," Macey challenged earning a mock gasp from Victoria. She glanced at Katherine asking, "So how do you know each other?"

"We don't," Victoria said. "She recognized me and demanded I drop all my projects to design a unique wedding dress. Oh, and she wants you to be her photographer for the wedding too."

"Oh, is that so...And who's the groom?" Macey let her gaze slide back to Katherine raising a brow.

Katherine opened her mouth and snapped it shut, her gaze swept over their audience as the entire DaLair family waited for her answer. Her eyes finally fell on Julius who glared at her, challenging her to say what was on her mind. Katherine's attention flitted to Macey's waist where his hand still possessively rested. It seemed her plan to drive them apart hadn't worked after all.

"He—He doesn't seem to be here at the moment. I should find him," Katherine muttered before retreating.

Victoria stared after her a moment before commenting, "She is aware lingerie should be worn under her clothes, right?"

"Like you're one to talk," Macey challenged.

"Pardon?" Victoria mocked a hurt expression. "I see how it is. All right, fine. You can think us French are dramatic, pretentious egotists if you want. We still think you Americans are self-absorbed, entitled prudes. Fair is fair."

"I'm sorry?" March suddenly asked, "you think we're...prudes?"

"Well what would you call a culture so obsessed with sex and sexuality but are also completely uncomfortable in your own skin?"

"Well..." March trailed off not sure there was a correct answer to her challenge and already regretted speaking up.

"How about an easy question, when's the last time you were naked?"

March choked on his drink, sputtering while the rest of the group chuckled. Aloud he said, "I don't think..."

"There you see that is a very American mentality right there," Victoria admonished. "There is nothing sexual about what I said. We're just talking about being without clothing. What about you, Macey?"

"Do baths count?" Macey asked. "And does it count more or less if I wasn't alone?"

Victoria raised an eyebrow as she slowly smiled, "Oh, I want details."

"Not in mixed company."

Victoria's gaze narrowed as she weighed Macey's seriousness before nodding. March's gaze darted to Julius. Though his brother maintained a neutral expression a pink tinge warmed his cheeks. March's gaze widened in surprise. Julius hadn't taken a bath since he was five. That was very interesting development.

A cough interrupted further discussion and Macey's attention shifted. She gasped, "Oh my god! Paul! I'm so sorry. I didn't see you! Let me introduce you..."

"Mommy! I want to do it!" Aria said.

"Okay, you do it then."

"This is our Aunt Vicki and Uncle Paul! They went to school with mommy!" Aria explained. "And this is our family! This is Uncle March and Aunt Rose and our cousin Jude. And you already know Grandpa Gus."

"Victoria."

"Augustus."

The pair traded neutral greetings. It was clear they were familiar with each other though it was difficult to ascertain whether they were friendly or hostile. At the very least there was mutual respect.

"And this is our daddy!" Aria said proudly as she and Caden clutched him possessively.

A moment of surprise flashed across Victoria's expression before her gaze narrowed to study him. His resemblance to the children and Augustus were not lost on her and she carefully gauged the proximity he maintained with Macey as well as where he kept his hand on her waist.

"So...you're Julius," she said after a moment.

"You know me?"

"Of course. There are no secrets between *meilleurs amis*," Victoria smiled teasingly. "And I'm sure Macey remembers the first advice I gave her. You do remember, yes? *Montrez-moi un homme qui a fait une erreur et je vous en montrerai un qui a besoin d'une deuxième chance. Mais ne lui donnez jamais une troisième chance.*"

Macey chuckled, "Show me a man who has made a mistake and I'll show you one who needs a second chance. But never give them a third."

Victoria nodded sagely looking at Julius with an appraising look.

Macey cleared her throat as the conversation stalled, "Victoria is a designer. She designs the most stunning wedding gowns you'll ever see. Paul is a sculptor. He specializes in, I guess you would call it, environmental sculpture. He likes to use natural materials and place his sculptures in natural environments. And this is...I'm sorry...Have we met?"

Macey turned her attention to the tall African-American who joined their circle alongside her friends. He smiled apologetically shaking his head saying, "No. I'm Franklin Jackson. I'm a member of the New York Philharmonic. I met Victoria and Paul here while I was admiring your latest series. We were having a friendly debate about its tone when Victoria said we should just ask the artist. I had no idea they actually knew you. Are you really thee M. Gray?"

"Guilty as charged," Macey shook his hand. "It's nice to meet you. Just call me Macey, please."

"Very nice to meet you...Macey," Franklin smiled.

He had been surprised when he received an invitation to the gallery's opening. Though he always made a point of supporting the arts the grand opening was an exclusive event and not many invitations had been sent out. Several of his friends were jealous when they heard his luck and offered to buy the ticket for him.

Franklin wasn't certain why he had received the invitation but refused all offers to take it off his hands. He had long admired M. Gray's work but he never thought he'd get the opportunity to speak to the artist who was known for being difficult to meet. He certainly wasn't prepared for her to be a gorgeous and friendly redhead.

"Can I ask you a question about your latest series?"

"Of course. Fire away."

"Well...I know you work in color and in black and white and a lot of your work features natural settings...but this latest series," Franklin looked at the large vibrant pieces each featuring a different insect. "It does seem to be a departure from your usual style. Is there meaning behind that?"

Macey chuckled, "Well, on the surface it does seem to be a departure I suppose. I wish I could say I had some lofty metaphysical idea but I really don't go for that. The truth is I was inspired by my children. Kids come into the world like blank slates and everything for them is new and magical. I wanted to capture that sense of wonder. Make us see the world like kids do, like we used to. You'll have to tell me how I did; after all, what the artist does is only half of what art is."