

The Billionaire's Twins Play Matchmaker Book Two: Chapter Fourteen



"Wow! Check this place out! It's huge!" Theo declared as they paused inside the foyer.

A step behind him Sean whistled. Their father called it a villa but the brownstone was more like a mansion. Who would have thought such a place existed even on the Upper West Side? Behind them came their security guards now acting as porters carrying in the duffels the kids packed during their brief return to their apartment. Their mother followed guiding Alexis though the latter now possessed her cane. Still it helped having a sighted person guide her during initial visits.

"Let me take your coat," Silas gently urged helping Ava out of her threadbare jacket.

The more he looked at it the more faults he found. It wasn't just frayed. It actually had several holes. It was faded making its original color difficult to ascertain: perhaps camouflage green? There were also mud and salt stains from years of use and wearing it in inclement weather. The first chance he got he would take them out for new wardrobes and toss the jacket out.

"Hey look! It even comes with a butler. Hey Jeeves! How's it hanging?" Theo asked.

"Hello," the butler said giving the boy an odd stare before looking to his employer. "Sir."

"Duncan," Silas acknowledged. "This is Ava. The kids are Alexis, Sean and Theo. They'll be in your care so I expect nothing but the best."

"Of course," Duncan nodded his gaze taking in the young, petite woman, her reserved daughter and rather boisterous sons. He had a lot of questions to which he didn't expect to get answers but he had a few guesses. "Madam, it is my honor to serve."

"...Th-thank you," Ava nodded. It had been a long time since she stayed anywhere with servants at her beck and call. Even the ones her parents employed were not nearly so personable usually dismissing her. She didn't want to be a bother.

"You can ask Duncan for anything," Silas assured her gently rubbing her shoulder. He wanted to comfort her but the physical contact only seemed to make her tenser. "The bedrooms are upstairs. Would you like to freshen up before dinner?"

"Y-yes. That sounds fine," Ava agreed. With an arm around Alexis she guided her to the stairs. "Sean. Theo."

"Coming!" Theo called reappearing from another room where he had wandered.

Duncan claimed the girl and boys' duffels from the security detail leaving them with Thomas for their new instructions. Silas took Ava's bag himself without a word guiding her up the stairs and down the hall. He wanted nothing more than to take her to his own bedroom but knew it was too soon. Instead he guided her to a room a few doors down.

This one was lavishly decorated with rich, warm tones. The curtains were heavily brocaded with thick embroidery. A Monet hung over the mantel with an antique vase full of flowers that were changed weekly regardless of whether the room was occupied. All the furniture was well-oiled, antique wood and carefully restored fabric. Ava slowly turned taking it all in mentally calculating the value.

Silas set her bag on the bed watching her. He hoped comfortable surroundings would help her relax but it seemed she was only becoming more anxious as she stood in her uniform hugging herself and rubbing her arms. Silas quietly approached covering her nervous hands with his own. She stiffened as he leaned close kissing her temple.

"...S-silas?"

"I can't believe I finally found you," he said.

"...Found me? Why would you..."

"I've been looking for you for ten years," Silas said slowly turning her to face him. "I'm so sorry I didn't find you sooner."

Ava opened her mouth but closed it not sure what she should say. She wanted to laugh or call him a liar but his gaze held her silent. His eyes were so gentle and expression earnest. Had he really looked for her? But why after he told her to disappear from his sight?

"Ava, I didn't...I didn't know it was you that day," Silas finally spoke the words he wanted to say.

"You...didn't know?"

"No. My friends thought...They wanted me to loosen up so they slipped something in my drink and...When I woke up and saw you I thought...God I thought you were a maid they paid or...I never saw your face. You never looked at me. I never dreamed it would be you..."

Silas hung his head unable to continue. If only he had controlled his temper. He didn't dare meet her gaze expecting her to be upset or disgusted with him. When she remained silent he clenched his jaw and slowly raised his head bracing himself. Her eyes were wide, questioning, uncertain.

"...You were drugged too?" Ava asked. Yes, her sister had said something about college boys bragging about the trick they played on their friend. "And you didn't know it was me."

"I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have said those things to you. If I knew it was you I...I never would...It's my fault for venting my anger at my friends on you. I'm so sorry."

"...It's fine."

"No it's not," Silas said startling her with his firm voice. "Don't forgive me that easily, Ava. Not after ten years. I owe you ten years and I'll spend the rest of my life making it up to you."

Hesitantly he reached up to gently stroke her cheek with his fingertips before tucking a stray hair behind her ear. He wanted to hold her but her fear was too great. She wasn't ready but she would be. He would win back her heart no matter how long it took.

"...Silas..."

"Shh...You don't have to say it," Silas leaned forward kissing her forehead. "I promise I'll take care of you. I'll take care of our children. I won't let anyone hurt you or them. You aren't alone anymore, Ava. I'm here."

Ava's shoulders shook as she trembled trying to contain her sobs. His arms wrapped around her pulling her against his chest as the tears she had been holding back burst forth. He held her silently stroking her hair and back letting her release her pent up emotions as she clung to him. She needed this release so he let her tears fall but he swore he would never let her cry again.

Ava quieted her tears finally spent. She slowly calmed still wrapped in his warm embrace. The chest she was pressed against was firm but he held her so gently. The finely tailored shirt covering her benefactor had been ruined by her tears. Realizing who was holding her she shuddered and tried to push away.

"...I'm sorry."

"You never have to apologize to me, Ava," Silas assured her refusing to let her go. "How about a bath to calm your nerves before dinner?"

She nodded.

He guided her to the private, luxury bath complete with Jacuzzi tub and rainforest shower. Silas took a moment to show her the bath and shower controls before filling the tub and leaving her but not before embracing her again and kissing her temple whispering, "Take all the time you need."

Left alone Ava breathed deep to calm her racing heart. Why was he being so kind to her? Didn't he hate her? Didn't he hate her family? Or maybe...Maybe he really didn't recognize her back then? Maybe he really did care about her and the kids...maybe...

Or was it a trick? Her father tried to force her to sign away the custody rights of her kids. Maybe Silas was simply trying to trick her into doing the same...maybe...

But she didn't want to believe that. Her heart ached from its previous rejection and from the years she watched him from the shadows. She wanted to believe him but could she? Could she put her faith in him? Would he turn on her again?

Her head pounded from the contradictory thoughts running through her head. She rubbed her temples forcing them to the side. She would think about that later. Her gaze fell on the inviting tub now filling with steaming water. First thing first...a bath to sooth her frayed nerves.

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Silas emerged from his room fresh from a shower and a change of clothes. He now wore jeans and long-sleeved t-shirt. Though he stayed at the brownstone infrequently his closet was full of clothes for any occasion including a relaxing dinner with his family. It felt good to be out of the restrictive suit and he hoped the kids would be more apt to warm up to him now. Sighing his mind returned to Ava.

He finally held her in his arms. She turned to him for comfort. It was a far cry from what he wanted but it was a start. He would do whatever it took to gain her trust. It didn't matter how many hoops she made him jump through. He would do it.

Stepping out of his room he found Thomas waiting for him, "Everything in place?"

"Yes," Thomas said. "Mike and the rest will be running security here from now on. They'll also escort them whenever they go out. They've gone to grab their gear and when they return Duncan will show them to the servants' wing for their accommodations."

"Good. Next step is to get in contact with a trustworthy hospital."

"Hospital?"

"For paternity tests. I want the children's birth certificates amended as soon as possible before Emerson makes his next move. He won't stay quiet for long now that he knows about the kids."

"Right. With his daughter's reputation in the gutter he's desperate to reclaim his family's standing."

"He has no right to claim Ava and he will not be allowed near the kids."

"Right."

"Then it's true."

Silas turned at Duncan's sudden appearance. The older man had served his family since Silas was only a boy and watched the young man grow up. In fact Silas might have spent more time in the care and presence of the butler than his own father. Now Duncan had a thoughtful look on his face. Thought Silas hadn't given him warning or explained the children's presence there was no doubting the strong resemblance of the boys to the man in front of him.

"The boys do bear a remarkable resemblance to you. And the young lady?"

"I have every intention of marrying her...if she'll have me."

"Then I wish you the best of luck," Duncan nodded fighting a smile. "I assure you they will have the best care and will want for nothing."

"Thank you. Oh, Ava doesn't like tomatoes. Sauces are fine just not the actual vegetable. She has an allergy to chocolate as well. I'm not sure about the kids."

"I'll ask the Miss if they have any preferences or allergies."

"Good." Silas nodded. "Anything they want make sure they get it. I'll take them shopping later."

He knew the kids could not be bought. It would take time to earn their trust and, he hoped affection, just as it would take time to win Ava's heart but he owed them ten years. He was their father and he would provide them with everything they could need or want from now on. Silas only hoped they wanted him in their lives.

"Oh Duncan, adjust the temperature of the house to seventy."

"I thought you preferred it kept cooler, sir."

"My preferences don't matter. I don't know if it is nerves or because she is so thin but Ava seems to be prone to catching chills. I want to make sure it is comfortable for her here."

"Yes sir." Duncan nodded this time he didn't bother hiding his smile.