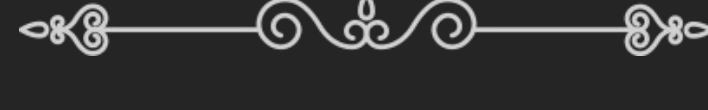


The Billionaire's Twins Play Matchmaker Book One: Chapter 19



Julius hurried to his car forcing himself to leave his family. It was getting harder to leave them not knowing if he would be allowed to return. His place was precarious and subject to Macey's whim. After last night it was clear she still desired him. Yet her reluctance only heightened how much he hurt her. Would she let him stay fearing it might end badly again? He had to find some way to prove his intentions were true.

Sitting in his car he pulled out his phone glancing at March's text message: Call me as soon as you get this. Sighing he hit the call button.

It rang once before March answered, "Finally! Where are you?"

"I'm still at the villa. I made the kids French Toast for breakfast."

"...So you spent the night at the villa?"

"Yeah."

"...Really? So, what happened?"

"Is that why you needed me to call you?" Julius ran a hand through his hair. He really didn't want to discuss this over the phone.

"...No. It's the Board."

"What about them?"

"...I guess some articles about you and Macey and the kids came out in the papers."

"Shit. And?"

"And they got pictures of you with the kids and the Board is panicking because they don't know who the children are."

"I fail to see how my life is any of their business."

"Our stocks dropped a couple points after the story broke. Our family founded this company so our private lives are used to indicate the company's stability. You know as well as I do that the stocks dropped after mom passed."

"Yeah, yeah. I get it," Julius glanced at the villa. The last thing he needed was for Macey to be dragged into this situation. She was only just letting him back into her life he couldn't let this jeopardize that. "Okay, call a Board meeting. I have to stop at my condo and then I'll be in to deal with them."

"I'll let dad know."

Julius sighed as he put away the phone. He looked to the villa again as he started his vehicle. A Board meeting was annoying but ultimately harmless. At least it had better be. He was not going to let anyone interfere with his family.

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March knocked before entering his father's office. Augustus glanced at him as he signed the papers Stephen handed him. Without a word March slumped in a chair and waited for his father to acknowledge him.

"Did you finally get a hold of your brother?" Augustus asked.

"Yeah." March nodded. "He's on his way in. He asked me to call a Board meeting. I don't know what he's planning to tell them but I assume he intends to put out the fire...or light a bigger one."

Augustus grunted.

"He spent the night at the villa apparently," March said.

Augustus's mouth twitched before he could prevent it but he managed to hold back a smile. It seemed his son was a man of his word intent on seizing hold of this opportunity. Perhaps there was hope in convincing Macey to stay after all.

"You know those candids of him and the kids were actually pretty nice," March said.

"You should contact the Eagle and see about buying them," Augustus agreed.

"I doubt they'd take the pictures down."

"I don't care if they do or not I just think copies would be nice for the family album," Augustus answered.

"Right." March chuckled. The Board was in a panic over a few pictures and his father wanted copies. He checked his watch. There was over an hour before the meeting, time enough to get some work done. Excusing himself he retreated to his own office.

Augustus leaned back in his seat looking at the door. Without a word he took out his phone and called up the text message he received earlier that morning. In it was a picture of Julius and Macey asleep in each other's arms and a brief message appeared under it: Phase Four complete.

He chuckled. His grandchildren were certainly audacious. Just what did they have planned for Phase Five?

* * *

At precisely eleven o'clock the Board gathered. They sat according to seniority with the older members closer to the end the DaLair patriarch and his sons occupied. Some of the senior members had been there since the company began. They knew Augustus DaLair for decades and still feared his wrath. The younger members did not have such experiences and usually dealt with the younger, more amicable brothers. They had forgotten to fear their employers. Augustus thought it was overdue to remind them.

The Board fell silent as the door opened. Augustus entered without a glance at those already seated. He walked with dignity despite his cane and took his seat like a king ascending his throne. March entered a few moments later taking his usual seat at his father's right. Neither DaLair said a word as they waited for the one who called the meeting.

Almost a full minute went by before Julius finally entered. He carried a pair of photo albums as well as magazines recently purchased from a news stand. After a quick shower he decided how he was going to respond to the Board's challenge. Though he occasionally wore polo shirts to work today he wore a suit looking every bit the professional for this confrontation.

"Stephen, stand by the door please," Julius glanced at his father's assistant. "No interruptions."

With a nod the older gentlemen stepped out and remained in front of the door to insure the meeting was not interrupted. A surprised look traveled through the Board members. To their knowledge Stephen had never obeyed anyone's directive except Augustus's before. Did this mean Julius was the acknowledged first heir over his brother?

"It seems you all have too much time on your hands," Julius announced glaring around the table. "So much so you have time to read the gossip columns."

Julius opened a magazine to the spread depicting him and Macey together before tossing it into the middle of the table. The Board members glanced at it sheepishly. None of them showed a look of surprise which meant they were all aware of it. More than a few probably bought a copy.

"Someone needs to explain how my private life is any of your business."

A couple of Board members looked to Augustus for guidance but the stoic patriarch was playing on his phone and didn't seem interested in what happened in front of him. March stood and dragged the magazine toward him to read the article as if it were all news to him. Both were content to allow Julius free reign to handle the situation.

"Well?" Julius demanded his voice getting a hard edge as the silence continued. "Cat got your tongues?"

Finally one of the younger members cleared his throat, "You have to understand Mister DaLair, you, your brother and your father are the founders and faces of the company. Investors look at you to determine if the company is stable."

"Is that so? Then explain to me how me spending time, sober, with two children is less stable than my usual drinking binges?"

"...Um...well..."

"This is a family company," another spoke. "They are worried that another family may take over..."

Julius snorted, "How long have you been at this company?"

"Five years."

"And you?"

"T-two years."

"And you haven't bothered to learn anything about your employers? There are men in this room who have been here since this company's inception. They could tell you at thing or two. They could tell you about my marriage for starters."

"Your marriage?"

Julius flipped open one of the photo albums to reveal images of his wedding shoving it at the young Board member who first spoke.

"Eight years ago, I married the most beautiful woman in the world. Six years ago I made the biggest mistake of my life. We've been separated since. Tell me, does she look familiar to you?"

The Board member stared at the redhead in the wedding dress standing beside Julius. His eyes went to the magazine March continued to read showing a redhead in Julius's arms. They could almost be twins...unless...

"You mean the woman in those photos is...your wife?"

"Do you know how difficult it is to get your wife to fall back in love with you?" Julius asked. "It's damn difficult. Take it from me."

"But the children..."

"These children?" Julius opened the other magazine and turned to the article about him and the twins tossing it into the middle of the table. "You mean you don't see the resemblance?"

He opened the album his father had given him turning to a page showing Macey's very pregnant belly. Setting it on the wedding album he asked the Board member, "Well?"

He flipped to another page with the babies in her arms.

"How about now?"

He flipped to the last page showing Augustus holding the twins.

"Or now?"

The startled members looked to Augustus who had set aside his phone to stare enigmatically at them sometime during Julius's speech. His expression was calm. There was no trace of embarrassment or remorse in his face.

"Sir?"

"What? I should be deprived of my grandchildren because my son was an idiot?"

The entire table fell silent. Even those who had been with the company eight years ago had forgotten Julius's marriage. There had been a lot of rumors at the time. She had been well below his status and many speculated before she was even prepared to be the wife to such an important figure. She was only around for a couple years before she disappeared and the marriage seemingly dissolved. None questioned it at the time but now it seemed the DaLair patriarch had been deliberately hiding her and his grandchildren from public scrutiny.

"I'm going to make this very simple," Julius said, "if the Board insists I will submit paternity tests to satisfy them...at a later date and at my discretion. Until then my father's word should be more than enough to satisfy you. But I will not tolerate interference in my personal life. You will not approach my wife or children. You will not make any formal statements or press releases. I will decide when and where I make any announcements. Do I make myself clear?"

He fixed each of them with a glare daring them to protest. They quailed under his ruthless gaze realizing they had grown too complacent. They had forgotten how dangerous it was to cross a DaLair.

"You really should be grateful," March chuckled, "until now my son has been the only heir. Now this company has three. How is that for a stable future?"

The Board members shared looks at that statement. It was true. Though other families were often torn apart by infighting and rivalries the DaLairs had always been close. Despite the age gap between the brothers March and Julius were a united front. There was every reason to believe the cousins would be just as close. It also meant future generations of the DaLair family were all but guaranteed.

"Now get out," Julius said reclaiming his photo albums and magazines. "Not one word of this leaves this room."