

## The Billionaire's Twins Play Matchmaker Book Two: Chapter Sixteen



"Whoa! Check it out!" Theo marveled. "This place is huge!"

After three days they had settled into the brownstone with their father and even got used to the ever present butler. After addressing concerns over his sudden departure from work their first day Silas had been working from home to spend more time with them. The attention seemed to make their mother nervous but the kids recognized he was trying to make up for lost time.

In twenty-four hours he learned to recognize Theo from Sean a feat that even their Aunt Tracy had not completely mastered. It was impressive but the triplets weren't about to simply accept him because of that. Another result of his extended time with them allowed their mother to become more accustomed to his presence. She was still not comfortable but she looked over her shoulder less and had relaxed somewhat.

Since it was the weekend Silas announced his plans to take them shopping. They now stood in Macy's in awe of the sheer size of the store. Their mother had taken them shopping many times but the discount department stores she usually frequented simply didn't compare.

"Clothes, shoes, winter jackets," Silas said, "games, toys...anything you need or to entertain yourselves go ahead and grab it."

Theo and Sean shared a look before smirking. Well if their father was offering why not spend his money? Though they never complained with what their mother was able to provide their wish lists were exceedingly long as it was for any ten-year-old. Guiding their sister the trio quickly disappeared among the racks with their guards struggling to keep up.

"Don't go overboard," Ava called though her entreat fell on deaf ears.

"What I said applies to you too," Silas said his arm encircling her.

Ava flinched shaking her head, "I don't need anything."

Gently he took her hand fingering the frayed edges of her jacket before asking, "Not even a new coat?"

Ava blushed looking away. It was true her coat had seen better days even before she found it on the racks at the Salvation Army. In fact her entire wardrobe could be described that way. While the kids never complained about not having the trendiest name brands she made sure to take them shopping often as they grew out of their old things.

On the other hand, she usually shopped at thrift stores for herself to save money. While the clothes she bought were clean and in good condition it was clearly older in style. Even the navy sweater, turtleneck and jeans she wore all had clear signs of their age leaving her looking rather shabby next to Silas who wore a wool turtleneck, leather jacket and pressed trousers all clearly purchased new and by brands she didn't dare name.

"Ava," Silas gently curled a finger under her chin and turned her face toward his. His gaze was gentle. "Don't reject the things I can provide. Please let me take care of you."

She opened her mouth to protest but snapped it shut again when no words formed. Why was he being so kind and gentle to her? Didn't he despise her for failing to provide their children with the best life possible?

"Ava please," his tone was pleading, desperate for her acceptance.

"...Mister Prescott..."

"Silas."

Ava blinked.

"With you it is always just Silas. You can ask me for anything."

Ava bit her lip unsure how she should act. What did he want her to say? Finally she said, "...Silas you don't have to go out of your way to be nice. I'm fine with what I have so there's no need."

"That's the problem."

She blinked her attention snapping back to his face. He frowned looking troubled.

"You say you're fine but you're not."

Ava hugged herself chewing the inside of her mouth desperately trying not to fidget under his scrutiny. Was she really so transparent?

"Ava, you're not alone anymore. I'm right here." His arm pulled her close into an embrace that was comforting and didn't make her feel trapped in the slightest. "Let me take care of you. Let me give you the things I can provide. Let me be here for you."

She fought tears willing herself not to cry in public. How many lonely nights had she laid awake fretting over the next day? Paying bills, buying groceries, clothes, shoes...the kids needed so much especially two boys growing like weeds. She did it alone because she had no choice but did she have a choice now?

"...Silas."

"I'm here. I'll always be here for you." He kissed her temple. "You don't have to do it alone. Let me help."

She sighed leaning into him. It felt so good to be held, to hear his gentle assurances. Was it wrong to trust him? Would she become too reliant on him? What would happen to her if he suddenly changed his mind later?

"Ava...please."

"...Okay."

His embrace tightened and he released her reluctantly. As she tried to compose herself he gently wiped away a lingering tear. Letting his hand rest in the middle of her back he led her toward the women's section.

"The kids."

"Don't worry. They have four of my security personnel watching over them," Silas assured her even as Thomas shadowed them. "Let's shop for you, starting with a coat."

Ava let him guide her without further argument. She kept watch for the kids wanting to warn them not to go crazy on this trip. It wouldn't due to annoy Silas and possibly lead to him kicking them out. The incident with her father left her scared and unsure. She wouldn't let her father breakup her family but she didn't know how to fight him. He had so much more power than she did. For now Silas was a shield but there was no guarantee he would help her against her father.

"Ava what are you thinking about?"

She jerked to attention realizing they were among the women's coats. Shaking her head she answered, "N-nothing. It's not important."

Silas watched her with concern but she ignored him as best she could. Instead she focused on the coat racks. Ava considered several particularly a belted, wool one in red that looked warm and flattering before settling on a cheap brown one. He looked at it with a disappointed frown but handed it to Thomas instructing him to take it to the cashier. Thomas gave him a knowing nod.

Then Silas guided her onward to shop for sweaters, pants even shoes and boots. Ava had been determined to stop at only the coat but at his insistence she reluctantly chose a few cheap offerings in each category. So preoccupied she didn't notice Silas and Thomas select the items she left behind. Anywhere her gaze lingered was enough to cue them to her suppressed desires. Each time she passed on something seeking a lower price tag Silas's frown deepened.

He wanted her to be extravagant and demand more of him. For ten years she fended for herself, taking care of the kids. She sacrificed her own needs for theirs surely she needed more than what she settled for. Frugal was one thing but Silas sensed something deeper in her reluctance...as if she had never been given much to begin with but how was that possible?

Carlisle Enterprises was hugely successful and Emerson was known to dote on his daughter. Marilynn had expensive and extravagant tastes that were known throughout the city. Yet Ava was so much quieter and demure...could it be she had never been allowed the same opportunities? He would have to make it clear to her she didn't have to act like that anymore but he had to do it carefully so as not to overwhelm her.

Eventually they returned to the checkout where a cashier had been set aside to dutifully ring in their purchases. Ava stared in disbelief at the mounds of clothes being folded and bagged. There was a mini mountain of shoes and boots in boxes as well as basketballs, sleds, video games and platforms, stacks of Lego Technic™ sets, laptops, books and board games enough to fill a hundred Christmas wishes.

"Kids!" Ava turned on the trio, "what is all of this?"

"He said to choose anything we wanted," Theo shrugged twirling the basketball in his hand.

"This is too much," Ava shook her head. "Now I want you to put some of it back."

"How much of it?" Sean asked. "I mean the guards already took like half of it to the car so..."

"What!" Ava gasped shaking her head. What was she going to do now? Surely Silas would be annoyed by the immense cost.

"There you are Mister Prescott. Have a good day," the cashier said with a smile handing him his card.

"Thank you."

"Silas?" Ava stared in disbelief. Did he really pay for it all without protest?

"Ava?" he stepped up to her gently taking off her coat.

"Silas you didn't need to pay for all of that. The kids just got over excited. They can put some back."

"I don't mind. I told them to pick anything they wanted," he answered helping her into a new coat as Thomas tossed the old one in the garbage.

"But...it isn't necessary," Ava protested suddenly realizing the jacket she wore was the red one she rejected earlier. "Silas this isn't the coat I picked."

"But it is the one you wanted."

"Y-yes but...I mean no...I..."

"Ava," Silas gently cradled her face in his hands, "let me take care of you please. It's okay to be a little selfish."

Ava trembled. How she wanted him to but she couldn't risk irritating him. Surely he wouldn't have patience for the kids' antics forever. He was the city's most eligible bachelor. Kids would only get in the way of his lifestyle.

"Boys, doesn't your mother look good in red?" Silas turned to Sean and Theo.

"Yeah mom! You look hot!" Theo said.

"You look really pretty mom," Sean seconded.

"Looks like you're outvoted," Silas chuckled tucking the coat around her following it up with a soft, woven scarf. "Please accept it."

Ava was at a loss for words and could only nod. Silas's arm circled around her drawing her close as he kissed her temple. He slowly released her not wanting to push her too much. It was becoming clear it was a long road ahead to proving how serious he was and how deeply he was devoted to her. She would see it in time. He wasn't going to lose her a second time.

"Now, shall we eat?" Silas asked.

"Yeah! I'm starved!" Theo loudly declared as he and Sean fell in place to guide their sister between them while the security guards finished hauling their purchases.

"And then after that we'll head to the hospital."

"Hospital?" Ava repeated. "Why there?"

"For the paternity tests."

"What?" she came to a sudden halt not sure if she heard correctly.

Silas halted with her as he explained, "Once I declare Lexi and the boys my heirs the shareholders are going to want proof. As much as I'd like to tell them to shove off it's easier to appease them."

"Declare them your heirs?"

"Of course. I'm their father and as my children they are entitled to everything I have and as their mother so are you."

"We don't...I don't..."

"Ava," Silas pulled her close stopping her protests, "for ten years my life has been incomplete because you weren't in it. I want you and the kids in my life, Ava. I won't let anything come between us or keep us apart...especially your father."

"My...father..."

"If I know anything about Emerson he isn't going to quit after one loss."

Ava shivered.

"Don't worry. I'll protect you. I won't let him hurt you again."

As much as she wanted to believe him she couldn't. Why would he risk his whole reputation for them? For her?