

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



"Good afternoon, ma'am," the butler nodded as Ava entered the kitchen. "May I get you anything?"

"N-no. Sorry." Ava backed a step. "I didn't know I wasn't allowed to come here."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am?" Duncan approached. "I can assure you there is no place here you are not allowed to go."

"...I..."

"If you are hungry please allow me to prepare anything you wish."

"N-no. That's all right," Ava shook her head. She and the kids had already enjoyed an extravagant lunch so she certainly wasn't hungry. "I was just going to get a glass of water."

"Of course, allow me." With a nod Duncan took out a glass, placed it under the ice maker and poured Perrier before giving it to her with a gentle smile.

Ava hesitantly accepted. She wasn't used to being waited on. Normally she was the one serving. It felt nice to be treated with consideration but also made her self-conscience. This was Silas's home and she was only a guest yet the staff was treating her like the mistress of the house.

To an outsider it might look like they were merely being considerate but to someone who had grown up with servants Ava recognized the subtle nuances, little gestures that separated how staff treated family from guests. But why would they give her that courtesy? The children she understood since Silas was their father but that had nothing to do with her.

"Ma'am? Is there anything else I can give you?"

"...No. You don't have to do any of this," Ava quietly said still holding the glass. Tap water would have been just fine.

"I'm afraid you are mistaken, ma'am. We are merely giving you the courtesy you deserve."

"...But why?"

"It is not my place to say. If you wish to know the answer to that you'll have to ask Master Silas."

Ava flinched at the thought. How could she? How could she face him after what she had done? Wasn't he disgusted with her? Would he take the kids away from her and leave her out in the cold like her father intended to do? Her greatest fear was being left alone...was that her destiny? To be forgotten?

"Ma'am? Are you all right?"

Ava blinked back tears and looked to see the butler looking at her with concern. Ava stepped back retreating from the kitchen clutching the glass as she went. Her thoughts were swirling. What did the butler mean by this was no less than she deserved? She wasn't the Lady of the House. She had no status even as the mother of the triplets so it did not benefit the staff to even notice her.

Lost in thought her wandering eventually brought her to the study. The walls were lined with oak bookshelves laden with hardbound novels to suit just about any preference. There were also paintings Ava was certain were originals and not cheap copies. At one end was a large table perfectly serviceable for someone wanting to work. On the other end was a seating area with comfortable, richly upholstered furniture all situated in front of a tall picture window that let in plenty of natural light. But what caught her attention was the piano.

A baby grand piano sat near the seating area. It gleamed in the sunlight streaming through the window. Silently she crept up to it hesitantly sitting on the bench. Setting the glass aside she lifted the lid covering the ivory keys. Ava let her fingers slide over the flawlessly smooth surface. How long had it been since she played?

She couldn't remember, probably not since teaching Alexis. Ava wondered if Alexis still played. It had been awhile since either dragged out the keyboard hidden away in a closet. Ava missed those days watching Alexis learn Twinkle Twinkle and eventually Für Elise. Sometimes they played side by side having fun with a Chopsticks duet as well as Heart and Soul. But any piece could be made into a duet if the ones playing had the skill and talent to work together. If they did the piece would become a living thing adapting and changing according to their moods and whims.

Alexis had skill and talent. She would certainly blow minds away on stage but she would never get the chance. Even with the right connections it was hard to enter the music world and Alexis had none. Was there a point to dreaming something impossible? Ten years ago Ava learned the answer was no. With a sigh she closed the lid and stood. Dreams like that belonged in the closet: out of the way and forgotten.

"Ava, why don't you play?"

She froze at the deep, gentle voice. Spinning she found Silas watching her from the doorway. There was a look of concern on his face, almost pained. Ava bit her lip. She had been avoiding him ever since their shopping excursion. All the clothes he bought her hung neatly in her closet but she hadn't worn any of them besides the coat. She couldn't afford to annoy him or take advantage of his generosity. As long as the clothes stayed pristine they could be returned.

"And why don't you wear the clothes I gave you?" Silas slowly approached as she struggled to hold her ground.

Ava hugged herself. The sweater she wore had seen better days but despite its faded color and frayed edges it was good enough for her. It had always been good enough but standing in front of him she felt shabby and inadequate, ashamed she couldn't afford better.

"Ava."

She flinched realizing how close he suddenly was. When had he approached? What should she say? What did he want from her?

His expression was soft nothing like the stern one he always used for pictures and certainly nothing like the enraged voice from ten years ago. Gently he raised his hand brushing her hair from her face before stroking her cheek. Ava blinked not certain how she should take his kind gestures or the smoldering desire in his gaze.

"You are so beautiful," Silas softly said.

Ava's brow furrowed. Did she hear him right?

"Why don't you accept the things I can give you, the things I want to give you?"

Ava opened her mouth to reply then snapped it shut. How could she explain to him? Could he ever understand?

"Ava?"

Frustrated tears blurred her vision and she couldn't keep her voice from trembling, "It's all...so easy for you. You don't know what it's like to walk down the grocery store aisle debating over a carton of milk or orange juice...or putting back a pack of chicken for \$6.47 because you found one for \$5.97...or having to listen to your children beg for Nikes™ knowing they would have to settle for some cheap athletics brand. You'll never know what it's like to try so hard knowing you'll always be inadequate...that someone else could do a better job..."

"Ava stop!" Silas suddenly pulled her into his embrace. "Just...stop. Is that what you think? You think buying the kids some clothes and games makes me a parent? Do you think anything I could buy them would be close to the love and care you've given them?"

Ava shuddered.

"You are their mother, Ava. They love you more than anything in the world. Do you think one shopping trip is enough for me to earn that kind of loyalty? You are a good mother, Ava. I could not ask my children to have a better one. And I'm in awe of you."

Silas fell silent as she shook with sobs. She tried to keep them in but her entire body trembled. His embrace tightened. He ran his fingers through her hair as his heart pounded in his ears. She was hurting with a deep seeded pain and he was to blame. He didn't have the knowledge to heal her. All he could do was hold her and comfort her.

"I'm here Ava. I'm here. You'll never be alone again. I swear it."

It was a long time before her sobs quieted and she leaned against him completely exhausted. He scooped her up cradling her bridal style as he carried her out of the study. Silas headed up the stairs toward the bedrooms.

Theo and Sean stumbled down the hallway laughing as Alexis followed a step behind shaking her head. They came to a halt as their gaze fell on Silas carrying their exhausted mother in his arms. Her eyes were red from crying and she seemed to have cried herself to sleep.

"What happened?" Theo demanded.

"She just released some much needed tears," Silas said kissing her forehead. "She needs to rest now."

"Here," Alexis said opening the door to their mother's room.

Silas carried Ava inside. Sean hurried to pull back the covers allowing Silas to lay her down and tuck her in. Ava stirred as he kissed her forehead again wishing her sweet dreams. Her brow furrowed and she reached out for his sleeve as he tried to pull away.

"...Please...don't go..." she whispered barely loud enough to hear. "...I'm afraid...to be alone."

"Shh," Silas hesitated only a moment before lying beside her. Pulling her into his arms he held her as he ran his fingers through her hair. "You'll never be alone again, Ava. I'll always be here."

She shivered but snuggled into his embrace whimpering quietly. Without a word Alexis climbed into bed alongside her mother and snuggled close to her patting her shoulder.

"We're all here mom," she said.

The boys followed their sister's example until all were crowded around their mother offering her support. Their loyalty and care brought a smile to Silas's face but it was overshadowed by his own concern. Just what had her family done to her to make her so self-deprecating? How many years had she suffered in that hellhole?

His embrace tightened. He would never forgive them. One way or another they would pay. Silas held Ava close as her breathing slowed and she fell into proper sleep. Right now her wellbeing was more important.

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Ava stirred. The room was dark. How long did she sleep? Surely she hadn't slept the whole night. Her memory was hazy but she recalled the piano and Silas finding her...

Oh god! Did she actually yell at him? What would he do now? She tried to live quietly and avoid his attention but now he would certainly have something to say. Ava had to do something before then. Maybe she could still escape his wrath.

"Shh...sleep," a husky voice said and she felt a warm embrace tighten around her.

Ava realized she was snuggled against a warm chest. Startled she looked up to see Silas's face close to hers. Lazily he opened his eyes to meet her gaze. He raised a hand and gently stroked her hair with a small smile softening his expression.

"Sleep Ava."

"...Silas."

"Shh." He pulled her close and kissed her forehead. "We'll talk later. Sleep."

Perhaps it was wrong but she succumbed to his suggestion. It felt good to be held. For once she was not alone. This was what her heart longed for.