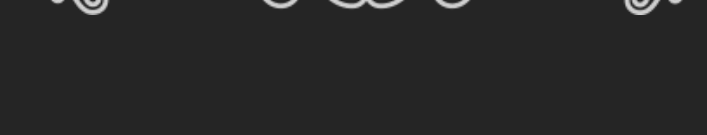


The Billionaire's Twins Play Matchmaker Book Two: Chapter Twenty-One



A bright-eyed woman took her seat after being sworn in. She was dressed professionally in a simple suit and skirt. Her auburn hair was pulled back in a neat bun and she studied the courtroom through rimless glasses.

"Doctor could you state your profession please?" Tracy asked.

"I'm a forensic technician. I am currently employed with the Metropolitan Forensics Lab."

"And what do you do there?"

"Mostly DNA testing concerning missing persons but we also process evidence gathered at crime scenes."

"Does this include drug testing?"

"Some but that's usually done at a different lab."

"Is it safe to say you deal mostly with evidence directly tied to people then?"

"Yeah that sounds right."

"Have you ever processed drug tests?"

"Yes of course. That is quite common."

"What would you say is the biggest downfall of such tests?"

"Well timing mostly. All drugs are processed differently by the body so they all exit the body differently. Marijuana is known to stay in the body for a long time but Ecstasy only a very short time before it becomes untraceable."

"Any other difficulties?"

"Drug tests are also indiscriminant. Certain substances can cause a person to fail a test even if they've never taken a drug in their life such as poppy seeds. A drug test will read positive for Opioids if a person had eaten anything containing poppy seeds such as a muffin or bread sometimes up to two or three days later."

"Objection, is this questioning going anywhere?" Emerson's lawyer stood.

"Merely establishing Doctor Schrodin's expertise."

"Overruled. Continue Counselor but get to the point."

"Given the deficiencies of standard drug tests are there better ones?"

"Yes actually. An analysis of the hair is best."

"Hair? Really?"

"It sounds strange but it's true. We spend so much time and money coloring it, cutting it and styling it but in actuality it is a complete record of everything we've ingested, smoked or imbibed. And the longer the hair is the further back we can look sometimes months."

"Is it really that accurate?"

"A few years ago we solved a kidnapping case using hair. The kidnapper sent some of the victim's hair as proof of life and we were able to determine where she was being held using the chemical additives present in the water she drank. So yes, it is very accurate."

"Your honor, I'd like to submit this to the court," Tracy pulled a paper from her briefcase. "This is an analysis of hair samples provided by my client, the kids and myself as a control. Doctor Schrodin, you are familiar with this test, yes?"

"Of course. I collected the samples and performed the tests myself. My colleague was also given samples to act as a double blind control. Our results were the same."

"And what are the results?"

"There is absolutely no sign of drug use in any of the samples."

"Objection. Is this the witness's opinion or fact?"

"It is fact," the Doctor answered easily. "We didn't even find any traces of ibuprofen or acetaminophen."

"Thank you, Doctor," Tracy smiled. "Your honor I'd like to submit this to the court as well. It is a copy of a police report. People living across from my client's apartment called 911 to report a break-in. According to the witness statement two men in hoods climbed the fire escape and pried open her window to enter her apartment. Police responded but at the time of their arrival the perpetrators had already fled. The responding officers knocked on her door and when no one answered they left. Given the timing of this break-in and the supposed anonymous tip I would be inclined to argue it is highly likely the perpetrators broke in to leave something."

"Y-you have no proof!" Emerson suddenly stood.

"Neither do you, Mister Carlisle," Tracy said with a smile. "And I don't need proof, only reasonable doubt."

Emerson fell silent.

"The knowledge I lack for custody hearings I more than make up for in experience with criminal cases."

"H-how..."

"Order! Order!" Judge Matthews rapped his gavel. "Mister Carlisle I suggest you sit down and let your Counsel do their job."

"Well he's doing it poorly! This break-in proves the area isn't safe for the children!"

"Mister Carlisle, sit down or I will find you in contempt of court. Miss Carlisle, or Carter...which do you prefer?"

"Carter," Ava answered after a moment of hesitation but she managed to say it without stuttering.

"Very well. Miss Carter do you have another place to stay?"

"Yes. We've actually been staying somewhere else the past several weeks."

"You have? And where have you been staying?"

"Well..." Ava hesitated but Alexis leaned close whispering, it's okay mom. "...We've been staying with the kids' biological father."

"What!" Emerson leapt to his feet again.

"Order! Order! Mister Carlisle, sit down."

"Your honor," Emerson's lawyer stood. "According to the children's birth certificate their father is unknown. Now if Miss Carlisle-Carter lied when filling it out that is a problem."

"I never actually said he was unknown," Ava quietly said. "When I got to the hospital the nurses asked about the father but I just shook my head because he wasn't coming. They assumed the rest. I just didn't correct them."

"And why didn't you?" the judge gently asked.

"He and I...weren't together at the time and I...didn't think he wanted to be so...I left it."

"And where is the father now?"

"Here," Silas stood leaving the seat he had taken in the back of the courtroom. He and Thomas had entered shortly before the commotion over the raid began. Everyone was so focused on the events at the bench they didn't mark his appearance so all were suitably surprised save for Alexis who had caught the scent of his cologne.

"And you are?"

"Silas Prescott," he approached ignoring Emerson completely and gazed at Ava with concern.

It had taken everything in him not to interfere when the accusations of drug use was tossed about. How dare they accuse her of something like that? His Ava!

"Prescott," Judge Matthews took a deep breath recognizing the name immediately.

"This has nothing to do with you!" Emerson declared.

"As these are my children, I think it does."

"Miss Carter," the judge rapped the gavel for order, "is Mister Prescott the father?"

Not trusting her voice she nodded, "Y-yes."

"Your honor I already filed paternity tests with the records office to update their birth certificates," Silas added. "And I'm hoping to change their names soon as well."

"I take it then you intend to stay in the children's lives."

"Absolutely. Their mother's too...if she'll have me." Silas turned approaching Ava before dropping to one knee and taking out a ring.

Ava stared wide-eyed at the gold band lined with diamond chips. For a ring it was understated but she wasn't one for impressive displays of wealth. She looked up from the ring staring at him wondering what he was thinking.

"Say yes, mom," Alexis whispered. "I think he means it."

"Ava, will you marry me?" Silas asked watching her with a gentle gaze.

She hesitated receiving a nudge from Tracy when she remained silent. Ava hesitantly answered, "...Y-yes."

Smiling Silas slid the ring on her finger before standing and pulling her to her feet. He held her close waiting for her to stop trembling. The kids cheered swarming around them. Though they were still unsure about their father they wanted to put on a good display for the court.

"Objection!"

"Your honor!"

"Order! Order!" the judge demanded. "Considering the evidence presented...I hereby dismiss this case."

"Your honor!"

"Mister Carlisle before you even think about appealing these results I suggest you should wait for the results of Social Service's investigation and think long and hard about how you want to approach your daughter and grandkids in the future. Mister Prescott congratulations."

Silas gave the judge a nod but his focus was on the woman in his arms. She had said yes but he knew she was still uncertain. One way or another he would erase all her doubts.

"Excuse me Miss Lamont, can I see that police report?" Officer Tyson asked quietly approaching.

"Help yourself," Tracy said. "I have as many copies as you need. Thanks again, Emily."

"No problem. This was actually kind of fun," the scientist smiled.

"Can I help you?" Tracy asked a woman in a rather plain tweed suit.

"I'm from Human Services."

"You have something to say to my client? Are you here to accuse her of being an addict too?"

"I will leave that to the police to determine but I do have questions concerning fraud."

Ava shuddered. Silas's embrace tightened as he glared at the woman.

"Fraud?" Tracy repeated.

"Well...she's received sizable aid over the years which she was given in part because her regrettable circumstances, circumstances that were created due to her omission of the truth."

"So you jumped to conclusions and expect my client to shoulder the guilt?" Tracy demanded.

"If money is all you are concerned with send me the bill," Silas stared at the woman with a scowl. "Every penny used to feed, clothe and house my children, every hospital and dental bill. I'll pay every cent if that's all it takes to keep you from harassing my fiancée and mother of my children. But that is the last charity you should expect from me. Come after her again...and it will be the last thing you do."

The woman shuffled back from his penetrating glare. Unable to hold his gaze she answered. "I—I'll have to speak to our finance department."

"Fine." Silas dismissed her with a frown. "Let's go home, Ava."

He helped her into her coat and gently escorted her to the door.

"You haven't heard the last of this, Prescott!" Emerson fumed.

"Looking forward to it Carlisle," Silas smirked at him. "Don't even think about contacting Ava or my children again."

Emerson shook with rage. This was not what he planned. He intended to secure custody of his granddaughter. The boys didn't mean anything to him. He would have been happy to toss them back into the slums with their mother.

"You have no right to keep me from my grandchildren."

"As their father I have every right," Silas eyed him coldly.

With a protective arm around Ava he headed for the door. Emerson gritted his teeth ready to demand he turn around when he became aware of the kids. Turning he saw the trio, or at least the boys, eyeing him with the same cold stare of their father and wondered how they had learned it so quickly or perhaps it was hereditary.

"This is your last warning, old man," Alexis said, "don't bother our mother again or you'll be sorry."

"Are you threatening me?"

"It's not a threat. It's a promise."

"How could you side with that person against your own family?"

"You're no family or ours. Our family wouldn't chase our mother out of her own home and abandon her," Alexis said. "I wondered how it was that someone would side with that heartless wench we have to call aunt but now I see you are just like her. Only a monster would send a perfect angel like our mom away and keep that despicable devil by his side."

"You shouldn't talk about your family like that."

"Truth hurts, doesn't it? Well it doesn't matter. Once we're done with you the Carlises will be only a memory because we're going to erase you from history and there isn't anything you can do about it."

"Lexi, boys," Silas paused at the door.

"See ya, old man."

"Later gramps."

"And stop looking at our sister you perv!"

The kids called out their farewells as they took their usual positions with Alexis in the middle escorting her to where their parents waited.

"Is everything all right?" Ava asked as they reached them.

"Of course!" Alexis disengaged from her brothers and wrapped her arms around their mother.

Ava hugged her back holding her close. Tears blurred her vision. She almost lost them today. Never once did she imagine her father would be so ruthless that he would stoop to slandering her and even frame her. Did she really mean so little to him?

"Ava," Silas's arm circled around her as he kissed her temple. "Let's go home."

Home. Ava nodded leaving into him. Home sounded good.