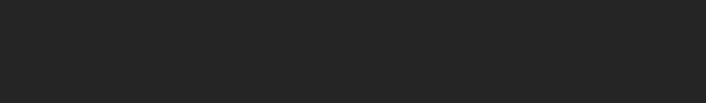


## The Billionaire's Twins Play Matchmaker Book Two: Chapter Twenty-Three



Ava stirred. Her body was warm and relaxed. In fact she felt rather heavy and moving took effort. She blinked awake taking in the room. Something felt off. Had the position of the windows changed? It was difficult to tell with the long, heavy curtains.

But the bedspread was also different from what she remembered. She was positive her sheets were maroon but the ones she laid on now were black and gray. When did...wait...Her mind went blank before recent memories filled it like a tidal wave. Did they really?

She stiffened jerking fully awake. An arm around her waist tightened pulling her close against a firm chest. With a groan Silas stirred, "Sleep Ava. There's no need to be awake now."

"Silas?"

"Mhmm." His breath warmed her ear as he kissed her and held her close. Her heart hammered in her head at his close proximity. Ava tried to ease away but he held her tight refusing to let any space between them.

"Silas, you don't have to..."

"I've waited ten years Ava I'm not letting you go now."

"You really did look for me?"

"Ever since I returned from college and I heard what happened, how your parents..." Silas couldn't find the words to describe the rage that threatened to boil over then and now. "If only I'd recognized you then...I'm so sorry Ava."

"...It's fine."

"No it's not," Silas propped himself onto his elbow and gently rolling her on her back so they could speak face to face. "Ava you have a very bad habit of saying everything is fine when it's not. Bad enough my so called friends played their joke on me but then they dragged you into it."

"Oh...it's all..."

"Ava, no. It's not." He stroked her cheek. "I'll never forgive them for what they did to you. I'll hunt each and every one of them down...them and your sister. I should have maintained control of the situation."

"Silas, you didn't know what they were planning to do. You couldn't have done anything to change what happened."

"Ava you shouldn't forgive me so easily," Silas shook his head. "I should have handled the next morning differently. I should have been taking care of you from the beginning: you and the kids. It's my fault you struggled so much."

Ava opened her mouth to protest but remained silent. It was clear Silas harbored a lot of guilt for what happened ten years ago and for how she and the kids fared afterward. She had been terrified of him since the hotel incident but seeing him now he looked vulnerable and pained. Though she didn't remember their first night together, last night he had been tender and gentle with her, practically worshipping her body. Reaching up she gently caressed his cheek.

His blue eyes flickered with passion as he leaned into her touch. Catching her hand he kissed her palm then leaned over her to kiss her long and slow. His hand caressed her hip pulling her close until she felt his stiff member press against her.

"S-Silas..." she moaned as he kissed down her neck savoring the feel of her soft skin.

He nibbled at her ear stopping only when her stomach growled. Pulling away he looked at her grinning mischievously, "We missed dinner. Are you hungry?"

"...Well I...yes."

"I can't have you missing a meal," he sighed pulling away and reaching for the phone beside the bed.

Selecting the line for the kitchen he waited for an answer before ordering dinner to be brought up to the room. Sighing he turned back to her and held her close. As much as he wanted to continue what they started he would have to wait until after their meal. Soon enough there was a knock on the door.

"Come in," Silas called without leaving the bed. He didn't move or release her as Duncan entered.

Without looking at them Duncan wheeled in a small trolley laden with platters on warming plates. He set the table arranging cutlery as well as plates and glasses. Once his tasks were complete he left without a word. Silas remained unmoved though Ava huddled against him as if trying to hide. Her modesty after their last activity brought a smile to his face and Silas gladly held her close.

Once they were alone again he was slow to stir not wanting to break their embrace. Then her stomach complained again for the delay. Chuckling he kissed her forehead.

"Let's eat, beautiful. Then we'll get back to where we left off."

Ava blushed as he disengaged and left the bed disappearing into the bathroom. She slowly sat up clutching the comforter to her chest. Unconsciously she shivered. She couldn't help but recall how she had woken up in the hotel room in a similar fashion, minus the headache or queasiness.

"God you are beautiful."

She looked up startled at Silas's sudden return. He was now dressed in a robe and carried another which he presented for her use. Blushing she looked away only for him to catch her chin and turn her face back to his. Kissing her he offered her the robe again.

Ava quickly wrapped herself in it before accepting his hand and standing. Her body protested the movement and she leaned against him. His arms wrapped around her tenderly.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes. Just a little sore."

"I'm sorry. I was a little overeager," Silas kissed the top of her head. "Are you going to need help?"

"No. I think I can make it to the shower on my own."

"All right...though if you want company I am here."

"Somehow I don't think we'd do much washing if we were both in there."

Silas chuckled his embrace tightened, "You're not wrong. In the interest of feeding you as soon as possible it is probably better if I stay out of it...this time. I'll be waiting for you."

"Okay."

He reluctantly let her go and watched her retreat into the bathroom. Closing the door she leaned against it trying to calm her racing heart. What was she thinking? What if this was a trick? What if he got tired of her? What if...

She looked at her hand and the sparkling engagement ring. It was small but elegant and the diamond chips glittered even in dim light. It was not the statement piece that a lot of people preferred but clearly it had been chosen with care and consideration. What was more if it fit her hand perfectly. There was no need to resize it. How did he know her ring size? Was it wrong to keep it?

She blushed remembering his touch, how he caressed her, kissed her. When he looked at her she felt wanted and when he told her she was beautiful it felt good. Was it wrong to want more?

Ava moved to the mirror to stare at her reflection. The dark circles under eyes were lighter. Despite their recent activity she felt rested. She was a little sore but the usual muscle pain she endured was gone. In fact...

She rolled her shoulder and turned her head. Her neck popped and cracked releasing tension it lived with for years. Ava sighed as her body relaxed. What she craved was a massage to be rid of the lingering aches but that was probably impossible. Still a spa day sounded like heaven. Maybe Silas would be fine with it if she asked.

Remembering he was waiting for her Ava retreated to the shower. The control panel made her pause. It was far more complicated than the one in her room but she recalled the system her parents had in their home. There were music as well as water settings. She selected the default option not wanting to mess too much with the panel before stepping in.

The water was hotter than she expected but it felt good. For years she lived with a permanent chill but now it seemed to be melting. She sighed, stretched and welcomed the small pops as her aches dissipated. Even the stubborn tightness in her shoulders eased. It was a pain that had lingered since she started working at the diner.

Oh...she suddenly recalled the diner and Gretchen. With everything that had been going on she hadn't spared a thought to her job or the woman who had been so kind to her. A wave of guilt assailed her. She would have to apologize. Hopefully Gretchen would be forgiving. She couldn't afford to lose her job.

He kept promising to take care of her but after ten years it felt strange not to be working. She suddenly had no schedule. She could sleep as late as she wanted, read, bathe, eat...she could do as much or as little as she wanted. As far as she could tell the staff had been told to see to her and the children's needs and not bother her so she could rest and relax. It was sort of like being in a hotel as Theo originally proclaimed.

But this couldn't go on forever.

Her mind unsettled she stepped out of the shower. As she dried she couldn't help but marvel at how soft her skin felt. Normally it felt dried out after a shower but now it definitely felt smoother. It was probably the products. Everything here was luxury goods. Shrugging back into her robe she quietly padded to the mirror to brush through her hair helping it dry faster. Not for the first time she thought about cutting it. It would make care easier.

Sighing and not wanting to make Silas impatient she exited the bathroom. She found Silas preparing their meal, pouring each a glass of wine. He had changed into a pair of sweatpants leaving his toned torso bare. He looked up at her return and his gaze immediately softened.

Without a word he closed the distance between them and embraced her. She leaned into him loving the way he made her feel loved. Kissing her temple he gently led her to the table and helped her sit. Once she was comfortable he offered her one of the platters revealing beef stroganoff and gratin potatoes.

"I hope you don't mind. I told Duncan to make something hardy and filling," Silas explained. Though she had gained some weight since arriving at the brownstone he still worried about her. After making love to her he was keenly aware of how much she still needed to gain.

"Hearty and filling?"

Silas leaned over kissing her hand, "You need to gain more weight, love. You've sacrificed everything including your health to raise our kids but not anymore. I won't allow it."

"About that...um...I should probably go back to work."

"You're not going back to the diner."

"But..." Ava fell silent at his stern expression.

"If you want to work I won't stop you but not there, not that kind of work," Silas said. "Did you really like it that much?"

"Well, it was nice in its way. Feeding people and watching them enjoy what you cooked for them. Gretchen said I should take over for her one day since she didn't have anyone else to leave the diner to."

"Then do that," Silas said. "Start your own restaurant. French, Italian, comfort food. It can be anything you want. You can choose the décor, the wait-staff, the chefs."

"Me? My own restaurant?"

"Absolutely."

"You think I could?"

"I don't know who Gretchen is but she thought you would be good at it...so is it really so hard to believe it yourself?"

"It's just..." Ava hesitated. "I don't know anything about business."

"That's what classes are for," Silas shrugged. "I didn't come out of the womb ready to run a multi-billion dollar company."

Ava snickered trying to contain a laugh. Her face flushed with embarrassment but Silas reached for her hand and kissed it. He wouldn't have been able to wipe the smile from his face if he tried. Not only had she genuinely smiled and even laughed she did so in response to one of his lame attempts at a joke.

"You are so beautiful when you laugh."

Ava cautiously looked up to see him smiling warmly. She never imagined he could have such a gentle expression. Ever since his men helped her escape her father he had been nothing except kind, tender and considerate.

Growing up her father had been king of his castle. The only time he came close to smiling was when she played. That momentary joy never translated to compliments. Instead he would reiterate the rules she was supposed to follow. She was a woman therefore she should always defer to a man and obey without question. Her father sheltered her, fed her and would choose the husband she would spend the rest of her days with. After her husband was chosen she would be expected to be subservient to him.

But Silas said nothing of the sort. He constantly called her beautiful and asked about what she wanted to do and encouraged her. He said she was strong and smart, treating her like she was something precious. His embrace was protective and gentle.

"Ava?"

"You make me feel special."

She looked up to see his expression was soft while his eyes almost seemed to burn with passion. It was too intense for her to hold for long and she looked away only to have him lean forward and gently turn her face back to him.

"I love you Ava. You are the most special person to me, always."

She opened her mouth to speak but he gently silenced her with a caressing finger.

"You don't have to say it back...not until you are sure." He smiled his expression taking on a hint of sadness. "Let's eat before it gets cold."

Mutely she nodded.