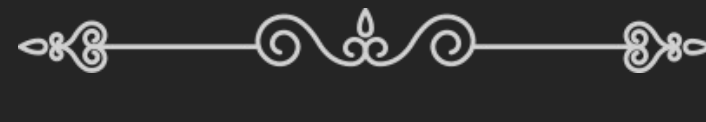


The Billionaire's Twins Play Matchmaker Book One: Chapter 16



Julius pulled into the parking lot barely containing his excitement. He was really going to spend the entire day with his family. March had been just as excited when Julius explained everything the previous night and was all too happy to take his brother's workload for the day.

Between the excitement of the previous night and anticipation for the day he hardly slept but he wasn't tired. Julius stepped out of his vehicle straightening his maroon, leather jacket. He dressed casually: black jeans and polo. Not wanting a repeat of the previous night he stopped at a shopping mall for proper car seats and promptly had to ask a random lady in the parking lot how to install them into his car. Wounded pride aside, at least, he felt prepared for the day to come. Julius leaned against his car trying to keep himself calm when he heard excited shouts.

"Mister Jules!" Aria called waving from the backseat of a Mercedes SUV.

A smile immediately lit up his face and he walked toward them as Macey parked. There was no doubt in his mind his father was behind her transportation just as he was behind the villa. Part of him was irritated as those were things he should be providing them but decided not to worry about it for now. Julius would settle with his father eventually. Today was about his family.

Julius stepped up to the passenger side opening Aria's door and helping her down. Caden released his own belt and scooted across the backseat to exit out the same door. Both Caden and Aria had a difficult time controlling their excitement when their mother said they would spend the day with him. Phase Four was going very well. Julius smiled as the pair danced around him eager for their outing.

Though he often saw twins dressed identically he noticed Macey never succumbed to the temptation. Today Caden wore khaki cargo pants and a blue sweater. Aria wore a denim jacket and jeans with a colorful shirt displaying the Eiffel Tower. Her hair was tamed with sparkly barrettes. Both looked ready for a full day of adventure.

"Are you two excited?" Julius chuckled.

"Yes!" Aria bounced up and down making her ponytail sway. "Mommy said you're taking us to the zoo!"

"That's right. We'll go wherever you two want."

Circling to the back of the SUV they found the hatch open and Macey fiddling with her camera equipment. Watching her Julius recalled how she was always snapping photos even as a little girl. Most of the pictures of their vacations were actually taken by her.

"So...what kind of appointment do you have?" Julius asked.

He knew she had gone back to school for her degree. Though his father undoubtedly provided her many amenities he also knew her pride. Macey could never let herself be idle. She wanted to work, liked to work and needed to provide for her children herself. It was the same mentality and work ethic her father instilled in her, the same ethic his father instilled in him.

"...I'm a photographer. I'm here to take pictures," Macey answered hesitating and refusing to meet his gaze.

Julius studied her wondering why she always seemed shy in his presence. Where was the confidence she exuded when she slapped Katherine to defend her children? Or the feistiness when she threatened to knee her solicitor in the balls? Why did she seem insecure only in his presence?

Even her attire at the moment was of a woman who knew herself and didn't need to put on airs. She wore mid-rise, denim jeans, long-sleeved shirt and denim vest. A silver hair clip tamed her hair and kept it out of her way. She was absolutely gorgeous, especially with the subtle blush on her cheeks.

"I remember," Julius nodded causing her to look up. "Every family function, vacation, gathering, birthday and anniversary...You were always taking pictures. So you turned your passion into a living. Have I told you how amazing you are?"

Macey's blush deepened and she looked away. She had been complimented before but hearing it from Julius was somehow different. Was it because he had been so dismissive of her in the past? Or was it because he was the one person she always hoped to impress? She wasn't sure, but it felt good to hear nonetheless.

Aria and Caden gazed at their mother with adoration. They had always known their mother was amazing and it warmed their hearts to hear their father admitted it too. Whatever circumstances tore their parents apart at least they were assured their father recognized how impressive their mother truly was. Unable to hold himself back Julius stepped closer pulling Macey into his embrace and kissing her temple.

"I should have told you sooner. I should have told you every day we were together." Julius whispered before slowly releasing her and stepped back before he overwhelmed her.

She sent him a look of gratitude. He saw a glint of her confidence return to her warm gaze. Julius smiled happy to see her reaction. He liked to see her self-assured and strong. She should always feel that way especially around him.

"Are we going to the zoo now?" Aria asked after giving their parents ample time to stare into each other's eyes.

For Phase Four it was important to encourage their parents' interaction but knowing their mother had never been actively pursued romantically they didn't want her overwhelmed. Luckily their father seemed to understand and was being very gentle. There was no doubting the passion in his gaze. Aria wanted to clap and dance for joy but refrained. She and Caden had to keep cool heads if their plan was to work.

Julius cleared his throat remembering their audience and said, "Yeah...let's go to the zoo so your mother work can in peace."

"You two be good," Macey knelt giving each a hug and a kiss.

"Mommy, we're always good," Aria said.

She chuckled giving her daughter a tickle, "I'm serious now. I better not hear you've been up to your usual tricks."

"Okay mommy. We promise," the pair said in unison.

Satisfied Macey stood grabbing her camera bag and closed the hatch. Her gaze met Julius's and she again felt shy. She wanted to encourage him to know their children and she wanted them to know him. If she were being completely honest with herself, she wanted him to be a part of all of their lives again.

"We'll be fine," Julius promised. "We're meeting back up for dinner, right?"

"Right," Macey nodded hesitating. "Oh wait, here. These are the keys to the villa in case the kids need something."

It never ceased to amaze her how easily kids could get dirty. Thankfully Caden and Aria seemed better than most in that regard, especially Caden who hated messes, but it was best to be prepared and in her rush out the door she hadn't packed them a bag as she usually did. Julius took the keys with a nod and a confident smile she hoped he wouldn't regret before she turned and left them with a wave.

Finally alone with the kids Julius turned serious, "So what do you two want to do first? Do you want to see the gardens? Do you want to eat? Or...should we hit the zoo?"

"Zoo!"

He chuckled taking each by the hand saying, "The Zoo it is."

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It was only a five minute drive to the zoo entrance and the kids were practically bouncing in their seats the entire time. It had been years since Julius went to the zoo, not since Jude was a kid. He forgot how crowded it could be and how lively. The twins seemed to be perfectly at home among the roaming crowds. They showed no fear and stayed close not letting go of his hands as the trio wandered the grounds.

He took them to the sea lions first as their pen was something of a central location and an easy checkpoint. Lifting up the twins he held them so they could see the sea lions lounging on their rocks and playing in the water. Aria giggled at their antics while Caden craned his neck to see the ones underwater performing flips and cartwheels.

From there he let the kids choose their destination from the signs posted around the different paths. Not surprisingly they were eager to see the tigers. Following the paths they reached Tiger Mountain in time to witness a training session with the keepers and one of the large male cats. They followed the paths toward Jungle World where the fruit bats proved a surprising hit. Caden eagerly soaked in the information from the keepers about how bats used echolocation to navigate their environments. This was followed by a ride on the Wild Asian Monorail which gave them a bird's eye view of the larger animals freely roaming large areas.

Eventually hunger won out and they took a break for hotdogs and Ices which fascinated the twins. The trio sat on a bench enjoying the slushy drinks that quickly dyed their tongues red and blue.

"You've never had Ices before?" Julius asked.

"No. We've had granita, but not this," Caden said.

"Ah..." Julius nodded recalling the twins had grown up in Europe. Ices was definitely an American treat. It made him wonder what their life had been like remembering how Aria spoke German so easily. "So do you both speak German?"

"I know a little," Caden shrugged. "Aria's better at it than me."

"If you talked more you'd know how to speak more," Aria scoffed.

Caden scowled. Julius noticed that about his children. Aria was definitely more vocal and expressive while her brother preferred to quietly observe everything around him. Even his smiles were usually just grins. Though he was reserved Caden's eyes were very expressive. It amazed Julius the twins had such different personalities but he wouldn't change either. They were perfect the way they were.

"I thought you lived in Paris."

"We do," Aria answered. "Mommy travels a lot for work and we go with her. We've been to Barcelona, Milan, Venice, Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Dublin...we've been to a lot of places."

Caden quietly nodded. Their mother's various projects took her many places. When they didn't have school they traveled with her. This earned them many envious stares from their peers most of whom never left Paris let alone the country. Others scorned them because they only had their mother whose work was unorthodox but neither of the twins let that bother them. Their mother was the best person in the world.

"Wow, you have been everywhere, impressive," Julius said. "So does that mean you speak French too?"

"Bien sûr," Aria rolled her eyes.

Julius chuckled. His children were not bilingual, they were trilingual. Or at least Aria was as Caden stressed he didn't know German well. Would they never cease to amaze him? Suddenly his phone vibrated. Taking it out of his pocket he glanced at the text message.

"Who is it?" Aria asked.

"Your uncle."

"Uncle March?" she perked up.

"Hmm. He wants to know how it's going. What should I tell him?"

"How about we take a picture?" Aria suggested. "Mommy says a picture is worth a thousand words."

"Well, your mommy knows best," Julius chuckled pulling Aria into his lap.

Scooting Caden closer he held out his phone snapping a picture of the trio on the bench with their Ices. Once the twins gave thumbs up for the picture he sent it to his brother picturing the smile that was sure to grace March's face when he received it and no doubt pass it on to Rose.

"Well, where shall we go next?"

"Lions!" Aria shouted.

"Giraffes!" Caden said just as loudly.

"Well luckily those are on the same continent," Julius laughed. The zoo organized its animals according to origin so animals that could be found on the same continent were generally located near each other.

They headed to the African Plains Exhibit next as well as the Gorilla Forest before pausing at the Bug Carousel and touring the Butterfly Garden all proved to be big hits with ample photo opportunities. Julius was beginning to wonder if his phone would hold them all but he kept snapping not wanting to miss a moment. He was beginning to understand what motivated Macey while she took pictures during family vacations.

They paused at the zoo shop for souvenirs before making the Children's Zoo their final stop. Both were excited to get close to the farm animals even making friends with a curious alpaca. Julius heard alpacas could be temperamental but this one seemed eager for attention. The twins giggled as it nuzzled them.

Even though the twins were full of energy it was getting late and Julius decided to call it a day. They still had dinner to prepare for after all. The twins expected him to take them to a restaurant but he brought them to a grocery store instead. Grabbing a cart he pushed it down the aisles with a twin on either side as neither wanted to ride in the basket.

"Are you going to cook?" Aria asked.

"You think I can't?" Julius challenged.

Aria gave him a sweet smile and earned a chuckle from him.

"Well, I have to admit I don't know much, but I know a few things. It's late so...how does chicken Alfredo sound?"

"Yeah!" the twins clapped pleased their father knew his way around the kitchen.

Grabbing the supplies he needed as he wasn't certain what was at the villa Julius headed to the checkout. He handed the items to the twins and they placed them on the belt for the cashier. She smiled sweetly at the five year olds.

"Are you shopping with your daddy?" she asked by way of conversation.

"We're making mommy dinner!" they proudly announced before Julius could correct her.

The pride he felt at their endorsement was immeasurable. He hoped he lived up to their expectations. Paying the cashier organized the pans he needed and got to work. Placing the twins on step stools he had them assist where they could. Surprisingly the twins seemed quite adept and he was certain they assisted their mother with similar tasks before.

They had barely gotten started with noodles when Macey sent a text to his phone. Julius smiled at her inquiry of where to meet them. Winking at the kids he replied for her to return to the villa before focusing on the task ahead.