

## The Billionaire's Twins Play Matchmaker Book One: Chapter Forty-Two: Bonus Story Seven



Time Marches On

Paul sighed as he stepped out of the car and adjusted his tie. He was late. The gala was set to begin at five and it was already approaching six. Even so there was still plenty of time left. He breathed on his hand and sniffed before digging out a breath mint. There hadn't been time to brush his teeth and he had a few drinks to steel his nerves. This was not going to be easy.

Since the baby's birth he avoided Macey and the kids feigning work. It wasn't a complete lie. He did actually have a couple installations to complete. In the past he always hurried back to Paris after his work was done. Now he lingered in whatever city or country he found himself in usually in a depressed, occasionally drunken stupor.

If Macey thought his sudden absence strange Victoria was good enough to cover for him. So far it had worked though he missed the kids and Macey. As much as he longed to spend some time with them he knew if he did he would have to see him too.

Julius DaLair. He was practically everything Paul despised about the human race. Julius was born to riches. He had never known a time of hardship and flaunted his wealth with expensive cars and tastes. Women fawned over him and men were jealous of him. Julius DaLair could have anything he wanted whenever he wanted never mind if his actions hurt someone else. Somehow this man captured Macey's heart.

She gave everything to this man without thought to the consequences and she paid the price. Julius betrayed her trust and broke her heart. But she was strong and left him before he could do more damage. Yet despite learning her lesson the hard way she still loved the man who hurt her. He managed to win her back and she remained at his side even now and cementing them together were not one or two but three kids.

He still didn't know why Caden and Aria were so accepting of a father they had never known. Julius had been absent from their lives for five years and yet they welcomed him with open arms. They clung to him and proudly declared him to be their father to anyone who asked.

After their first confrontation Paul had done some research and uncovered Julius's drinking binges and public indiscretions. He waited expecting Julius to reveal his true colors again ready to step in to protect Macey and the kids but remarkably Julius seemed to have much more self control.

Though he was known to be a drinker Paul never saw him have more than one or two glasses of wine and never once did Julius appear out of control. It seemed he was staying on his best behavior in front of the twins. When he first moved to Paris Julius had not been in a hurry to look for work choosing to spend as much time with Macey and the kids as he could to make up for the years they lost. Paul might have called him a freeloader if not for the incredible wealth he possessed. In truth Julius never needed to work so treating his time in Paris as an extended holiday was only natural.

Instead of returning to America Julius remained in Paris ready to start a new branch of his family's company. Paul thought it was a joke and was ready to laugh once Julius's attempt failed as so many others did. Yet he hadn't failed. Incredibly Julius's gamble paid off and his company was rapidly climbing the business hierarchy. It was almost more than Paul could stand but the hardest part to tolerate was Macey's happiness.

It was clear she was overjoyed to have Julius in her life again. When she learned she was pregnant again she was so excited she practically glowed. Knowing the challenges she faced with her first pregnancy Paul expected Julius to fail to support her. After all the man had no experience with a pregnancy or the difficulty it placed on the mother. But once again Julius surprised him. Not only did Julius remain steadfastly by her side he was ready to answer any of her requests.

He took over much of the cooking and cleaning duties so she could relax. When her feet hurt and began to swell he was there to rub them without complaint. If she needed a nap he took the kids out so she could sleep in peace. Though his business was getting busier he made time for her and the kids instituting game and movie nights to ensure they were all together. Even Victoria was impressed at how Julius juggled home and work.

When the baby came Julius continued to prove himself. He not only helped manage the twins which would have certainly been enough, he also helped with the baby. Julius took turns getting up for late night feedings and incredibly even changed diapers. Granted he had to wear a mask but he changed them nonetheless. Just a few weeks ago Macey sent an excited text. Coda said his first word: da-da.

Showing his invitation Paul stepped into the well-lit venue. Macey's latest work hung from the rafters in floating frames rather than on temporary walls. It presented her photography in a more dynamic fashion and kept the space open. Her latest series was entitled Baby Days. Macey was always inspired by real life so it was no surprise to him that the ten photographs centered around the new baby.

Paul quietly wandered the gallery looking at the mostly black and white photographs featuring building blocks, stuffed animals even a mobile all taken from a low angle representing the perspective of the baby. Each photograph had one color that was highlighted out of the otherwise gray tones. He didn't know if it was because the baby was a boy but the color for each photograph was the same: blue. It added a contrast to the gray tones and also softened the images giving them more life than if they had been left purely black and white.

He studied the photos with a smile. Macey had a unique way of making the mundane sacred. It was what made her work so special and why so many people gravitated to her photographs.

"Uncle Paul!" and excited voice greeted.

He turned to see Aria and Caden nearby. Aria was wearing a blue, velvet dress with a white skirt. Her usually unruly hair was tamed in a pair of pigtails with sparkling butterfly barrettes. Beside her Caden, incredibly, was wearing a suit with a small bow tie and boutonniere matching the rich color of his sister's dress. Caden always hated suits and restrictive clothing but now he wore them at every formal function without complaint.

"Hello there wee ones."

"You missed Coda's birthday," Aria's face suddenly scrunched together.

"Awe, yes. I did. I apologize for that," Paul smiled. "I was in the middle of a large project and couldn't leave it."

"Well...okay." Aria sighed. "But don't do that again. Mommy was sad you missed it."

"I'll be sure to remember that." Paul nodded. In truth he deliberately postponed the completion of the installation to ensure he wouldn't be able to attend the birthday. It might have been childish and more than a little cowardly but he just couldn't bring himself to attend knowing he would have to face Julius again.

"Paul, I'm so glad you came."

He looked up to see Macey approach. Without hesitation she gave him a welcoming hug. For a moment he indulged in her embrace. He knew her attention was completely plutonic but he couldn't help wishing there was more between them. Stepping back he admired her dark blue gown. It had a satin finish and hugged her curves. After she had the twins Macey often complained about the effect it had on her body and for a long time afterwards would only wear baggy clothes. But now she had a new confidence in her body even after giving birth to Coda and she had a lot to be confident about.

She looked stunning. Whenever he saw her she took his breath away and this time was no different. Macey was practically glowing her expression was so bright and at ease. Her hair was tamed in a thick French braid and a topaz necklace graced her neck. She had never been one for jewels and he had a sneaky suspicion who purchased such an extravagant ornament.

"I could hardly stay away. Your work is always awe inspiring."

"Well, thank you," Macey lightly blushed at the compliment.

"Daddy, we're over here!" Aria called.

The others turned to greet the newcomer as Paul's expression hardened. He clenched his jaw to brace himself for this confrontation. Mentally prepared he watched his rival approach.

Unsurprising Julius wore a finely tailored suit that matched the one Caden wore. In his arms he carried the one-year-old Coda. The baby wore a white shirt with blue vest and pants that matched the color theme the rest of the family adhered to for the night. Unlike his brother who had always fought against wearing restrictive clothing Coda seemed comfortable in his party clothes.

"How was it?" Macey asked as Julius reached them.

"Just wet this time," Julius said with obvious relief. It was clear he still had a hard time with poopy diapers though he never refused to change them.

"Such a good boy," Macey cooed caressing the baby's pudgy cheeks eliciting giggles.

"Mum," Coda said as he chewed on his binky. Paul wasn't sure if the baby meant to say mom or if it was the consequence of babbling with his plug in his mouth. It was adorably sweet in either case.

Julius chuckled kissing the baby's temple. Despite the baby's shockingly bright, red hair there was no doubting his parentage. In fact he was almost a perfect copy of Caden and was sure to look just like their father as he grew up to say nothing of his clear, gray eyes. Coda clung to the hem of his father's suit with his pudgy fingers as he gazed around the crowded room but remarkably showed no fear.

"Paul," Julius greeted him with a simple acknowledgement.

"Julius," Paul echoed the greeting.

As far as he knew Julius never spoke a word about their first confrontation when they first met in New York. Paul was grateful for his discretion but also irritated by it. Julius's words from that night still rang in his mind.

She has always been mine...and always will be.

That's right. Julius and Macey had known each other since they were children. She developed a crush and fallen in love with him when they were still just kids. They married at the behest of his father but Julius fell in love with her of his own accord. Now that he acknowledged and embraced his feelings Macey was indeed his. Tenderly kissing the infant Macey caressed Julius's cheek and kissed him. It was only a small kiss but the feelings behind it were far more passionate. No matter where they were Macey always had a special smile for Julius that was given to no one else.

Paul swallowed down his jealousy. This was Macey's big night and he wouldn't ruin it. No. This time he would be a good friend even if he wanted more. That was the way it had to be.