The Billionaire's Twins Play Matchmaker Book One: Chapter 36: Bonus Story One

When Victoria Met Macey

“Doctor, how is she?” Augustus demanded as soon as she exited the bedroom.

Signing for quiet the doctor peered into the bedroom at her patient comfortably resting before pulling the door closed. Maia Darman had been practicing for over two decades and had gathered a rather exclusive clientele. Though her hair was slowly fading to gray now, her wits were as sharp as ever.

It was often assumed the rich were entitled and self-absorbed and in some cases that was undoubtedly true. However, there was also reason for their entitlement especially in terms of healthcare. After all ensuring their good health as well as the health of their heirs was doubly important when the rumor of a cold was enough to affect their company’s profits and stocks.

With such stakes it wasn’t a surprise they rarely stepped into a hospital preferring the physician to make a house call. And of course that doctor had to be trustworthy enough not to succumb to idle gossip. Augustus DaLair was no different but he wasn’t impossible with his demands. As such she was able to maintain her own practice aided by his generous donation and endorsement.

“She’s resting comfortably now,” Maia said. “I prescribed her something for the nausea if it gets that bad again but the most important thing for her right now is rest and to reduce her stress levels.”

“Stress?”

“This is her first pregnancy and according to what she told me her cycles have a habit of being irregular,” the doctor explained. “Irregular cycles can be a sign of hormonal imbalances in which case getting pregnant can be more difficult and also more difficult to maintain especially in the first trimester.”

Augustus felt himself go pale. His wife had a hard time conceiving and Rose had as well. Was Macey similarly cursed?

“What about the baby?”

“As far as I can tell it’s fine,” the doctor sighed.

Augustus let out a slow breath.

“She should continue to rest and allow the pregnancy to establish itself. She should take it easy and relax and you should keep as much stress out of her daily life as possible.”

“It shall be done,” Augustus nodded.

“I’ll return in a couple days for a follow-up but call me if anything comes up before then.”

“Of course, thank you doctor.”

A sidelong glance at Stephen was all that was necessary to instruct the younger man to escort the doctor out. When they were both gone Augustus quietly let himself into the bedroom. With a sigh he took a seat beside the bed and stared at the woman comfortably sleeping.

It had been a trying two days since she left Julius. She left everything behind aside from a handful of cash. Even her cell phone had been discarded. If he hadn’t the foresight to send Stephen to shadow her she would have disappeared completely forever out of his sight and protection. Augustus couldn’t let that happen.

He owed his life to her father. Carl Grayson was a simple man or so Augustus thought at their first meeting. They met in basic training when Augustus along the other men of his squad. Their training centered on working together until their deployment. While the other men in the squad soon developed close ties and camaraderie Carl maintained an aloof manner and kept everyone at a distance.

He obeyed orders and carried them out to the letter but seemed to lack imagination. Battle was a fluid thing and sometimes it was necessary to think on one's feet but Carl seemed to lack this ability and it caused strife among the other members. When not actively training he spent an inordinate amount of time checking his gear, sharpening his knife or disassembling and cleaning his weapon rather than hanging out with the squad. Even at meal time he kept himself apart quietly observing them.

Not wanting any disharmony with his men Augustus took Carl aside one day to confront him about these issues. Carl merely nodded quietly and shrugged when he was asked to work on them. Frustrated Augustus demanded, "These men are your comrades. How can you expect them to watch your back if you don't prove yourself to them?"

"I don't expect them too," Carl answered easily.

Augustus was at a loss for worlds. Was this even possible? Was this man serious or just that arrogant?

"I know I'm not making a good impression but I never do," Carl continued when Augustus continued to stare at him. "I'm just not good at relating to people no matter how much I want to. It's like…It's like…music."

"Music?"

"Yes. Everyone here is like rock music while I'm…classical. Have you ever listened to Beethoven?"

"No. I can't say that I have."

"That's a pity. He is considered a genius for a reason. Whenever I play one of his pieces I feel uplifted."

"You play?"

"Yes, my grandmother taught me. I think she did it so I could connect to something since people are hard." Carl frowned momentarily lost in thought. "But in any case…I'm not good with people."

"Because they don't like the same music?"

"Like has nothing to do with it. We just don't connect." Carl sighed frustrated. It was perhaps the only time Augustus ever saw him express an emotion. "When you turn on a radio station it's because you like the music they play, right? Whether its rock, country, classical, whatever. No radio station plays them all, right? I know I'm not explaining it well but…"

"No. It's fine. I think I understand what you are saying," Augustus said after a moment sensing Carl was getting worked up from his own ability to express what he thought. "You have a hard time connecting to others. It's not something you can control or overcome."

"Right."

"But these men are your comrades and you're life will depend on them."

"I will never abandon my comrades," Carl nodded. There was no uncertainty in his statement and Augustus was forced to leave it at that though he was still unsatisfied.

He made up his mind to try and include Carl more in hopes of improving the squad's harmony that plan fell through as they were shipped out soon after. Carl remained aloof and unapproachable but while others complained about the heat and humidity he remained stoic and unbothered. It actually gave the others a bit of confidence oddly enough.

Augustus's lips twitched fighting a smile at the memories. He looked again to Macey. There was no sign of her earlier struggles though her expression still seemed strained. He didn't know exactly what Julius said to her but it was clear it had a terrible effect.

Augustus was surprised by her pale, haunted look. He couldn't believe his son had rendered such a lively woman to such a state. It had taken everything in him not to confront his son immediately and now he was grateful he held back. If he had caused a ruckus it might have induced more stress on Macey and the baby. But now, what should he do?

It had been two days since the party and March claimed Julius was desperately searching for her even going as far as enlisting the IT department to track her route from the apartment to the bus station. Augustus admired his son's tenacity but that didn't excuse him. As much as he wanted to bring this trouble to a swift conclusion it was impossible as long as Macey's health was in question and he certainly wasn't going to risk the life of his grandchild.

Coming to a decision Augustus stood and quietly let himself out without disturbing his daughter-in-law's sleep. He was quite certain Julius would be furious once he learned Macey had been with Augustus the entire time but that didn't matter as long as Macey and the baby recovered. He would put off any decision until after that.

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"How are you feeling, my dear?" Augustus asked.

"Better." Macey managed a smile. She was relaxed reclining on her pillows.

It had been just over a week since she arrived at the mansion. The staff had been told not to reveal the identity of their guest and to treat her with the upmost care following doctor's orders. Luckily his sons were infrequent visitors and since his birthday party there was little need from them to come home when they saw him at work every day. Normally Augustus lamented their inattention but now he was grateful as it allowed Macey to recover without interruption.

"I'm glad," Augustus sighed. "And the baby?"

"The doctor says its heartbeat is strong so she doesn't think there will be any complications as long as I avoid unnecessary stress."

"Good." Augustus didn't try to hide his relief but continued to worry how the next topic would affect her. "As much as don't want to I need to discuss something with you."

"Oh?" Macey looked at him genuinely confused.

It seemed she had not heard any rumors about Julius's continued search. His son was becoming more desperate and Augustus was having a difficult time keeping the truth away from him. He was beginning to suspect that Julius found out about the pregnancy despite Macey's assurance there was no way for him to know.

"It's about Julius."

Macey stiffened and her serene expression fell.

"You should know he's been looking for you ever since the night you left," Augustus said. "I haven't told him you are here."

"Thank you," Macey said after a moment. "I'll…I'll leave soon. So you don't need to worry…"

"Now hold on," Augustus argued. "No one said anything about you leaving."

"…But I can't stay especially after…"

"After what? Macey, you can tell me. What happened that night?"

Macey breathed deep. She didn't want to revisit that night but perhaps it would be best to tell him. Slowly coming to a decision she started from the beginning. Augustus listened quietly fuming. How could his son do such a thing to the wonderful woman in front of him? Did he teach him nothing?

"…And when I got home…I found the divorce papers."

"Divorce papers!!!" Augustus leapt to his feet ready to drag his son in front of him at that very moment.

"Dad, please, calm down," Macey said.

Looking at her pale face he slowly marshaled his control and sat down again. It was no wonder she had been so unhappy and stressed. Augustus took her hand holding it gently.

He wasn't sure exactly when he noticed Macey had developed a crush on Julius. Was it when they were in high school? At the time Julius had been something of a playboy going out with several different girls though he was never serious about any of them. None of his relationships lasted more than a week but they had an effect on Macey.

Thankfully she went to public school and was spared watching Julius carry on with his various affairs but whenever she and her parents visited she had to endure listening to his escapades all the same. Augustus could never forget the look of disappointment and hurt that flitted across her face and darkened her gaze. Despite knowing each other for so long Julius seemed oblivious to her. She had grown up with the brothers so they treated her like a sister or cousin rather than a romantic interest.

Julius, you damned fool.

Augustus sighed, "So what exactly did the papers detail? What kind of alimony did he offer?"

"…I don't know. I didn't read any of it. I just sighed."

"Macey…"

"I don't want anything from him," Macey fought back tears. "If I did take any money it would only prove I'm the gold-digging whore they claim I am."

"…Macey."

"Please, just leave it. The papers are signed. It's over."

Augustus fell silent. If it was over why was Julius looking for her so desperately? Something didn't add up. Could it be? Could Julius have finally realized the truth? Maybe…But was it too little too late?

The woman in front of him was resigned. She had given up the love she had nurtured for so long truly believing it was over. Would Julius be able to convince her he made a mistake? No. In her current state she probably wouldn't even listen.

"Let's face it…he and I…we're too different. I just don't belong in his world and I guess he knew it from the beginning," Macey let out a sniffle prompting him to give her a tissue. "It's better if I just leave. I don't want to cause problems."

Augustus studied her for a long moment in silence. Perhaps it was better to put distance between them for now. Macey had always lacked confidence when it came to standing among the DaLairs. Though they treated her as a member of the family she could never forget she was still an outsider. Exposure to those harpies undoubtedly solidified her inferiority complex though Augustus knew she was far superior to any of them.

"So what would you like to do?" he finally asked.

"I think…I'd really like to go back to school," Macey answered after a moment. "I'd like to earn my degree if only to prove to myself I can."

Augustus smiled his eyes sparkling. That was it. That was the answer. What better confidence booster than that?

"Where would you like to go?"

Macey hesitated. Originally she had thought to go back to the School of Visual Arts but that would mean staying in New York. The chances of running into Julius were low but they were hardly zero. And once he and his new woman started making the front covers there would be no avoiding it. How would she be able to stand it? No, it was better to leave. A clean break. But where could she go that she could avoid even hearing news about him.

"…I've always wanted to see Paris."

"Paris?" Augustus repeated alarmed that she would be so far away.

He hoped to keep her close enough to watch over her but perhaps that would be too much for her. March had often told him he was too overbearing. It was true he could exert influence and pressure without even trying. A bird couldn't fly if left in a cage. But he wouldn't let her fend for herself. No. He would do everything he could to support her. She was the daughter of the man who saved his life and the mother of his future grandchild so he would do everything he could to aid her.

"Very well. Paris it is."

Macey blinked in surprise.

"Give me a week or two. I'll send Stephen to secure you a proper living space as well as look into hospitals."

"Oh, you don't…he doesn't…"

"Macey, my dear," Augustus smiled. "You are, and will always be, my daughter-in-law. You are the mother of my grandchild. I refuse to let you settle for anything less than the best."

Macey bit her lip.

"You want to go to school yes? And you'll be having a baby soon. You'll need proper care and amenities for you and the baby."

"…Well, yeah but…"

"Let me do this for you, Macey. I promise I won't interfere but I want to be there for you and my grandchild."

"Okay."

"Good. Now rest and don't worry about a thing. It will all be okay."

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"Are you all right Miss?" Stephen asked with concern as they exited customs.

"I'm fine," Macey sighed. "Air travel has never been my favorite."

"It will be much easier from here."

Hailing a cab Stephen loaded her luggage into the trunk then gave instructions to the driver. Macey listened amazed at the ease with which he handled the situation.

"Stephen, I didn't know you could speak French."

"I can't."

"…But."

"I learned a bit when I came here to set up your apartment," he said, "but I only know enough to give the correct address."

Macey was silent for a time, "I'm going to need to learn."

"Miss?"

"French. If I'm going to stay here I really should learn the language, don't you think?"

"You have a point. It will be especially useful when you begin attending school. But the state has several remedial programs specifically for immigrants to learn the language."

Macey bit her lip. After a moment she said, "Classes are good, but I think I'll learn faster and more naturally with a tutor."

"Very well. I'll make arrangements."

"…You will?"

"Of course," Stephen agreed. "Mister DaLair insisted I should see to all of your needs and make sure you would be comfortable before I left."

"Thank you."

They spent the rest of the ride in comfortable silence. Macey spent her time looking out the window watching the people they passed by. Taking out landmarks the view was surprisingly normal…she could have been just about anywhere. Unexpectedly she took comfort from this. This was her home now after all.

Reaching their destination Stephen paid the driver and helped her out. Refusing her help he hauled her luggage himself escorting her into a beautiful stone building. She had expected a simple two bedroom apartment but a short ride in the elevator brought her to a surprisingly modern space.

It had an open concept with wide windows overlooking the city. The kitchen was clean with stainless steel appliances for a fresh feel. There was even a dining area with a small circular table. A counter top separated the kitchen from the living room which was fully furnished. The furniture was sleek and comfortable with wide cushions upholstered in soft gray tones that complimented the warm-colored area rug and rich wood side tables.

Macey stood surveying the rooms with her mouth open in shock. This was far from what she was expecting. When Augustus asked her what kind of accommodations she needed she said something simple and reasonably priced. There was no way this apartment was within her budget.

"Is something wrong, Miss?" Stephen asked. "Anything not to your liking?"

"No…it's fine…but this is too much." Macey shook her head.

"This was the bare minimum Mister DaLair would allow."

"But I don't need…how am I going to afford this?"

"Not to worry. The rent will be deducted automatically from an account Mister DaLair set up."

"…An account? What account?"

"A bank account," Stephen went to a small office nook and took out a checkbook. Inside was a debt card with her name on it.

Macey stared at the beginning balance noted in the book and almost fell over. Wide-eyed she stared at him in disbelief. Augustus said he was going to support her through her college education but this was too much.

"It is the bare minimum," Stephen assured her.

Macey let out a slow breath. Having known Augustus DaLair since she was little she knew exactly how overbearing he could be though he always meant well. As a man who dearly loved his family knowing he would be so far away from his grandchild he was no doubt very worried. It was actually rather surprising he agreed to let her move to Paris in the first place. Her gaze fell on the checkbook again. Just because he gave her this much didn't mean she had to spend it. It was a small concession but one she could at least accept.

"Would you like to see the nursery?"

Nodding Macey followed him to one of the bedrooms. It was quite large and would give the baby ample room to grow into throughout their toddler years and onward. The walls were neutral color. The dresser, crib, swing and changing table were white with light green accents. Opening a dresser drawer she saw it already stocked with onesies, booties and sleepers. The only thing missing was the baby.

With a small smile her hand settled on her stomach. Eight months from now that place would be filled. Slowly turning she saw Stephen watching her. Blushing slightly she gave him a genuine smile for the first time since their arrival.

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Victoria stepped out of the cab with a sigh checking her phone for the address one more time before entering the building. Though she was generally confidant and carefree she had to admit she was feeling a little anxious about this meeting.

She had seen the advertisement a week ago for a private tutor willing to teach remedial French to a newly arrived immigrant from America. Like many people she didn't have a favorable opinion of Americans in general. They were arrogant in their claims of coming from the greatest country in the world as if their country never did anything wrong or didn't have problems. At least other countries admitted their shortcomings. The militant patriotism displayed by Americans was extremely uncomfortable to watch.

Then there was American fascination with sex and sexuality when at the same time they were completely uncomfortable with their own bodies. They either saw themselves as too fat or too thin, too short or too tall. Half the population was busy trying to reach some unattainable ideal while the other half simply gave up on life and succumbed to obesity.

Victoria readily admitted she was a bit freer than most when it came to her body. She had no problem with her own self image and was completely comfortable in her own skin. Her bohemian life style certainly wouldn't be considered typical even by French standards but she had no regrets and certainly no desire to change. But she was also broke.

Money was the only reason she applied for the position of tutor. The amount offered was considerably more than she would ever make as a nude model or florist. Both were previous occupations she had maintained over the years. If she was going to achieve her dream of being a designer she needed some funds to procure material and preferably a good studio to work in. If it meant putting up with a spoiled American for a few hours every day then it would be worth it.

Knocking on the door she waited. She wasn't sure what she expected but a rather tall man in a business suit was not one of them. He gave her a quick appraising eye.

"Miss Laurent, I presume?"

"You presume correctly, Mister…"

"You may call me Stephen. Please come in."

He escorted her inside and settled her at the dining table. Offering her something to drink he sat across from her reviewing her application on his phone.

"So what kind of teaching experience do you have?"

"I was an au pair when I was younger. Most recently I acted as a teaching assistant."

He nodded. "And you do not have an issue conducting lessons while also acting as guide?"

Victoria merely shrugged, "Real world interactions will probably help develop a more natural way of speaking. So…sure…"

Stephen eyed her carefully. Perhaps her answer was a little more carefree than he was hoping for but she was the most promising candidate. Of all the applicants she was the closest in age to Macey herself and it was his employer's hope Macey's tutor also be a friend to help her acclimate to her new home.

Before he could ask for a more detailed answer the door opened. He stood as Macey entered. Surprised by her interviewer's reaction Victoria stood as well and got her first look at the woman she would be teaching.

She wore ear buds connected to her phone as she followed along with a language program practicing pronunciation. Her red hair was barely contained in a scrunchie and her clothing was modest but neat. She carried a backpack slung over one shoulder and it was clear she had just come back from her language class as she was still practicing the day's lesson.

But something was off. This woman was a little too pale, the rings under her eyes a little too dark and her gaze unexpectedly haunted. It was clear she had suffered and if Victoria had to guess…it was probably love. Love could easily make or break any woman.

Setting down her bag the redhead realized she wasn't alone. Pulling out her ear buds she said, "I'm so sorry. I didn't realize you'd be here. Um…bonjour?"

Victoria fought back a laugh. There was something genuine and sweet about this woman. This wasn't what she expected but she was pleasantly surprised.

"Miss," Stephen nodded. "This is Miss Victoria Laurent. She is your language tutor."

"Oh, hello. I'm Macey."

"It's nice to meet you Macey," Victoria stepped forward offering a hand. "Just call me Vicki."