

THE SILENT SYMPHONY

Chapter 20: The Decision I

The days following Mateo's visit to La Masia were filled with a mixture of excitement and anxiety that permeated every corner of Casa de los Niños.

Word of Barcelona's interest had spread quickly through the orphanage, creating a buzz of anticipation that made it difficult for anyone to focus on normal routines.

The children peppered Mateo with questions about his experience, while the staff struggled to balance their pride in his achievement with their concerns about what his departure might mean for the community.

Don Carlos had called a meeting with the orphanage's board of directors to discuss the implications of Barcelona's offer.

The opportunity was extraordinary, but it also raised complex questions about Mateo's welfare, his education, and his emotional development. The boy had

already endured significant trauma in his young life, and the transition to La Masia would represent another major upheaval.

"We have to consider what's best for Mateo," Sister María Elena said during the heated discussion that followed Don Carlos's presentation of Barcelona's proposal. "Not what's most exciting or prestigious, but what will truly serve his long-term interests."

"But this is the opportunity of a lifetime," countered Father Miguel, the orphanage's chaplain. "How many children get the chance to train at the world's most famous football academy? We can't let our own attachment to the boy prevent him from pursuing his dreams."

The debate continued for hours, with valid arguments on both sides.

Some board members worried about the pressure and expectations that would come with joining La Masia.

Others pointed out that Mateo's unique communication challenges might make the transition particularly difficult. But ultimately, everyone agreed that the decision should rest with Mateo himself.

Don Carlos found the boy in the courtyard that evening, practicing his ball control with the focused intensity that had become his trademark. The signed football from Ronaldinho sat carefully positioned nearby, a tangible reminder of the incredible opportunity that lay before him.

"Pequeño," Don Carlos said, settling onto the bench beside the practice area. "We need to talk about Barcelona's offer."

Mateo immediately stopped his practice and jogged over, his expression serious and attentive. He had been expecting this conversation, and he was ready for it.

"The board has discussed the situation," Don Carlos continued, "and we've decided that the choice should be yours. But before you decide, I want to make sure you understand what you're considering."

Mateo nodded and pulled out his notebook, writing quickly before showing the page to Don Carlos: "I understand it's a big decision."

"It's more than big, Mateo. It's life-changing. If you join La Masia, even in their day program, everything will be different. The training will be more intense, the

expectations higher, the pressure greater. You'll be competing with some of the most talented young players in the world."

Mateo wrote again: "I'm ready for that."

"Are you?" Don Carlos asked gently. "It's not just about football, pequeño. It's about growing up faster than you might want to. It's about dealing with disappointment and setbacks that could be more difficult than anything you've experienced here."

The question hung in the air between them, heavy with implication. Don Carlos wasn't trying to discourage Mateo from pursuing his dreams, but he felt a responsibility to ensure that the boy understood the full scope of what he was considering.

Mateo was quiet for a long moment, his dark eyes reflecting the complexity of his thoughts. When he finally wrote in his notebook, his message was simple but profound: "If I don't try, I'll never know if I could have made it."

The response revealed a maturity that was remarkable for an eight-year-old. Mateo understood that the path to greatness required risk, that achieving his dream of representing Spain would demand sacrifices and challenges that might be uncomfortable or even painful. This text is hosted at novel^{*}fire^{*}.net

"What about your friends here?" Don Carlos asked. "Pablo, Elena, Miguel... they'll miss you terribly. And you'll miss them too."

Mateo's expression softened, and he looked around the courtyard where he had spent so many happy hours playing with the other children. The prospect of leaving them was genuinely difficult, but he also understood that some opportunities couldn't be postponed or delayed.

He wrote carefully in his notebook: "They want me to succeed. They'll understand."

"Yes, they will," Don Carlos agreed. "But that doesn't make it easier for any of us."

As if summoned by their conversation, Pablo and Elena appeared in the courtyard, followed by several other children who had been watching from the windows. They approached hesitantly, sensing the gravity of the discussion taking place.

"Are you really going to Barcelona?" Pablo asked, his voice small and uncertain.

Mateo looked at his best friend with eyes full of affection and regret. He wrote in his notebook and showed it to the group: "I don't want to leave you, but this is my chance to achieve my dream."

"We know," Elena said, her tough exterior cracking slightly to reveal the vulnerable child beneath. "We want you to go. We want you to become famous and play for Spain and make everyone proud."

"But we'll miss you," Pablo added, tears beginning to form in his eyes.

Mateo set down his notebook and gathered his friends into a group hug, his own emotions threatening to overwhelm him. These children had been his family for as long as he could remember, and the thought of being separated from them was heartbreaking.

But the System's voice whispered in his mind, providing perspective and clarity that helped him process the complex emotions he was experiencing.

This is not goodbye forever, the entity reminded him. This is the beginning of a journey that will allow you to honor their support and friendship by achieving

something extraordinary. They will always be part of your story, no matter where football takes you.