

Nothing Matters, except YOU & Me Chapter

521

Given how fickle and stubborn women could be, men would never voluntarily play against them without the preface of courtship. Gone was the mischievous and lively Heather who had been on the tennis court earlier as she gazed at him pointedly. It was clear that this would be the end of their tennis-filled escapade.

Matthias, on the other hand, had only just started to see the fun of tennis when she flippantly declared that she no longer wanted to play another set. Seeing as she had the final say for their date today, he had no choice but to assent to her decision to carry on their date elsewhere.

As they went to retrieve the car, he asked in concern, "Are you hungry? Shall we grab a bite?"

Her gaze flickered over to him and she teased, "I think you're the one who's hungry!" He chuckled at this. Truth was, she was right to say that he was hungry. He hadn't eaten much during lunch with the Langstons, seeing as their food disagreed with his palate. Following their tennis match, Matthias felt as if he had been hollowed out. He wasn't proud of this, hence his subtle invitation for a meal in the first place. He certainly did not expect her to call his bluff.

"But I'm not hungry now, so why don't we go play a round of golf?" Heather suggested excitedly, her lips curving up into a devious smile. She had to admit that these little digs were oddly satisfying.

"Alright, then." He looked at her with endearment, finding it adorable that she could look so pleased with her little evil schemes.

They began to drive over to the golf course that she had deliberately chosen, and it happened to be the best one in Bradford City. However, she did not want to step foot on the premises at all.

She grew grim as she thought about how the manager of the golf course had always leered at her and as one thought led to another, her expression only soured when the image of Caleb's menacing face flashed in her mind. As far as she was concerned, he was the epitome of evil and she bristled whenever she caught sight of his insidious looks.

Meanwhile, Matthias was looking at Heather oddly as he took in the changes in her expression. He wondered what she was thinking of and why she looked so conflicted. They were only going golfing, after all. It was only when the car rolled to a stop at the traffic light that she noticed he was staring at her and she shot him an affronted look.

He was observing her so intently that it was a surprise he hadn't pressed his face against hers. Heather frowned and eyed him with disgust, then feigned nonchalance as she touched

her face, hoping that there wasn't any dirt on it. That would have been embarrassing.

"Stop staring at me and keep your eyes on the road," she warned him irritably. His behavior today had been erratic and secretive, as if he had embodied every bit the despicable villain.

"A penny for your thoughts, my lady?" He was just as affable as he had been since the beginning of their date, having kept his temper under lock and key. He was hoping that his

warm compassion would eventually cajole Heather into changing her mind about him. “I have no thoughts worthy of a penny,” she answered uneasily, fidgeting slightly in her seat.

She was merely thinking about Caleb and what he might do next.

“Are you thirsty?” Matthias took the bottled water from the cupholder and passed it over to her with his free hand.

She turned down the water, waving her hand dismissively as she said, “I don’t want it.” Heather didn’t like drinking bottled water. Besides, she felt fine and wasn’t feeling thirsty at all.

“Then could you please help me open the cap?” he asked, pretending to be really focused on driving with one hand.

“You know how evolution has given us this?” She pointed to her mouth, indicating for him to use his to twist the bottle cap open.

Once again, she turned him down. Still holding onto the water bottle, Matthias thought better of it and decided to put it back into the cupholder. He should be used to rejection by now but that didn’t mean he would stop trying to talk to her. This was one of Evan’s suggestions—chemistry came from conversation.

Heather, on the other hand, felt her heart twist at Matthias’ awkwardness as he tried to make small talk with her. He had never been that skilled in making a good impression and when it came to romantic pursuits, he could use a manual or two. As a matter of fact, he looked like he was having a hard time trying to ease the tension between them, and she might even go so far as to say he was helpless.

As the car continued forward, she stared calmly out the windshield while his gaze occasionally flickered over to her. At some point during the drive, she began to find his curious looks irritating. She had grown so used to seeing his wicked side that his sudden transition into a lovesick schoolboy was making her uncomfortable. It was as if their dynamics had taken an abrupt and strange turn.

“Maybe we should talk about why you’re trying so hard to put up an act and the purpose behind it,” Heather said blatantly, seeing as there were still a bit of ways to go before they reached the golf course.

The golf course she had chosen was known for its expansive acres, but its geographical location was, unfortunately, not ideal. It was set in the outskirts to accommodate its sprawling landscape, which means it would take a long drive to get there. The journey would

be insufferable if Matthias were to continue giving her those unreadable and meaningful looks, and she wasn’t sure what he was trying to imply through his gaze.

“How are you so sure that I’m putting on an act? What if this is my true self?” His lips tipped

up into a mocking smile, though she wasn’t sure if he was being self-deprecating or sarcastic toward her.

“Am I supposed to believe that you’re showing me your kind and compassionate nature?”

She burst into a small laugh, thoroughly amused. “Come on, Director Locke. You’re in charge of the Locke Group, are you not? You can’t rule over the company with kindness and compassion.”

It wasn’t as if Heather was completely oblivious to the internal conflicts that were rife within

the large Locke family. She had done enough research to know that it was no easy feat for anyone to hold power in his family—they did not favor brawn over brains, after all.

“I’m just trying to be myself in front of the person I like,” Matthias replied honestly.

However,

Heather froze when she heard this.

“The person you like,” she repeated stiffly. She did not like this term and she disliked it even more when Matthias used it to describe her. There was no way she could ever reciprocate his feelings despite the many occasions on which he had made them known, and she knew that feigning ignorance was no longer a viable option at this point.

Not wanting to beat around the bush, she asked, “Are you saying that you’ve fallen for me?”

“Yes; I have,” he confessed plainly. Denial was but futile effort at this point.

“Well, don’t. Don’t fall for me. I’ve told you as much from the very beginning,” Heather countered imperiously. They had been young when she warned him not to fall for her, and she remembered having done so during their first meeting.

“Yes; I know you’ve told me that a long time ago,” he agreed. The memory was still imprinted

in his mind and he recalled how she had looked as beautiful as an angel and been as wicked as the devil.

“But you know how unpredictable these things are, and it’s not as if I could stop myself from

falling for you. I can’t even stop thinking about you,” he added, feeling emboldened by his earlier confession. He wanted to tell her how much he liked her but he couldn’t bring himself

to look her in the eye.

“Why would you ever fall for me? You, out of all people, know exactly how wicked I am.

After

all, I basically ruined your chances of having a love life.” The barest hint of a smile played on Heather’s lips. She couldn’t quite figure out men and their feelings; how could he fall for her

while still holding a grudge against her?

“Then give me back those chances at love, even if things might turn out differently,” he said softly, his voice thick with implication. At that moment, it felt as if the air in the car was getting warmer.

His words shot through her erratically-beating heart like an arrow. If he kept going on with his bold and heartfelt confessions, the walls around her could very well come crashing down and leave her vulnerable.

“No way,” she bit out with absolute resolve. The dark and sentimental gaze with which he regarded her was truly meant for Myra, and it would do her well to remember that.

Pride was what stood between them. Try as she might, she could not forget the way he had been head over heels for Myra, and Heather did not want to become her replacement. "I ruined your chances at love and I took Myra away from you. Those aren't things I could ever give back to you," she explained slowly and tiredly. Matthias might have lost his mind and been spewing nonsense for all she cared, but she could not allow herself to stray from reason.

"You keep bringing Myra up. It seems as if you're dwelling on the fact that the person I used to like was her instead of you," he pointed out forthrightly. He eyed her steadily, making her wish she could hide from his piercing gaze.

"The person you're in love with has always been Myra. Think about it, Matthias—why would you ever fall for me in the first place? It's practically impossible." Heather felt like she was drowning and was desperately trying to hold onto the driftwood in front of her, worried that if she let go, she might be pulled into the depths of the icy waters.

"I have once told myself with the same fierce certainty that I would never fall for you even if you were the last person on Earth, but fate has a twisted sense of humor and before I knew it, I found myself having feelings for you, falling for you." Matthias wished he could escape this terrifying loop wherein his thoughts revolved around Heather, and there had been a time when he decided against making his feelings known to her. However, at the end of the day, he still wanted her to know the truth.

This was especially so when other men started sprouting around her, and only then did he realize how bracing and bitter jealousy could be. He would much rather make the first move than watch her walk away with someone else. He couldn't bear the thought of it. He might regret it if he never tried to pursue Heather romantically. It was exactly how he had missed his shot with Myra, and he didn't want a repeat of that now that he finally came to terms with how he felt about Heather.

"Have you really fallen for me, Matthias?" she questioned once more, wanting to make sure that she was still firmly rooted in reality instead of some fever dream. He nodded at her firmly. "How many times do I have to say it in order to make you believe me?"

"Turn the car around and drive me home this instant!" she shouted. She no longer wanted to go golfing and she had lost interest in doing anything else—all she wanted was to go home and be with her own thoughts.

"But we're not done with our date yet," he reminded her gently. It had taken him a lot of effort to finally get a date with her, so it was only natural that he didn't want it to come to such an abrupt end.

“I need to calm down and process all this.” Heather blinked her doe-like eyes as she felt the desperate need to anchor the emotions swelling within her. Her chest tightened with the urge to cry, though she doubted if the tears would come at all.

“Is it so hard for you to choose to love me back?” he asked disappointedly.

Incredulous, she retorted, “Could you ever love your enemy?” Then, she realized that her words had come out wrong because judging from the looks of it, Matthias really had fallen in love with his enemy.

Upon hearing her retort, Matthias was at a loss for words. Well, this is awkward, he thought ruefully. While he was torn over having feelings for somebody he ought to hate, she was determined to never fall for him. Moreover, she had continuously doubted him and suspected he had ulterior motives. I must have been blind to fall for her in the first place.

“Did you put a spell on me or something?” he blurted out without much thought.

Heather glanced at him in bewilderment. If I put a spell on him, why on earth would I make him fall for me when I could make him get away from me instead?

“Look, I can’t think clearly now so it would really help if you could give me some form of encouragement or assurance, just to let me have the strength to pine after you shamelessly with all that I have,” he pleaded with her with such earnestness that Heather felt her heart twist.

“Don’t fall for me. It will never work out between us,” she replied with finality, putting an end

to this conversation. This relationship was cursed from the beginning and she had to cut off its roots before it grew into something worse.

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522

Heather pondered on her qualities. While she liked to consider herself as well-accomplished

and an example of the perfect woman, she shuddered at the thought of being romantically pursued by someone whom she knew actively hated her. She briefly wondered if Matthias had suffered head damage from the accident, because it was the only logical explanation behind his feelings for her.

“I like the challenge of turning the impossible into reality,” Matthias said defiantly even after

his pleading was to no avail. He knew that Heather wanted more than just a lover—she wanted someone who could thrive in the same league as her own.

“Stop grinning like that. It’s freaking me out.” She eyed him warily, recoiling at the wicked smile that played on his lips.

If that grin on his face was anything to go by, he looked like he was more than eager to take up the challenge of romantically pursuing her. She bristled and began to question what it was about her that spurred him on. Then, as her mind raced to figure out his, a sudden thought seized her.

“Do you actually like me or do you like the idea of conquering me?” She stared at him, willing

him to answer.

“The former,” he replied with firm assurance.

“Men are all liars,” she said pointedly as she shot him a displeased look. She thought about

asking Myra for her opinion on this. It would do her no good to dwell on such complex matters without another woman's insight.

In the end, Heather announced imperiously, "Drive me home now. I don't want this date to go

on, so let's just call it a day." Truthfully, she was worried that one thing might lead to another

if they were to carry on with this date. What if he gets some weird idea and wants to take things to the next level?

She shuddered, then tossed aside the strange and unwarranted thought as soon as it popped up in her mind. Stop thinking about how it would feel if he kisses you, she chided herself, repressing the urge to retch.

"I hate to break it to you, but this road is strictly one-way so I can't turn the car around," Matthias pointed out in resignation. To a certain extent, he had accomplished his mission for the day, having made his feelings known to her. No, you didn't, the voice in his head countered sadistically.

"Did you really drop by the Langston Residence today so you could talk about the business partnership?" Heather asked. In retrospect, the reason for his visit earlier today had been rather suspicious and she wanted to talk to Robert about it, having noticed his odd behavior during Matthias' visit.

"Of course. Believe me, I was equally surprised when Old Master Langston called me up this morning." In all honesty, Matthias couldn't quite grasp the situation just yet. All he knew was

that the old master had had a change of heart and called him up that morning with the prospect of a partnership.

She scoffed upon hearing his answer. "I thought perhaps you might have made some shady backdoor deal with him." By that, she meant that she had been inclined to believe that Robert sold her off to Matthias but as it turned out, she was reading too much into the situation.

"Seems a bit inappropriate to talk about your grandfather that way, don't you think?"

Matthias berated gently, though he secretly envied the bond she shared with Robert.

"It's none of your business how I describe my grandfather. Can you please drop me home now? I don't want to see you for a moment longer than necessary," she snapped irritably and

without thought. Then, upon recollecting herself, she peered at him worriedly from the corner of her eye and saw that his expression had darkened considerably.

However, he sounded placid as he replied, "Fine, I shall drive you home this instant. Wouldn't

want you to have to see this repulsive face of mine for the rest of the day."

Heather's heart twisted with guilt as she lowered her head. It was as if all the sophistication disappeared from her lexicon whenever she was in his presence. She felt bad for saying such hurtful things to him and she knew she sounded like a spoiled and unreasonable aristocratic brat.

Regardless of how wounded he might be, Matthias was still a man of his word. He stepped on the accelerator as they cruised down the road and when she saw the speed at which he was driving, she began to worry that they might run into trouble with the traffic police.

After a while, she noticed that he was still angry and the car was gaining speed under his maneuver. Matthias' sullenness translated into reckless driving, and there were even a few times when they were inches away from bumping into the other cars on the road.

"Slow down, Matthias. Getting into an accident is not part of my to-do list," she snapped, once again hurting him with her sharp choice of words.

"I highly doubt being a safe road-user is on your to-do list either, seeing as you've crashed your car into mine twice before this," he retorted sarcastically, unable to help his sour mood.

She's being brash with me because she thinks I like her too much to put her in her place. Frustrated by his sudden change in temperament, Heather sputtered, "Are you serious?"

This

is no time for you to be sassy, Matthias!" What did I do to him this time?

This only seemed to spur him on. He stepped on the accelerator and the sports car revved as it sped down the road. Fear flashed in Heather's eyes as she felt inertia pushing her into her seat. The vehicle might come with state-of-the-art safety features, but that doesn't mean

he can be so reckless with our lives!

"Unless I've misunderstood your instructions, I'm just doing what you told me to," he countered, not backing down. One could hardly reason with him when he was being stubborn like this, and this probably had something to do with Heather injuring his pride. Heather grew terrified when she saw how maniacal he was and she quickly surrendered. "Okay, okay—I'm the one who's in the wrong, not you. I'm sorry. Can you please slow down before we crash?"

It wasn't until he had calmed down that she retracted her piteous gaze. She had to admit that he easily outdid her when it came to being ruthless.

She got down from the car when it finally rolled to a steady stop outside the Langston Residence. Then, she turned to address him somberly, "You have obsessive tendencies and I'm far too stubborn—the both of us would only anger each other. I suggest you think about it before you delude yourself into believing we could ever work out."

There was a certain truth to her words that even Matthias could not deny. He did have strong obsessive tendencies that bordered on a personality disorder, but he had always brushed those off as part of his character. He remembered Evan urging him to see a therapist but he had unfortunately paid no heed to that suggestion, either.

At the rate at which Matthias was going, it would only be a matter of time before he bit off more than he could chew. However, he did not think of the consequences that might come and was instead focused on getting Heather to reciprocate his feelings. He wanted her to look back at him and give him the assurance he craved.

The regret leftover from his pursuit of Myra seemed to weigh on his feelings for Heather. Seeing as he had missed his chance with the former, he was adamant to make things work with the latter.

It was no easy feat for him to fall in love with someone and when he did, he would not so much as spare other women a second look.

Sometimes, Matthias wondered if his feelings of affection came from the constant interaction between himself and the woman he loved, be it Heather or Myra. However, as he

dwelled on the likelihood of this theory, Lara's presence disproved it.

Given that she was his assistant in the workplace, his interaction with her was on a daily basis, yet he had never seemed to develop any romantic feelings for her. On the contrary, he

saw her as nothing more than a loyal subordinate or an endearing younger sibling.

He thought about how these years had gone by. Affection and sentiments were empirical in their existence and there was little use in trying to rationalize them. He could say that Myra was the source of his determination up to this day, but it was much more accurate to admit that Heather was the reason for his present glory.

Heather had asked him why he had not come to Bradford City much earlier and instead chose to move over with the rest of the Locke Group. Had he not anticipated for Myra to fall

in love with someone else? Why would he gamble on that prospect and decide to only move

into the city after he had reached the peak of his success?

More importantly, he had chosen to relocate to Bradford City before Heather's return, and it

was clear that she was the intended audience for his magnificent comeback. Just then, a bold presumption came to Matthias' mind—perhaps Heather was the one he had fallen for from the very beginning and he had merely been too scared to admit it.

Maybe his residual attachment to Myra's warmth had misled him into thinking he had actual

feelings for her, but Heather had always been the one who amazed him and try as he might, he could never get her out of his mind.

Matthias spent the days and nights that followed this realization thinking about Heather's haughty expression more than he did Myra's warm smile.

It was not too far of a stretch to say that he could pick Heather out of a crowd, and this was the case when he had been in Italy all those years ago. He had been on stage then, and one look was all it took for him to spot her among the audience. However, he had felt inferior to her back then and dared not reveal himself to her, which made him even more resolved to only show up in front of her once he could lord his superiority over her.

"Give me ten more minutes," he pleaded now, hastily getting down from the car and reaching

out to grab her hand. When Heather saw how earnest and serious he was about this, she relented.

"Fine, but we can't be seen dawdling outside the house." With that, she began to shove him

back into the vehicle. "We'll talk inside the car."

That was a close call. If anyone in the house saw us... Heather gazed out the window uneasily. Matthias, on the other hand, was watching her from where he sat behind the wheel

while his brain tried to recompose his words into something coherent.

"Well, what is it that you wanted to tell me? Come right out with it," she demanded incredulously as she felt the sudden urge to throttle him.

Is he doing this purpose? Did he plan on putting on some flamboyant show in front of the

Langston Residence? She couldn't think straight right now and her mind was in chaos. "My falling for you could very well be love at first sight," he murmured slowly, not wanting to be too forthcoming.

Upon hearing this, Heather stiffened and for a moment it was as if her brain had imploded—the words "love at first sight" echoed in her headspace. She found herself growing exasperated and helpless that he would spring something like this on her just as they were about to part ways.

Her words came out in a flurry as she retorted, "I don't want to hear your explanation nor anything else you have to say."

Despite being met with cold rebuff, Matthias continued, wanting to clarify all that he was feeling at the moment, "I admit that I was infatuated with Myra and her gentle compassion.

I liked how her smile could light up an entire room." He paused, seemingly entranced by the memory, then went on to say, "I saw her as my saving grace."

"Yes, yes; I know, and I was the devil who split the both of you up with my wicked schemes,"

she interjected impatiently. A chill ran down her spine when she saw his lips curve up in a peculiar smile.

"No, you were a beautiful angel—the most gorgeous girl I've ever seen." It was as if Matthias

was transported back into their younger days and even the smile on his face a wistful one. Heather had been about to get down from the car when she heard this. No longer sure if he was telling her the truth, she asked in a flustered tone, "I'm sorry, but is your memory warped? I was 'an angel' and 'the most gorgeous girl you've ever seen'?"

"I thought it was pathetic of me to have fallen for you back then. Do you remember how you

used to look at me? You treated me like I was some foul-smelling beggar or an ugly street cat." There was a sour note in Matthias' voice as he recounted this. If only Heather had shown him some compassion, maybe he wouldn't have felt so unworthy and been terrified of confessing his love for her.

He sounded like his reasonable self once more as he further elaborated, "I've been thinking about it for a while, and I had this epiphany that maybe I was never in love with Myra at all. Maybe I've only ever loved how warm and kind she was to me. I don't even know what she's

like as a person nor have I seen her dark side—or any other side, for that matter." If he did not know her well back in those days, then it was impossible for him to claim he was anything other than clueless about her now.

Presently, the only person he wanted to know was Heather. In fact, he wanted to get to know

her better, so that he might touch the deepest part of her soul.

"And how about me? Do you know me at all? Have you seen all sides of me, especially the darkest ones? You don't have to know someone to fall in love with them," Heather argued. She still couldn't come to terms with the fact that Matthias was in love with her, let alone his

proclamation that it was love at first sight.

He dared not look her in the eye any longer and he tore his gaze away. Seeing this, Heather thought that she might have finally cracked his pretense and she waited for the chance to catch him out.

However, Matthias was plaintive as he said, "Looks like I was wrong—I'm still not worthy enough to confess my love for you and I should have kept my pathetic thoughts to myself." The light in his eyes dimmed at that moment and as it turned out, today was yet another miserable day for him.