

Read Billionaire Baby Daddy online free by Claire Adams

Chapter Eighteen

Andrew

As I followed Lexi back down into the living room, I couldn't help but reflect on how much fun it had been to play the game with her and Emma that night. It was just a simple child's game, but somehow, it had kept me entertained for ne

arly an hour. Even though, as Emma had pointed out, I hadn't been doing so well at it.

It was a weird feeling to have, knowing that I'd been so engrossed in that game and in spending time with my three-year-old daughter and the girl's mother. I didn't think I'd ever had such a warm, fuzzy feeling before. Maybe a couple times when I was doing some holiday things with my sister, growing up. But even then, I didn't think that the feelings had been quite so intense. And I wasn't sure what to do with these feelings, now that I was having them.

I laughed a little to myself, wondering if I was starting to grow soft. Maybe it had something to do with settling down and getting myself into a steady relationship.

A steady relationship. Renée.

I pulled out my phone, grimacing when I saw that I had three unread messages from her over the course of the evening. I'd been so busy with the game that I hadn't even noticed the thing going off each time. I'd been focused on something better.

"Work messages?" Lexi asked, having seen the look on my face change.

“Nah, it’s my girlfriend actually,” I told her. “She wants to meet up at some point, but I’m trying to keep her from coming back to the house while you and Emma are here. She doesn’t know about the two of you.”

“Why not?” Lexi asked curiously. “Is there some reason you’re hiding us from her?”

“I just think it would be better for everyone involved if she didn’t know about you,” I told her sternly. But seeing the look on her face, I sighed and relented. “I like Renée. A lot. But I also just don’t trust her.”

Lexi snorted derisively, as I might have expected she would. “She’s been your girlfriend for how long now?” she asked. “And you don’t trust her? I know every relationship is different, but if you can’t trust your girlfriend, she shouldn’t be your girlfriend.”

I groaned. “It’s not that simple,” I insisted. “You know that I’m rich, and you know that members of the press are always on the hunt for a scandal. Finding out that Seattle’s ‘Hottest Young Billionaire,’ or whatever they’re calling me these days, has a three-year-old daughter, and that his baby-momma is currently living with him? That would give them a field day. One that I’m eager to avoid, even if you’re not.”

“What does that have to do with Renée?” I asked.

“Renée and I don’t see eye to eye when it comes to the press,” I admitted. “She likes to be in the spotlight. And I sometimes think that she’ll do anything to get in the spotlight. If she knew that I had a daughter, I wouldn’t put it past her to spill the beans on that one. Or at least to use that as leverage against me.”

“Hmm,” was all Lexi said.

I didn't want to phrase it in so many words to Lexi, but I was trying to keep her safe. I didn't want to compromise her anonymity.

I was a good judge of character. You couldn't work in business like I did without being a good judge of character, I didn't think. Renée had a predatory spirit. I had known that since the day we met. It was one of the things that attracted me to her, to be honest. But I wasn't a fool, and I wasn't about to leave an opening for her. I shuddered to think of the kind of stunts she could pull, with knowledge of Lexi and Emma as ammunition.

"Well, I guess if you have a hard time trusting your girlfriends and find that lying to them is the best solution, then maybe it's no surprise that you have a difficult time holding down a steady relationship," Lexi said, surprising me with how snide she was.

I drew myself up to my full height. "At least I can keep a job and—"

"Wait," Lexi interrupted before I could go any further with my indignation. She ducked her head, biting her lower lip. "I'm sorry," she said, sounding sincere. "We just had a really nice night, and now I'm ruining it by escalating things. How you want to handle your relationships is none of my business. If you don't want to tell Renée about me, if you don't think it's a good idea for Renée to know about me, then I'll do my best to make sure that Renée doesn't find out about me." She paused, and I could tell that there was something else on the tip of her tongue.

"Go on, say whatever it is," I said.

"She came over here this afternoon. Renée. I answered the door. She wanted to know who I was, and Janice lied and said I was her niece, and

that Emma and I had come to stay with you for a little while because of some family troubles back home.”

I frowned at her, mulling over that new bit of information. Finally, I shook my head. It would do no good to dwell on that now. If there was any damage done, it was already done. “I always appreciate Janice’s quick thinking,” I said.

“Yeah,” Lexi said. She paused. “Seriously, thank you for spending some time with Emma. I can tell that she really likes you.”

“But?” I asked, wondering what she was holding back on now.

She shook her head, though. “There is no ’but,’” she said. “While you were on your business trip, I had a lot of time to think things over. For the past couple years, I’ve been just reacting. All I could do was worry about keeping a roof over our heads and food on our table. Once those worries were taken care of, for at least a little while, I was able to think of something else. And I think it would be really good for Emma to know her father. I only hope that you want to get to know her as well.”

I frowned, wondering where this was coming from. “So, you just woke up one morning and were like, hey, I think Emma should get to know her dad?” I asked dubiously.

She took a deep breath, rubbing her palms nervously against her jeans. “I had a difficult relationship with my father,” she finally admitted. “Things were strained. It wasn’t the best situation to be raised in. I’ve cut him out of my life at this point, but I still have all those feelings inside me. And when I look at Emma, I can only imagine what things might be like for her, if she has a father who is just like mine was.”

“And you think I’m just like he was,” I surmised, feeling surprisingly bitter about that.

“I don’t, actually,” Lexi said softly. “That’s the thing. The more I thought about it, the more I realized I’m only projecting my fears onto you. And that’s not very fair.”

I ruminated on that for a moment. “I didn’t have the best relationship with my own father,” I admitted at last. “Or with my mother, for that matter. Both cold, but in their different ways. The closest thing I had to family, growing up, was my sister Katherine.” I cleared my throat. “But I don’t want to be that guy, Lexi. I want to be better than them. I really want to try.”

“Okay,” Lexi said simply.

We sat there in silence. Finally, I laughed. “You’re going to have to forgive me, though. I’m still new at this. Where do I even get started?”

Lexi laughed as well. “Spending time with Emma is a great start,” she said. “I know you’re busy with work, but even if you could spend some time with her in the evenings, that would be a huge step in the right direction. She already likes you, but I want her to trust you, too. And maybe, once she trusts you some, we can go ahead and let her know that you’re her dad.”

“I am busy with work at the moment,” I agreed. “But this is important.” I frowned, thinking over my schedule for the next day. There was nothing critical, nothing that I couldn’t delegate. “Why don’t I make some time tomorrow, and we can do something together? Just you, me, and Emma.”

Lexi sighed. “Don’t go making promises that you can’t keep,” she said. “And spending time with Emma doesn’t count if you’re on the phone to work the whole time that you’re there.”