

# Read Billionaire Baby Daddy online free by Claire Adams

## Chapter One

Lexi

I pushed back from the computer for a moment, taking a deep breath as I stared out the window. At some point, the sky had gotten overcast, a perfect reflection of the turmoil that had been building within me over the course of the morning. Now, my presentation for Orinoco was almost finished, and I was practically vibrating from how nervous I was.

It wasn't as though Albright was asking me to sell our company to Orinoco, that was the thing. They were simply asking me to put on a presentation and to state the facts. That shouldn't make me this worried. But a buyout by Orinoco, this huge online retailer that was snapping up its competition piece by piece, was a huge deal for us.

As though summoned by my roiling thoughts, Chuck knocked on the edge of my doorframe. "How you doing, trooper?" he asked, using his nickname for me.

Most people in the building didn't make the trek over to my office very often, but Chuck always swung by with muffins or a bit of advice. At first, I'd thought he was hitting on me, but he'd never asked me out, and I'd come to accept that it was just him being friendly and welcoming to his coworkers. I appreciated that.

I rolled my eyes and gestured towards the computer screen. "Almost done with this thing, at least. Then I'll just have to present the thing without looking like a total idiot."

“I’m sure you’ll do fine,” Chuck said, smiling warmly at me. “Do they know who Orinoco is sending as its representatives?”

“That’s just it,” I groaned. “They’ve decided that this is too big an acquisition for them to send representatives. Instead, they’re sending none other than their CEO!”

“Andrew Goldwright is coming?” Chuck asked sharply, looking suddenly even more interested.

“Yeah,” I said miserably. “Do you know him?”

“I know of him,” Chuck said cautiously. He whistled lowly. “That’s big. Goldwright hardly ever deigns to talk to mere mortals. I wonder what it is about this deal that’s got him so interested.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” I said sarcastically. “Maybe something to do with the giant bonus that he’ll be taking home if he manages to merge our companies? You haven’t seen the numbers, maybe, but we’re talking big.”

“Hmm,” Chuck mused. “I still think it’s strange that he’s involved.”

“What do you know about him anyway?” I asked. “I’ve done a little bit of research, once we knew that he was coming, but I didn’t have time to do much in-depth digging. There seems to be a lot of anger around his rise to CEO, but I’m not really sure what the underlying cause is.”

“There’s a lot of mistrust there,” Chuck said, looking as though he was choosing his words carefully. “And I share in the distaste that some people have for him. Orinoco has a reputation for being a ruthless company, as I’m sure you’re aware, and Andrew Goldwright is viewed as just another of the guys in the company who have absolutely no moral

scruples. And beyond that, the guy's business sense leaves something to be desired."

"How so?" I asked. "I wasn't able to find any record of failed takeovers or scandals or anything else that we could use as leverage against them."

"Maybe not, but that doesn't mean there isn't a heady amount of nepotism at the core of the company," Chuck said grimly. "Goldwright only got his position because Daddy Goldwright was ready to retire to the Bahamas with some bimbo half his age. This all happened a few years ago when Goldwright Jr. was barely even out of business school."

"I read about all of that," I said, frowning. "But still, Andrew Goldwright has clearly had a positive impact on the company. Sure, his father created the company and made it a sizable player in the online retail industry. But it wouldn't be where it was today without the shrewd, and sometimes ruthless, tactics of the son."

"Maybe so, but underneath it all, I have a feeling that Goldwright is exactly what you'd expect from someone with his upbringing: a spoiled and petty brat. Some rude guy who would never have been able to cut it if he'd had to start at the bottom and schmooze his way up."

I grinned at Chuck. "Is that what you're doing here?" I asked teasingly. "Just trying to schmooze your way to the top?"

"Isn't that what we're all doing?" Chuck responded, his tone equally teasing. But then, his look turned serious again. "You know I'm here because Albright feels like a family," he said. "I chose this job because I interviewed with Melinda, and she made me feel like I would be a valuable asset to the company. Because she made me feel like she valued my time and valued me as an individual. I'm afraid we're going to lose

all of that, if Orinoco takes over.” He paused. “Scratch that, I know we’re going to lose all of that if Orinoco takes over.”

I shifted uncomfortably. “To be honest, I haven’t thought through what the buyout means for the company,” I admitted. “My job is just to give them the facts of it. It’s for my higher-ups to make the decisions on what’s best for the company.”

Chuck frowned. “It’s rare that a buyout doesn’t result in some sort of reorganization, and reorganization tends to mean that people lose their jobs.”

“True,” I agreed. “But I have a pretty specialized position as an insurance analyst. They can’t replace me with just anyone. And what’s more, there’s no real reason for them to want to replace me. I don’t get paid all that well, so it’s not like I’m sapping up company resources, and I do my job well and turn in my reports on time. That’s all they could be looking for, isn’t it?”

“It’s all about loyalty,” Chuck insisted. “Besides, you can’t tell me that you don’t like the relatively laid-back corporate culture that we currently have. Being able to wear whatever you want in the privacy of your office. Having an office where, for all your higher-ups know, you could be browsing social media all day. Knowing all your higher-ups by name and going out with them for drinks on Fridays. Things like that. None of that is going to exist with Orinoco.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because that’s not the way companies like that operate,” Chuck said, shaking his head. “I used to work for a company that was similar to

Orinoco in some respects. Very cutthroat. Every man for himself. It's not a fun place to come to work in the mornings. I can tell you that much."

I laughed. "Chuck, we work in an office. And sure, we may both love the people that we're working here with, and it might not be the harsh office environment that some companies promote, but at the same time, it's not all about fun. Do you honestly think Orinoco is going to change us that much? They probably won't even care what the company workplace is like, as long as we keep increasing our bottom line profits."

"I wouldn't be so sure." Chuck sighed. "As much as I'd like to believe that they won't care about anything more than the profits, I think that it's precisely because they care about the profits that they'll care about the company. They'll view it as modifying our work ethic. Streamlining things. Promoting company loyalty."

"Well, even if that eventually does happen, that's nothing that I need to worry about today," I said, wishing I could sound

as firm as I wanted to. "All I have to worry about today is giving this presentation and getting all the facts across."

"Watch out for Goldwright, though," Chuck advised.

I rolled my eyes. "Watch out for what?" I asked. "Sure, his business practices may be ruthless, but that's something for the supervisors to consider when they're thinking about the trade. It's not like he's going to get up in the middle of my presentation and do something. I'm more worried that I'm going to say something stupid or mess something up with one of my slides."

“Just, remember that Andrew Goldwright has something of a reputation,” Chuck said slowly, and from the look he was giving me, he was trying to hint at something more than the man’s business reputation.

I laughed. “Relax,” I said. “I appreciate your looking out for me, but I’m sure Andrew isn’t going to do anything that could jeopardize this takeover. He’s not stupid, no matter what you seem to believe.”

“I never said he was stupid,” Chuck muttered.

“Lacking in business sense, then, or whatever it was you said.” I smiled a little at him. “Chuck, don’t worry about me. I’m a big girl. I’m sure I can handle whatever it is that he throws at me. As long as he doesn’t ask me to stand on my head and recite the last ten years of tax returns or anything like that!”

“I doubt he’ll do that,” Chuck said, finally cracking a smile. “I’ll take you out to lunch afterward. How does that sound?”

“We’re having lunch catered in during the meeting,” I said apologetically. “But maybe we could get drinks later this week?”

“Sure, sure,” Chuck agreed. “Break a leg, trooper.”

I smiled and turned back toward my presentation. “Thanks,” I said, even though I was already typing in the final section of text.