

Read Billionaire Baby Daddy online free by Claire Adams

Chapter Sixteen

Andrew

I got stuck in a meeting at work, and I got to the café a little late. Fortunately, Katherine was still sitting there patiently, waiting for me to arrive. She stood up when I entered, putting her arms around me and giving me a quick kiss on the cheek.

“There’s my favorite brother,” she said warmly. “Got held up in a meeting?”

“Yeah,” I said, glad that she understood. “Things are nuts today since it’s my first day back.”

“Well, I’m glad that you could make time in that busy schedule to have lunch with me,” she said, grinning self-deprecatingly.

“Aww, come on. You know that I’ll always make time in my schedule for you.”

“I know,” she said. For all that she claimed to already know that, she looked happy to hear it, all the same. “How was Europe?”

“It was good,” I said. “Hey, I got you something.” I pulled out the small box that I had brought for her and watched as she opened it.

Her face lit up with glee when she saw the earrings. “Andy, these are gorgeous!” she said in surprise. “Did you really pick them out yourself?”

“I had a little help,” I admitted. “They’re made in Rome, by the sister of the guy who’s going to be heading up the Orinoco office there. She helped me pick out the best ones for you. These ones match your eyes.”

“They’re beautiful,” Katherine said. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” I said, smiling.

But my brain was running a mile a minute. Thinking of Alfonso, our main contact in Italy, had me thinking of the two logistical issues that I needed to run by the team back at the office. I’d forgotten about them that morning since we were mainly focusing on the London office at the moment, but I knew that if I continued to forget to mention them, they were never going to get resolved. Then, we’d try to launch the office in Rome, and everything would be a mess.

I rubbed absently at my temples, feeling a headache coming on.

“Whoa,” Katherine said, reaching out to lightly touch my arm. “Is everything all right?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Work’s just been busy. We never should have tried to expand to two different offices at once. We need the people, and we need the logistical aspects, warehouses in a couple different places to make shipping quicker, but everything is nuts at the moment.”

Katherine was quiet for a minute, her head cocked to the side as she considered that. “That’s not all of it though,” she said slowly. “You haven’t told me the whole story.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I’ve seen you stressed out over work before,” she said. “The fact that you haven’t run yourself into the ground yet is actually astounding to me.”

But this isn't just the normal work weariness." She paused. "You know you can tell me anything."

I gnawed at my lower lip. I knew that she was right. It was the stress of having Lexi and Emma at the house and of not knowing what to do about that situation. That was really getting to me. When it came to work matters, I knew what I was doing by now. Relationships, I didn't have a clue about, and children, I had even less of one.

I really wanted to tell Katherine about Lexi and Emma, but at the same time, I was the older brother. I shouldn't have been so irresponsible as to get my

self into this situation, and I didn't really want to tell my younger sister about it.

"It's just work things," I insisted, shaking my head. "I think I need to find a new secretary. Rachael just isn't her normal perky self anymore, and she's the face of our main office at a crucial time, so I really need her to give it her all."

"Maybe she's just as exhausted as you are," Katherine suggested, raising an eyebrow at me. "But come on, Andrew, I know that's not the whole story, either."

She wasn't going to let it go. And there was definitely a part of me that wanted to tell her about her niece.

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "A couple weeks ago, one of the women who I slept with showed up on my doorstep," I admitted.

Both of my sister's eyebrows shot up. "Really?" she asked. "Looking to rekindle that old flame?"

“No, she wasn’t alone,” I continued, tracing a pattern in the grain of the wooden table. “She was there with her daughter, Emma.” I paused and cleared my throat. “Our daughter. She was there with our daughter.”

Katherine stared at me. She shook her head. “You have a daughter?” she asked. “Emma. How old is she?”

“She’s three,” I said. “And Katie, you would love her. She’s so adorable.” I smiled a little, just thinking about her, but then I tried to school my expression back to neutral. I knew I couldn’t get too attached to her. Lexi hadn’t wanted me to be in Emma’s life to begin with, and I had to expect that as soon as she and Emma had their own place to live again, that would be the end of my interaction with the girl.

“To be honest, I’m not overly shocked to hear that you have a daughter,” Katherine said, stabbing at her salad. She chewed thoughtfully for a moment. “Actually, if I had to say anything, I’m surprised that something like this hasn’t come up sooner.” She grinned at me, and I snorted. “So, what did Renée have to say about it? Are you still with her, or are you getting back together with your baby-momma?”

“I haven’t told Renée about it yet,” I admitted. I rubbed my hands over my face. “There’s more to it than that.”

“Go on,” Katherine said cautiously. Then, she smirked. “Don’t tell me you have twin daughters.”

“Oh god, no.” I couldn’t even imagine. “Lexi only came to me with Emma because she’s been unemployed for ages and doesn’t have any money at the moment. They’ve been staying in one of my guest rooms. I’ve been trying to think up some sort of solution, but I don’t know what to do. I think I’m just going to write Lexi a big check, enough to cover their living expenses and college for Emma and whatever else they could need. And then just forget about the whole thing.”

Katherine stared at me. “You’re joking, right?” she asked. But when she didn’t see any signs in my face that I was, indeed joking, she sighed. “Oh, Andy,” she said, reaching out to pat my hand. “You know you can’t do that. Even if you and Lexi don’t want to rekindle your relationship, you can’t do that to Emma. You should have some sort of relationship with your daughter. Even if it’s just the ‘send a Christmas card once a year’ relationship.”

“You want me to be like Mom was to us?” I asked bitterly.

“No,” Katherine said quietly. “I want you to be better than who Mom was to us. And better than Dad was to us as well.” She was silent for a moment, clearly choosing her words carefully. “If nothing else, though, Emma has Goldwright blood in her veins, and that has to count for something. She’s your firstborn child. She technically could inherit the empire that you’ve made Orinoco into, when you choose to retire. Doesn’t that, at least, matter to you?”

I didn’t know how to answer that.

“Anyway,” Katherine forged on. “I think spending time with Emma might do you some good. Maybe you’ll loosen up a little. Stop working yourself to death. We can only hope.” Her eyes looked sad. “Despite your material success, I can tell you’re not really happy. And that hurts me, to have to see that.”

“I am happy,” I said defensively. But I knew she wasn’t buying it. “Well, maybe I’m not so happy right now. I’ve had to make a lot of sacrifices to get to where I am now. You know that. I’ve had to defer my chances at happiness for the time being. But it’ll all be worth it, one day. I have the satisfaction of knowing that I’ve made Orinoco into an empire in the online retail business. We’re opening offices in multiple countries as we

“speak, and that’s way more than Dad ever managed to accomplish with the business.”

“But don’t you think it’s pointless to have all that wealth if you’re just making yourself miserable?” Katherine asked. “And where do you draw the line? You’ve already got over a billion dollars, plenty for you to live on for the rest of your life. Plenty for you, and me, and Lexi, and Emma, and your future wife and other future kids to live on. You don’t have to worry about that. So why not cut back on the work and start living a little?”

“It’s not like I don’t like the work,” I protested. “Most people hate their jobs. I love mine. At least I have that, even if it doesn’t leave me time for much else.”

Katherine continued to stare at me, and at that moment, it felt as though she could see right through me, right into my soul. We had grown up together, and we’d always been close. She probably knew me better than I knew myself. So her words, when she spoke again, carried a lot of weight.

“You can’t just throw money at the problem and make it go away,” she said softly. “Even if you write Lexi that big check and get them out of your life for good, now that you know about Emma, she’s never really going to be out of your life for good. You’re always going to wonder what’s happened to her. You’re always going to imagine that you’re seeing her as you walk down the street, or when you’re looking at an application for a position at your office. You won’t be able to forget about her, no matter how much you think you might like to.”

“So, what am I supposed to do then?” I asked, my voice raw with emotion.

Katherine sighed. "I can't answer that question for you, not really," she said. "All I can say is that for now, you need to take things slowly. You have Lexi and Emma staying at your house. Take the time to get to know the girl. Maybe you'll find that being a father isn't as disagreeable as you imagine it to be."

"I will get to know her," I said. "I'm already trying to get to know her, at least a little. I brought her back a stuffed animal from London, a sloth."

Katherine laughed, no doubt remembering her own stuffed sloth, which she had refused to part with for the better part of her childhood. She smiled warmly at me. "You did a good job raising me," she said. "I'm sure you'll do a great job with Emma as well."

I smiled at her, trying not to let my inner turmoil show. I was feeling more confused than I had even before this lunch. What was Katherine really suggesting; that I keep Lexi and Emma at my house with no end date in sight? I couldn't do that, especially not with Renée in the picture. Katherine had to realize that.

But I also knew that my sister was right. While Lexi and Emma were there in my house, I had to make a point of getting to know my daughter. Otherwise, when they left, it would be all too easy for Lexi to refuse to let me see the girl.

If Emma didn't remember who I was, if she didn't care to see me, it would be easy for her mother to refuse to let me see her. And even though I had threatened Lexi with litigation when she first showed up on my porch asking for money, I didn't actually want to take her to court. Things would only get messy that way.

My phone buzzed with a text, and I looked at it, hoping it wasn't something from work. Instead, it was almost worse than that: it was a message from Renée, asking to meet up with me for dinner that evening.

I barely refrained from rolling my eyes. "Just a minute," I muttered to Katherine. I typed out a quick, curt reply to Renée, telling her that I was still exhausted and jetlagged but that I'd see her sometime that weekend.

"Who was that?" Katherine asked as I pocketed my phone again.

"Just Renée," I said, shrugging as nonchalantly as I could. We'd already had one difficult conversation over lunch. I wasn't prepared to have another.

Fortunately, Katherine seemed to read my mood, and she didn't press it. Instead, she reached out and put her hand on my arm again. "Hey, by the way, I forgot to say this before," she said. "Congratulations on being a dad."

I couldn't help but smile at that.