

Read Billionaire Baby Daddy online free by Claire Adams

Chapter Seventeen

Lexi

I frowned dubiously at the directions, wondering if this was really a suitable game for a three-year-old like the box said.

“Trust me,” Janice said. “I’ve used it with young kids before, and they all loved it. I’m sure Emma will as well.”

“If you say so,” I said, shaking my head. I unfolded myself from the carpet, where Janice and I had been laying out the game and getting it all set up. I found Emma in the bedroom, standing up in her newly-assembled crib. She reached towards me with grabby hands, still looking sleepy.

I smiled at her and hoisted her into my arms. “Hello, sweetie,” I said, smoothing down her hair. “Did you have a nice nap?”

“Nuh uh,” Emma said, shaking her head. “I don’t like naps.”

“I know you don’t, but naps are good for you,” I said. “They’ll make you grow up big and strong.”

“You don’t have to take naps,” she said, frowning at me.

I laughed. “If I got any bigger than I am, I’d be taller than Daddy!” As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I regretted saying them, but Emma latched onto them faster than I could backpedal.

Her whole face scrunched up in confusion as she thought that through. “Who’s Daddy?” she asked.

I frantically cast around for some way to deflect that. “I am not your Daddy,” I finally settled on. “And neither is Janice. But you know what? Janice brought a really fun game with her today, and we were hoping that you would play it with us.”

“A game, a game!” Emma cheered, wriggling so that I would put her down. Then she raced into the living room where J

anice was patiently waiting for her. I followed more sedately after her and listened as Janice explained the rules.

We had eaten dinner and played more than a few rounds of the game when Andrew arrived home from work. I could hear him stomping around in the front hall for a couple minutes, and then he came into the living room, leaning against the wall and watching us play.

“I’m winning!” Emma announced proudly when she saw his eyes on us. “I’m the best at games.”

I shook my head fondly at her and rolled the dice.

“Can I play?” Andrew asked, coming hesitantly closer to us and crouching down next to Emma.

“Of course, you can,” Janice said quickly. “Why don’t you take my spot, and I’ll go start cleaning the dishes from dinner? There’s a whole mess going in the kitchen at the moment, and I’d like to get it sorted out before I go home for the night, rather than leaving it for the morning.”

“That sounds like a plan,” Andrew said. “But I’m afraid you’re going to have to teach me how to play, Emma.”

“First, you roll the dices, like this. And then...”

I listened to her rattle off rules to her father, and I couldn't help smiling as I watched the two of them. But I couldn't stop wondering what Andrew's ploy was. Did he think he could sweeten me up and then dump more horrible news on me?

The worst thing that I could think of was that he was trying to get Emma to trust him so that he could then take me to court and win sole custody of the girl. I knew that was ridiculous. From everything that Andrew had said so far, he didn't want to have responsibility for the girl, let alone have sole responsibility for her. But I couldn't help thinking about what he'd said that first night that we'd spent together, about how his father had groomed him from a young age to take over the family business.

Maybe Andrew, after a long business trip, was starting to think about the future of Orinoco. And maybe he envisioned Emma as the future of that company.

I swallowed hard, trying to get myself to relax a little as we continued to play.

“I am horrible at this game,” Andrew commented a little while later.

“Yes,” Emma agreed solemnly, nodding her head and causing both of us adults to laugh.

“Your mother seems to have all the luck,” Andrew continued, smiling stiffly over at me. “She's winning!”

“That's cause Mama's the best!” Emma said. She abandoned the game and crawled into my lap, giving me a big hug that I just had to return.

“Hey sweetie,” I said down to her. “Want to go see if Janice needs help in the kitchen?”

“Okay!” Emma cried, and then she was off, racing towards the kitchen. I was sure she would be in the way more than she would actually be helpful, but I knew Janice wouldn’t mind. And my curiosity was killing me. I needed to know what card Andrew had up his sleeve. It was strange for him to be so suddenly cheerful.

Andrew laughed and started to pick up the game. “That was fun,” he said.

“Yeah, it was,” I agreed slowly, still wondering what the catch was. But whatever he was thinking, whatever he was planning, it wasn’t forthcoming just yet. “How was work today?” I finally asked, when the silence became unbearable.

“It was work,” Andrew said, shrugging his shoulders. “Busy. It’s my first day back after being gone for all of last week, so of course there was plenty to talk about with a million different people.”

“Sounds interesting,” I said lamely, even though it sounded like nothing of the sort.

Andrew hummed. “I snuck away for lunch with my sister, though.”

“Oh, really?” I asked. “How did that go?”

I practically buzzed with nervousness, waiting to hear about lunch with his sister. From the casual way that he had brought it up, I could tell that this whole game-playing thing stemmed from that. But I didn’t know what she could have said to him to make him change so drastically.

He had been avoiding me when he had left for the office that morning, and now he was being positively friendly towards me. He was still a bit stiff, maybe, but the fact that he had played the game with us definitely scored him some brownie points in my book.

For the first time, I could see the hint of something beneath the stern businessman that he usually projected.

“I told Katherine about you and Emma,” Andrew said, drawing me back to our current conversation. “I figured I owed it to her to let her know that she was an aunt.” He cleared his throat. “To be honest, I wasn’t planning on telling her, but she could tell that I was stressed out about something, and she also seemed to know that it wasn’t just work things, so eventually, I had no choice but to fess up. We haven’t set a date for her to meet Emma, but I was hoping that that could happen. At some point.”

I frowned, trying to sort out how I felt about that little bombshell.

“Emma doesn’t even know that you’re her father yet,” I pointed out.

I felt irrationally disappointed to find out that his playing the game with us that night really was just because he wanted to sweeten me up for something. And furthermore, as much as I wanted to like this sister of his, if she was anything like her brother, the last thing that I needed was two cold Goldwrights hanging around Emma.

Then again, it was still a nice evening, all things considered. Maybe I should just be happy with that, and stop, as Misty had told me, looking for trouble where there was none. Anyway, Emma was his daughter, too, and Katherine’s niece, just as Andrew had reminded me. It wouldn’t be fair for me to say that Emma couldn’t meet her aunt, no matter what my personal feelings were on the matter.

That was why we were there, in Andrew's house. It was all for Emma's sake. I had to do what was best for her, and giving her the biggest, most loving family that I could muster was what was best for her.

I nodded at Andrew, but before I could respond verbally, Emma came back out into the living room, dragging her feet and her head hanging down. "Janice said I had to come say goodnight," she said, pouting cutely.

"That Janice," Andrew said, his grin a mile wide as he shook his head. He held open his arms to the girl, and Emma rushed at him, flinging herself at him. He caught her easily, holding her close and peppering her face with noisy kisses. "Good night," he told her eventually.

She couldn't stop giggling for almost a full minute. "Good night," she finally managed to say. She solemnly came over to me. "Mama, are you sure I have to go to bed now?" she asked. "Big girls get to stay up later."

"That they do," I agreed, just as solemnly. "How about this? If you're a good girl all week, maybe you can stay up late one night this weekend. We'll watch a movie and have some popcorn. How does that sound?"

"Yay!" Emma said delightedly, clapping her hands together. She gave me a big kiss and then waited for me to pick her up.

I carried her upstairs to our room so that I could put her down in her crib. To my surprise, Andrew followed after me.

"This big girl is almost too big for a crib, isn't she?" he asked.

Emma nodded her head, but as soon as she saw her crib, I could tell that she started to get sleepy. I hid a smile as I lay her down and tucked her in.

“Can I have a bedtime story, Mr. Goldwright?” Emma asked sleepily.

Andrew gave me a worried look but then took a step forwards. “Uh, sure,” he said. “Once upon a time, there was a little girl. She was a princess. There was a little princess. And she had a pet penguin...”

Fortunately, Andrew had only made it a couple paragraphs into whatever strange story he was telling before Emma was soundly asleep, snoring softly, her breathing heavy.

I smiled at her and put a hand on Andrew’s shoulder, steering him out of the room, flicking the lights off as we went.