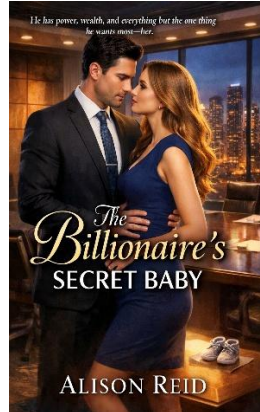


The Billionaire's Secret Baby

by Alison Reid



Adrian sat at the small conference table in his office, jacket off, sleeves rolled neatly to his forearms. Across from him, Heidi sat with her tablet, posture as precise as ever, though the edges of her expression had softened.

They were knee-deep in the Q4 projections, cross-checking variables, debating strategies. But the atmosphere was different today—lighter somehow.

Adrian felt it.

Relief had been a quiet companion all morning. The kind that didn't shout but whispered: you did the right thing.

He'd made the call. The papers were on their way. And every breath since had felt a little easier.

Heidi glanced up from a note and arched a brow. "You really think the board won't flinch at that much deviation from last quarter?"

"They'll flinch," Adrian said with a dry smile. "But they'll get over it once the returns hit."

Heidi laughed softly, shaking her head. "Arrogant and right. Dangerous combination."

Adrian leaned back slightly, mirroring her smile. “You say that like it’s a bad thing.”

Just then, the office door flew open with a crack.

Cleo.

Her heels struck the floor like gunshots. Designer coat slung carelessly over one arm; sunglasses still perched on her head like a crown. Her lips were twisted into a venomous smile as her eyes landed on Heidi.

“So,” she said, voice like acid. “This is the tart you’re leaving me for?”

Heidi’s smile vanished in an instant, her body going still. She didn’t speak—but her eyes lifted to Adrian’s, guarded and unreadable.

Adrian stood sharply. “Enough, Cleo. Get out. I’m having a meeting with my CFO.”

Cleo laughed, bitter and theatrical. “Oh, CFO, is that what we’re calling it now?”

“I will not do this with you here,” Adrian said, voice firm, low. “Leave. Now.”

“I will not,” Cleo snapped, stepping further into the room like she owned it. Her gaze stayed glued to Heidi, dripping with disdain. “I don’t want a divorce. I’ll fight you. I’ll drag it out for years if I have to.”

Adrian’s eyes locked onto hers, his voice steady—dangerously calm. “I don’t think that’s wise, Cleo. Because if you push this... I’ll make sure everyone knows you faked a pregnancy to trap me into marrying you.”

Cleo’s mouth dropped open in theatrical offense. “I didn’t fake it.”

“Really?” Adrian said, his voice deceptively calm as he lifted an eyebrow. “How exactly does someone get pregnant six months after a tubal ligation?”

Heidi’s head snapped up, her eyes wide. She looked between them, startled. Adrian wasn’t joking.

The silence hung thick for a moment.

Heidi began to rise from her seat, her spine straightening, chin tilting slightly in quiet resolve. Her professionalism wrapped around her like armour. “I’ll give you both a moment,” she said evenly.

“No,” Adrian said, turning toward her. His hand came to rest on her shoulder—firm but gentle, deliberate. “Stay.”

His voice wasn’t loud. But it carried weight.

Heidi froze, eyes lifting to his. And for a breathless moment, something passed between them. Not just understanding—but solidarity. Trust.

Cleo blinked, thrown by the gesture. For the first time, she faltered.

“I... I didn’t... I never did that,” she stammered, her usual poise fraying at the edges.

“I have the medical report. You did it eighteen months ago. And you claimed to be pregnant twelve months ago.” He let the silence stretch, each word sinking in like a stone. “So no, Cleo. You were never pregnant. You never lost a baby. You just lied. And let me grieve something that didn’t exist.”

She faltered, the colour draining from her face.

“You want me to walk away with nothing?” she whispered.

“You deserve nothing,” Adrian said, ice in his voice, “after all the lies you’ve told. But you might still get something—if you don’t make this ugly.”

Cleo’s expression shifted like a flicked switch. She moved closer, slowly, her voice dipping into a sultry register. She placed her hands on his chest like a plea wrapped in seduction. “Adrian... we can work this out. You’re just upset.”

He peeled her hands off him with a grimace of disgust. “Get out, Cleo. We are done.”

Her composure crumbled. “I don’t care what you say. I will fight this.”

Adrian exhaled, steadying himself. Then he shifted tone—pragmatic, cool. “You’re not entitled to anything. But if you walk away quietly, I’ll offer you a settlement. Nothing extravagant. Just enough to move on with some dignity.”

That made her pause. Her chin lifted a fraction, eyes narrowing with suspicion. “You’re bluffing,” she said slowly. “You wouldn’t actually tell people.”

“I would,” Adrian replied, voice like steel. “And I will. Try me.”

Her expression twisted. “All you ever cared about was that damn baby.”

“I cared because you knew how much I wanted to be a father,” he said, jaw tightening. “And you used that knowledge to trap me.”

Cleo said nothing. But the fire in her eyes wavered, the certainty beginning to crumble.

Then, with a sharp pivot, she turned on her heel and stormed out—the door snapping shut behind her like the crack of a gavel.

Adrian stood motionless for a long moment, his jaw tight, his hands curled into fists at his sides. The room still crackled with the remnants of Cleo’s venom.

He finally turned, his gaze finding Heidi. She hadn’t said a word—hadn’t moved—but her eyes were wide, her expression unreadable.

“I’m sorry,” Adrian said quietly. “She had no right to speak to you like that.”

Heidi shook her head once, slowly. “I’m fine. Are you okay?”

His lips lifted in a wry, tired half-smile. “I will be.”

Heidi didn’t press. But the way she looked at him—steady, searching—made it clear she wasn’t just asking to be polite.

Adrian sat down again, the weight of the confrontation settling in his bones. Across the table, Heidi still hadn't touched her tablet. The air between them felt different now.

Charged.

Quiet, but not empty.

“Do you want to leave this for another time?” she asked gently, nodding toward the Q4 projections.

Adrian exhaled slowly, rubbing a hand across the back of his neck. “You must think I'm an idiot.”

Her brow lifted, surprised. “Why would I think that?”

“Because I fell for her lies.”

Heidi's voice was steady, kind—but firm. “An idiot is the last word I'd use to describe you. You believed someone you trusted. That doesn't make you foolish, Adrian. It makes you human. And her...” She hesitated just briefly. “It makes her a manipulator.”

Adrian's mouth curved—not quite a smile, but something close. Tired. Grateful. “You're a good person, Heidi.”

She gave him a soft look—one that didn't try to fix, explain, or excuse.

She just saw him.

“You are too,” she said quietly. “Even if you don't feel like it right now.”

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