



The Billionaire's Daddy Test (Billionaires and Babies)

By Charlene Sands

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Editorial Review

Review

"Sands captures the emotional aspects of being vulnerable and risking your heart, allowing her readers to connect with her characters while showing the balance required to raise a baby in a loving atmosphere." --*RT Book Reviews* (4 stars)

About the Author

Charlene Sands is a USA Today bestselling author of 35 contemporary and historical romances. She's been honored with The National Readers' Choice Award, Booksellers Best Award and Cataromance Reviewer's Choice Award. She loves babies, chocolate and thrilling love stories. Take a peek at her bold, sexy heroes and *real good men!* www.charlenesands.com and Facebook

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Adam Chase had a right to know his baby daughter.

Mia couldn't deny that, but her heart still bled as if a dozen knives were piercing her. Darn her conscience for leading her to Moonlight Beach this morning. Her toes sifted through sand as she walked along the shoreline, flip-flops in hand. It was cooler than she'd expected; the fog flowing in from the sea coated the bright beach with a layer of gloom. Was it an omen? Had she made the wrong choice in coming here today? The image of Rose's innocent little face popped into her mind. Sweet Cheeks, she called her, because she had the rosiest cheeks of any baby Mia had ever seen. Her lips were perfectly pink, and when she'd smiled her first little baby smile, Mia had melted.

Rose was all Mia had left of her sister, Anna.

Mia shifted her gaze to the ocean. Just as she'd hoped, she spotted a male figure swimming way beyond the breaking waves hitting the shore. He was doing laps as if there were roped-off columns keeping him on point. If the scant research she'd found was anything to go by, it was surely him. Adam Chase, world-class architect, lived at the beach, was a recluse by nature and an avid swimmer. It only made sense he'd do his daily laps early, before the beach was populated.

A breeze lifted her hair, and goose bumps erupted on her arms. She shivered, partly from the cold, but also because what she came here to do was monumental. She'd have to be made of stone not to be frightened right now.

She didn't know what she'd say to him. She'd rehearsed a thousand and one lines, but never once had she practiced the truth.

With another glance at the water, she spotted him swimming in. Her throat tightened. It was time for the show, whatever that was. Mia was good at thinking on her feet. She calculated her steps carefully, so she'd intersect with him on the sand. Her hair lifted in the breeze, and another shiver racked her body. He stopped swimming and rose up from the shallow water, his shoulders broad as a Viking's. Her heart thumped a little faster. He came forward in long smooth strides. She scanned his iron chest, rippled with muscle—all that grace and power. The few pictures she'd found in her research hadn't done him justice. He was out-and-out beautiful in a godly way and so very tall.

He shook his head, and the sun-streaked tendrils of his hair rained droplets down along his shoulders.

"Ow!" Something pricked her foot from underneath. Pain slashed the soft pad and a sharp sting burned. She grabbed her foot and plunked down in the sand. Blood spurted out instantly. Gently, she brushed the sticky sand away and gasped when she saw the damage. Her foot was cut, slashed by a broken beer bottle she spied sticking out of the earth like a mini-skyscraper. If she hadn't been gawking...

"Are you hurt?" The deep voice reverberated in her ears, and she lifted her eyes to Adam Chase's concerned face.

"Oh, uh." She nodded. "Yes. I'm cut."

"Damn kids," he said, glancing at the broken bottle. He took her hand and placed it on the bridge of her foot. "Put pressure here and hang on a sec. I'll be right back."

"Th-thanks."

She applied pressure, squeezing her foot tight. It began to feel a little better, and the stinging dissipated. She glimpsed Adam as he jogged away. Her rescuer was just as appealing from the backside. Tanned legs, perfect butt and a strong back. She sighed. It was hardly the way she'd hoped to meet the very private Adam Chase, but it would have to do.

He returned a few seconds later holding a navy-blue-and-white beach towel. He knelt by her side. "Okay, I'm going to wrap it. That should stop the bleeding."

A huge wave crashed onto the shore, and water washed over her thighs. Adam noticed, his gaze darting through amazingly long lashes and roving over her legs. A warm rush of heat entered her belly. She wore white cotton shorts and a turquoise tank top. She'd wanted to appear like any other beachgoer taking a leisurely morning stroll along the water's edge, when in fact she'd deliberated over what to wear this morning for thirty minutes.

Now Adam Chase was touching her cautiously. His head down and a few strands of hair falling on his forehead, he performed the task as if it were an everyday occurrence. She had to admire him. "You seem to know what you're doing."

"Three years lifeguarding will do that to you." He glanced up and smiled, flashing a beautiful set of white teeth. That smile buoyed her spirit a little. "I'm Adam," he said. "Mia."

"Nice to meet you, Mia."

"Uh, same here."

He finished his work, and her foot was tied tightly but with an excess of material hanging down. She'd never be able to walk away with any dignity. The makeshift tourniquet was ugly and cumbersome, but it seemed to do the trick. The bleeding was contained.

"Do you live close by?" he asked.

"Not really. I thought I'd go for a stroll along the beach this morning."

"Do you have any beach gear?"

She nodded. "It's about a mile up the beach." She pointed north. "That way."

Adam sat up on his knees and peered down at her, rubbing the back of his neck. "You really should have that cleaned and bandaged right away. It's a sizable gash."

She shivered. "Okay."

The water crept up to their legs again.

Adam frowned and glanced at her encumbered foot.

Pushing off from the sand, she tried to rise. "Oh!" Putting her weight on her foot burned like crazy. She bit her lip to keep from crying out any more and lowered herself back down onto the sand.

Adam's eyes softened. "Listen, I know we've just met, but I live right over there." He gestured to the biggest modern mansion on the beach. "I promise you, I'm not a serial killer or anything, but I have antiseptic and bandages in my house, and I can have you patched up pretty quickly."

Mia glanced around. No one else was on the beach. Wasn't this what she'd wanted? A chance to get to know Adam Chase? She knew darn well he wasn't a serial killer. All she knew was that he liked his privacy, he didn't go out much and—most important of all—he was Rose's father.

She could write volumes about what she didn't know about Adam Chase. And that's exactly why she'd come here—to find out what kind of man he truly was.

Rose's future was riding on it.

"I guess that would be okay."

Come to think of it, no one knew where she was today. Rose was with her great-grandmother. If Adam did have evil on his mind, it would be a long time before anyone came looking...

The mountain of a man scooped her up, and she gasped. *Pay attention, Mia.* Her pulse sped as he nestled her into his chest. His arms secure about her body, he began to carry her away from the water's edge. On instinct, she roped her arms around his neck. Water drops remained on his shoulders, cooling his skin where her hands entwined.

"Comfy?" A wry smile pulled at his lips.

Speechless, she nodded and gazed into his eyes. There were steely flecks layered over gray irises, soulful shadows and as mysterious as a deep water well. Oddly, she didn't feel uncomfy in his arms, even though they were complete strangers.

"Good. Couldn't think of a faster way to get you to the house."

"Thank you?" she squeaked.

He didn't respond, keeping his eyes straight ahead. She relaxed a little until her foot throbbed. Little jabs of pain wound all around the bottom of her foot. She stifled a shriek when a few bright red drops of blood seeped from the towel onto the sand.

"Does it hurt?" he asked.

"Yes, this *is*...*awful*" She barely got the word out. Adam Chase or not, she wanted to crawl into a hole. What a way to meet a man. Any minute now, she'd probably bleed all over his gorgeous house.

"Awful?" He seemed to take exception with that. She wasn't complaining about his sudden caveman move, how he'd plucked her into his arms so easily. No, that part had been, well, amazing. But she felt like a helpless wounded animal. She couldn't even stand on her own two feet.

"Embarrassing," she muttered.

"No need to be embarrassed."

His stride was long and smooth as he moved over the sand toward his mansion. Up close, the detail of his craft showed in the trim of wide expansive windows, the texture of the stucco, the unique decorative double glass doors and the liberating feel of an outdoor living space facing the ocean—a billionaire's version of a veranda. Fireplaces, sitting areas with circular couches, overhead beams and stone floors all made up the outskirts of his house. The veranda was twice the size of her little Santa Monica apartment, and that was only a fraction of what she could see. Inside must be magnificent.

"Here we are," he said, steps away from the dream house.

"Uh, do you think we could stay out here?" She pointed to the enormous outside patio.

He blinked, those dark gray eyes twinkling. "Sure. If you feel safer outside."

"Oh no, it's not that."

His perfectly formed eyebrows arched upward. "No?"

"I don't want to ruin your carpeting or anything." Lord knew, she made a decent living at First Clips, but if she destroyed something in the mansion, it could take years to pay off a replacement.

"My carpet?" His smile could melt Mount Shasta. "There's not a shred of carpet in the house. I promise to keep you away from any rugs lying about."

"Oh, uh. Fine then."

He moved through the front doors easily and entered a massive foyer, where inlaid marble and intricate stone patterns led to a winding staircase. She gulped at the tasteful opulence. She clamped her mouth shut and held back a sigh from her lips. Was it the unexpected nuances she found in his stunning home, or was it the man himself who caused such a flurry in the pit of her stomach? His size commanded attention, the breadth of his shoulders, the bronze tone of his skin and, yes, the fact that he was shirtless and wet, his moisture clinging to her own clothes, his hands gripping the backs of her thighs.

A thrill ran through her, overriding her embarrassment.

He began to climb the stairs.

"Where are we going?" Up to his lair?

"The first aid supplies are in my bathroom. Mary is out shopping, or I'd have her go get them for us."

"Mary? Your girlfriend?"

His gaze slipped over to her. "My housekeeper."

"Oh." *Of course.*

"Have you lived here long?" She needed lessons in small talk.

"Long enough."

"The house is beautiful. Did you decorate it yourself?"

"I had some help."

Evasive but not rude. "I'm sorry about this. You probably have better things to do than play nursemaid to me."

"Like I said, I have mad lifeguarding skills." Yes. Yes, he did.

Adam set the woman down on the bathroom counter. Long black lashes lifted and almond-shaped eyes, green as a spring meadow, followed his every movement. From what he could tell, she didn't have an ounce of makeup on her face. She didn't need it. Her beauty seemed natural, her face delicately sculpted, glowing in warm tones. Her mouth was shaped like a heart in the most subtle way, and her skin was soft as butter. His palms still tingled from holding the underside of her thighs as he'd lifted her off the hot sand. "Here we go. Just let me get a shirt and my glasses."

He grabbed the first shirt he found in his bedroom drawer and then came up with a pair of wire-rimmed glasses. Next he selected the medical supplies he'd need out of a closet in his bathroom. He found what he needed easily: gauze, peroxide, antibacterial cream. When it came to keeping things organized, he was meticulous. It was the way he rolled, and he'd taken more than a fair share of heat about it from everyone who knew him. That aside, he'd bet he'd shock his college pals if they saw the worn, tattered and faded to ghost-blue UCLA Bruin T-shirt he'd just thrown on. Adam almost cracked a smile. It was so unlike him; yet once a Bruin, always a Bruin. He wouldn't part with his shirt. He set his glasses onto the bridge of his nose. "Okay. Here goes. Ready?"

She nodded. "Go ahead."

Gently, he unwound the towel from her foot. "I want to take a better look at that gash."

"You're really nice for doing this," she said softly.

"Hmm."

"What kind of work do you do?" she asked.

He didn't take his eyes off her foot. It was small and delicate, and he was careful with her, surveying the damage and elevating the heel. "Uh, I'm self-employed."

"It's just that, well, this house is magnificent."

"Thank you."

"Is it just you and Mary living here?"

"Sometimes. Mia, do you think you could swivel the rest of your body up on the counter, near the sink, so I can see the foot a little better?"

"I think so." Holding the heel of her foot, he helped guide her legs onto the counter. She had to scoot back and pivot a bit until she filled half the length of the long cocoa marble commode. She couldn't be more than five foot five. Her foot hovered over the sink.

A tank top and white shorts showed off her sun-kissed body. Her legs were long and lean like a dancer's. Seeing her sprawled out before him, the entire Mia package was first-class gorgeous. He caught himself staring at her reflection. *Focus, Adam. Be a Good Samaritan.*

"So you went to UCLA?" she asked.

"Yeah. Undergrad." He stroked his chin and hesitated, staring at her foot. It had been years since his lifeguarding days. He'd never had qualms about giving first aid before. He'd done it a hundred times, including giving CPR to a man in his sixties. That hadn't been fun, but the man had survived and, years later, gratefully commissioned Adam to design a resort home on the French Riviera. It had been one of his first big architectural projects. But this was different somehow, with Mia, the beauty who had landed at his feet on the beach.

"Adam?"

He looked at her. A fleeting thought entered his head. For a woman in distress, she sure asked a lot of questions. It wouldn't be the first time someone tried an unorthodox way to interview him. But surely not Mia. Her foot was slashed pretty badly. Some women liked to talk when they were nervous. Did he make her nervous?

"Is it okay if I wash your foot?"

Her lovely olive complexion colored, and a flash of hesitation entered her eyes. "Do you have a foot fetish or anything?"

He grinned. Maybe he did make her nervous. "Nope. No fetishes at all."

She made a little noise when she inhaled. "Good to know. Okay."

He filled the sink with warm water. "Let me know if it hurts."

She nodded, squeezed her eyes shut and clenched her legs.

"Try to relax, Mia."

Her expression softened, and she opened her eyes. He rotated her slim ankle over the sink with one hand and splashed warm water onto her foot. Using a dollop of antibacterial liquid soap, he cleansed the area thoroughly with a soft washcloth. Heat rose up his neck. It was about as intimate as he'd been with a woman in months, and Mia, with her cotton-candy-pink toenails, endless legs and beautiful face was 100 percent woman. "The good news is, the bleeding has stopped."

"Wonderful. Now I can stop worrying about destroying your furniture."

"Is that what you're worried about?" He furrowed his brow.

"After the foot fetish thing, yes."

He shook his head and fought the smile trying to break his concentration. Not too many people made him smile, and Mia had already done that several times. "You can stop worrying. I don't think you'll need stitches either. Luckily, the gash isn't as deep as it looked. It's long, though, and it might be painful for you to walk on for a day or two. You can have a doctor take a look, just to make sure." She said nothing.

He dabbed the cut with peroxide, and bubbles clustered up. Next he lathered her wound with antibiotic cream.

"How're you doing?" He lifted his head, and her face was there, so close, obviously watching his ministrations. Their eyes met, and he swallowed hard. He could swim a mile in her pretty green eyes.

She took a second to answer. "I'm, uh, doing well."

It was quiet in the house, just the two of them, Adam's hand clamping her ankle gently. "That's...good. I'll be done in a second." He cleared his throat and picked up the bandages. "I'm going to wrap this kind of tight."

He caught Mia glancing at his left hand, focusing on his ring finger, as in no white tan lines, and then her lips curled up. "I'm ready."

Suddenly, he'd never been happier that he was romantically unattached than right at that moment.

Users Review

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