

# Baby Daddy

## By Frances Moloney

‘Aren’t you going to get out?’ I asked.

The car had ground to a halt and Mum sat, both hands clutching the steering wheel, eyes fixed straight ahead, as she watched the doddering man in the middle of the road struggling to pick up his shopping. On a normal day, Mum would have parked the car, got out and helped him, but today wasn’t an ordinary day.

Mum put the car into reverse and Noah started to cry as it shot backwards with a violent lurch. She swung it round in a tight circle and for a moment my heart soared. I thought she had changed her mind, that we were going to take him home, but then she indicated left instead of right and my heart sank into the depths of my belly where it lay with the curdling christening cake.

‘I told you we shouldn’t have taken him.’ I argued. ‘It’s not too late to turn round.’

‘He’s your baby too,’ Mum hissed. ‘Why shouldn’t I get to spend time with my own grandson?’

‘You can’t just steal a baby.’ My voiced was raised, which Mum would usually tell me off for, but now the tables had turned. I was the one trying to reason with her.

‘We haven’t stolen him. He was upset... and we’re just... taking him out for a drive. Of course, we’re going to return him.’

A message from Diane flashed up on the screen of my phone. ‘Where are you? What’s going on? What have you done?’

‘Should we take him back then?’ Mum snapped.

I knew it was a loaded question. Of course, we should take him back, kidnap wasn’t going to end well for either of us. But if I admitted that out loud, a lecture would ensue about what a terrible father I was and how if I was old enough to get into this situation, I’d have to learn to deal with the consequences. The truth was, at sixteen, the last thing I wanted to do was look after a baby. But Diane had been adamant she was keeping him, and her parents had offered to help. So, what I thought didn’t really matter.

I was about to tell Mum that yes, she should take us back to Diane’s, when I caught sight of Noah’s chubby little face in the rear-view mirror. He had stopped crying and was staring up at me with a look of amazement. Even I had to admit he was kind of cute once he stopped bawling.

‘Dada,’ he gurgled. Or at least that’s what I thought he had said. Diane would have told me he was just burbling, that they were just made-up sounds Noah was making, that they didn’t mean anything. But I didn’t believe her. I continued to stare at the baby, waiting to see what else he might say. Waiting for a sign. Noah smiled at me, or perhaps he just had wind.

‘No, it’s fine.’ I sighed, slumping down into my seat. ‘We’re here now. The damage is already done.’

We drove on for a couple of miles in silence but then Noah started crying again, louder this time, his whimpers turning to wails. My phone vibrated in my pocket, and I knew without looking, that it was another frantic message from Diane.

‘Shh, shh.’ I tried to soothe Noah from the front seat, but it had no effect. His face was turning from a healthy pink colour to a violent shade of red. I looked around for something to give him to play with, but of course, we didn’t have any toys.

‘Where are we going anyway?’ I asked Mum.

‘Just for a drive,’ Mum replied, glancing at Noah in the rearview mirror. ‘Babies settle better when they’re on the move. Everyone knows that. I used to have to walk round all night with you. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have got any sleep at all.’

But Noah showed no sign of settling. I couldn’t understand why Mum couldn’t just leave them to it, why she was so adamant we had to be involved. Turning up at Diane’s had been a bad idea. No one wanted us there.

‘I think he’s hungry,’ I said. ‘Maybe we should take him home. Diane’ll be worried. If we go back now, they might not be so angry.’

‘Of course, you’re right,’ Mum replied, and her shoulders fell back, defeated.

When we pulled up outside, the garden was still sprinkled with silver confetti and bright blue ‘baby boy’ balloons. Discarded cups and paper plates littered the ground. The celebrations seemed to be over.

‘I’ll take him,’ I told Mum. I didn’t want to give her another chance to make a scene.

I opened the back door and lifted Noah gently out of the car seat. His eyes were beginning to close, and his head nestled into my shoulder. Maybe Mum was right, I could say we were just trying to help. I walked through the party-strewn garden and rang the bell. As I waited for all hell to break loose, I felt a strange sense of calm wash over me, standing on the porch with the snug weight of my son in my arms.

It felt as if he belonged there.