



# Daddy's Little Chaos Gremlin (The Lactin Brotherhood)

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Zephyr is a little and a traveling acrobat who happily spent his days twisting and contorting himself to the delight of audiences across the country. Now he's living in a bed and breakfast, anxiously seeking employment before he winds up performing for spare change.

Tristan is a middle and an artist who blends his skill with Shibari with his love of sculpture. He draws his greatest inspiration from having a living, breathing muse to work with. One who doesn't mind being trussed up and placed on display. It's been months since he's found someone to truly inspire him, until Zephyr gets stranded, and suddenly, the little who needs a job and home meets the artist who needs just the kind of inspiration his talents can provide.

Rowan is a Daddy whose lactation has increased so much that his boy isn't able to consume all that he produces. A private man and a patron of the arts, particularly the creations of his driven, devoted boy, he isn't one to offer his milk for sale, even anonymously. He and Tristan are, however, very open to making an addition to their family; after all, Tristan's always wanted a little brother. They need a boy who's thirsty for Daddy's milk and eager to be both inspiration and playmate. In Zephyr, they're certain they've discovered both, along with a much-needed dose of playful chaos.

**Total Pages (Source):** 18

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ROWAN

“But, Daddyyyyyy, I’m full,” Tristan moaned, pouting up at me with sleepy, honey-hued eyes, a lock of chestnut hair curling against his cheek.

I’d gotten better at braiding it for him at night, but not enough to keep all the long strands from escaping while he was nursing or just wiggling around getting comfortable. My little wiggly worm was always super squirmy at bedtime, when he struggled to set his projects and plans aside to get some much-needed sleep.

Early in our relationship I’d discovered that, when left to his own devices, my boy would rather nap on his workbench than leave his studio, and I’d mistakenly allowed him to continue with that practice until there were dark circles beneath his eyes and I’d been forced to put my foot down and establish a routine for us. No easy feat when I was as much a workaholic as Tristan.

Nursing from me usually helped him settle, but lately I’d been producing more milk than my boy could consume, disrupting our bedtime routine when I was forced to leave the bed to pump.

“It’s okay, sweet boy, your tummy is full, and you look like a feather would knock you out right now. It’s time for you to go to sleep,” I said as I gently eased away and began arranging the blankets around him.

I tucked my pillows against his back as soon as I left the bed, so he’d feel a presence

behind him even if it couldn't be me until I'd finished my nightly task. It also made it easier to get back in, because somehow, my five-foot, five-inch boy would become a 73-foot dangly starfish capable of taking up more space in that Alaskan king than I'd have ever thought possible. It might be time for me to seriously start donating my milk to those in need, though I'd always been hesitant to do so and extremely private about my ability to lactate. It had never been a source of shame or anything of that nature, but when you ran a security firm, you were cautious by nature, and I prided myself on the reputation my company had garnered over the years. Still, as a member of The Lactin Brotherhood, I had access to others who might know how regular, anonymous donations could be made. I was starting to miss falling asleep beside my boy, our conversations growing slurred and dreamy as we drifted off, excited about the day to come.

His fingers latched onto my wrist as I tucked the blanket around him, and the sad look he gave me damn near shattered my heart.

"I'm sorry, Daddy," he murmured as he drew my hand to his cheek and nuzzled against it.

"No, you have nothing to be sorry for," I told him as I leaned to kiss him and peer into his sleepy eyes.

"Wish I had a brother to share with."

Was that sleepy musing or a real request, that was the question. While we talked about finding him a little brother, we'd yet to meet anyone who'd piqued our interest enough for us to open this part of our lives up to. Of course, neither of us had taken the time to do much searching, as his days were filled with the sculptures he crafted and the events he showed them off at. My amazingly talented boy was not only a talented craftsman, but a skilled Shibari artist who incorporated his love of both arts into the works he crafted and sold.

“If that is truly your wish, then we can discuss it further in the morning,” I assured him as I kissed the bridge of his nose.

“Promise?”

“Of course.”

“‘Cause I was hopin’ we could find a dancer,” he murmured, voice growing lower even as he struggled to keep his eyes open. “Someone with some fuckin’ grace and flexibility who can hold a pose without twitching and shifting around every thirty seconds.”

Uh-oh.

My boy rarely cursed, so for him to jump straight to an F-bomb was the only clue I needed as to how his afternoon session with his latest muse had gone. No wonder he’d come to bed sulking and pouty. While my nipples were truly beginning to ache from how engorged they were, I didn’t want to miss a word of what he was struggling to say.

He’d clearly given this some thought already.

“You fired him already, didn’t you?”

“Was gonna tell you in the morning,” he slurred.

I chuckled at that and stroked his hair as I finished arranging the pillows beside him. He’d never liked to give me bad news before bedtime and I never liked to receive it, so we’d developed a little system of dropping potential landmines only after we’d each had at least one cup of coffee, two if it was going to be an epic shitshow. For him to break that tonight, well, that spoke volumes about how upset he was.

“It’s okay,” I whispered as I pressed one last kiss to his cheek. “I didn’t like him anyway.”

He was smiling when I slipped from the room, leaving the bedside lamp on its lowest setting, where I knew it wouldn’t disturb him. My pump was in my study, set up beside my easy chair where I could easily hook myself up when necessary. I’d started a new book the night before, a noir style murder mystery with all the atmosphere of a beautifully-shot BBC series. I was a sucker for a good period piece, especially when the mood and tone of it fully encapsulated the time period. I’d had to the foresight to invest in a double pump, allowing me to empty both sides at the same time, but it still took about fifteen minutes, even after my boy had fed, and then there was still the sterilizing to deal with. I didn’t bother with storage. I’d been dumping the excess I produced. Wasteful, I know, but I’d never felt comfortable with the thought of registering at one of the doner banks.

With what Tristan was proposing, there was a chance that I wouldn’t have to.

A slim chance , the little voice in the back of my head reminded me, not that I’d ever needed its help to keep me grounded. I’d grown up watching the best of intentions go sideways as my old man tried time and time again to improve our situation. This sprawling home was proof that he’d finally gotten it right. Unfortunately, he’d passed away less than a year after paying it off, leaving me with a legacy of missed opportunities and a list of regrets a half-mile long. I wasn’t about to add to it. If my boy needed a better muse, a permanent muse that he could rely on to work with him as he sought to bring his visions to life, then I would do everything in my power to find one for him, preferably in the form of another boy I could love and lavish with attention and the milk that wouldn’t stop leaking out of me.

Tonight, it felt like the pumping process went on forever, while I kicked myself for not having the foresight to place a notebook on the table where I kept my book. I’d rationalized it by telling myself that having one at hand would only encourage me to

work past the hours I'd set. Deep down I knew that was accurate, but a pad of sticky notes? Now that I could do.

And maybe keep the Goddess-be-damned thing flipped over so I wouldn't be tempted to brainstorm when I should be reading.

Of course, there was nothing to stop me from grabbing a legal pad from my desk drawer after I'd finished pumping and sterilizing my equipment. A glance into the bedroom revealed what I'd already known I'd find. Tristan sprawled face down, one foot having already escaped from the covers to drape over one of my pillow barricades. He was peacefully passed out with his favorite bear clutched to his chest the way he usually clung to my arm. Warm flutters danced in my belly as I watched him sleep, reminding me of just how much joy and affection he'd brought into my life. Everything about him was genuine, and he never failed to put me in my place if he felt that I was being needlessly bullheaded about something, or flat out wrong. No fear. He'd just take my hands, sit me down, then plop himself in my lap and clearly lay out his case until I'd stopped resisting the truth that was right in front of me.

He was my everything, but there was no denying that there was a hole in our lives we'd been aching to fill. Maybe the universe had given up on waiting for us to get our heads out of our asses and stop putting off the quest for someone who'd be more than temporary. After all, settling hadn't gotten us anywhere but frustrated and I'd had enough of seeing that grumpy pout on my dear boy's face.

So what was that he'd said about looking for a dancer?

Someone flexible?

I wrote down both and of course, my own desire to find someone who was willing and eager to nurse. Over the last year, we'd found a handful who claimed to be, but it was more of a fetish for them, a fascination with the process and a desire to poke and

prod at my chest to see if they could get the milk to flow. Not only had it been insulting and downright demeaning to be treated that way, but their actions had so infuriated Tristan that he'd ordered them away before he finished his sculpture and melted the metal down to repurpose into something useful. There was a fruit bowl on the kitchen counter he cursed out whenever he grabbed a banana. Its name was Brian.

We had a trio of floor vases named Calvin, Glenn and Moe, but my personal favorite was a cock-and-ball-shaped candelabra named William, or as I tended to refer to it, Willy. Tristan had sketched up the idea in the midst of a rather inspired meltdown after William the self-proclaimed yoga guru had been forced to admit that the only pose he could actually maintain was the gods-be-damned lotus position. I was capable of that, for fuck's sake.

The fact that he'd lied his way through the interview had been bad enough, add in how much of my boy's time was wasted on the initial photographs, brainstorming and sketching ideas, as well as arranging all the materials in his workspace, and I'd been more pissed on his behalf than I'd been the time I'd been forced to fire a dumbass for failing to notice danger to a client because he'd been too busy sucking up to the one who'd arranged for her to be in peril in the first place. I swear sometimes folks thought more with their wallets and their ambitions than they did with the brains the Goddess gave them.

Honesty, integrity, a love of the arts and entertaining. That wasn't too much to ask now, was it? Long-term and live-in seemed like bigger deal breakers to me, though experience had proven that there were those who were willing to say or do anything the moment they got a look at the house.

So, we'd hold the next interview somewhere else, and I was certain I knew just the place.

It was late, though, so I'd have to touch base with Shane in the morning to see if one

of the furnished apartments he rented out was currently unoccupied. If so, I had no doubt he'd allow us the use of it, especially once I explained the reason. He had several horror stories of his own regarding gold diggers and unscrupulous so-called friends who'd only been interested in what he could do for them. It seemed to be an unfortunate byproduct of being successful and one that was difficult to detect until you were smacked across the face with someone's betrayal.

I added one week trial period to the list along with a note reminding me to inquire about the monthly rent so I could go ahead and secure a unit to have at the ready. With no way to predict how long the process would take, that might be the safest bet and help Shawn out in the process. Sometimes those rooms stood empty for months before someone snagged one for a couple months while they investigated the area and looked for work.

Decision made, I jotted one final thing before setting the legal pad aside and climbing in bed. There were a lot of things I could live without, many of which I had in my younger years, but there was one Tristan and I dearly loved and engaged in as often as possible and no, it wasn't sex as so many potential partners assumed.

It was cuddles.

I'd pump every day until my body stopped producing if we found someone who ticked off the rest of the boxes on that list...but I'd be damned before I condemned my boy and I to a relationship that lacked snuggles.

Was no reason not to when I'd nearly been damned for much less.



## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:26 am*

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### ZEPHYR

I'd never slept in a bed this comfy, which made it super hard to want to get out, not that I had much to get up for. The bed had become my little safe space, but with every day I returned to my room without finding work, I grew more and more worried about having to give it up.

What then?

Through no fault of my own I had no family to go back to. Even if they'd take me in, I'd never subject myself to being treated like the hired help by people who'd always made me feel like I was a burden because of the mess my folks had made of their lives.

That wasn't on me.

The main reason I'd left in the first place was because I was tired of wearing that anchor around my neck. My choices might not have worked out the way I'd hoped they would, but they'd never hurt anyone. If anything, I'd been the one to wind up hurt in the end...and here in this beautiful little bed and breakfast run by the most adoring couple I'd ever met.

The way Bruce and Brenner were with one another, whoa, hashtag relationship goals. Looking at them, I could see the love they had for one another shimmering in their eyes whenever they glimpsed the other's way. I just knew they'd torch the gates of

hell to keep the other safe. Someday I hoped to find that, but first, I needed to get up, get in the shower, and resume my job search before the temptation to lie there wrapped in soft, fluffy blankets overrode common sense.

I just hated the questions I knew were coming should I manage to wrangle an interview. Twice now I'd had to explain that while for the last three and a half years I had been employed as an acrobat in a traveling troupe of performers, I had plenty of experience stocking shelves, filling orders, whipping up meals and tackling every manner of household chores both inside and out. I just didn't have any references to prove it. Funny thing about working for family, especially when you were working in the family home. They were the only ones who knew how hard you tried or what lengths you went through to get things done. If they chose to turn a blind eye to it, ignore your efforts because you were nothing to them but a barely tolerated inconvenience, well then it wasn't like they were gonna tell someone what a good job you'd done if they came asking.

Coupled with the fact that I was a stranger in town with no permanent address, I fully understood why folks were reluctant to take a chance on me. It just sucked, 'cause I'd happily get an apartment if I could just get a job first so I could show potential landlords that I had money coming in. It was a vicious cycle, but I was grateful to Bruce and Brenner for solving one problem for me and allowing me to use the address of the bed and breakfast for as long as I was here.

Okay, Zephyr, time to get moving, jobs don't find themselves.

I was out the door in under thirty minutes, hair still damp and curling around my ears but at least the bright purple, aqua and pink tones were fading, drawing fewer glances from folks when they first saw me. It sucked, 'cause I loved when the colors were fresh and shimmering. Seeing them in the mirror or the glass of a storefront always made me smile and straighten my shoulders whenever I was tempted to hunch them and hide.

I never wanted to hide again or feel ashamed for just being me.

As I wandered past storefronts hoping to see a help wanted sign, the phone in my pocket buzzed and I immediately pressed my back against the brick of a nearby building so I wouldn't be in anyone's way when I went to answer it.

"Hello?"

Yes, my name is Rowan Williams. I am looking for Zephyr Murry.

"I'm Zephyr, Mr. Williams. How can I help you?"

I understand that you are a performance artist, an acrobat, is that correct?

"Yes, sir."

I'm afraid I was unable to witness your show during the charity event hosted by The Lactin Brotherhood last week, but I was told that it was quite the amazing feat of showmanship and versatility.

"Thank you so much, I'm sorry you missed it, too, it's the last one I'll be performing in for a while, I'm afraid. My troupe disbanded that night and it's hard to draw much of a crowd as a one-man show."

I knew because I'd tried and while several people had paused and tossed a few bucks in the hat I'd set out, without any advertisement, I'd only been able to garner the attention of those who'd been in the city park at the time. Still, it had been enough to cover half the nightly rate for my room, which had helped pad my dwindling account. If meals weren't included, I'd have truly been struggling to keep my warm, comfy bed.

Then it's a good thing I'm not interested in a crowd, or other performers to detract from what you can do. He explained, I'd like to set up a private performance for myself and my partner . I assure you that we would simply like to see what you are capable of and if you would be a suitable muse for several upcoming projects he has slated to undertake. Curtis Hanson here at the Brotherhood explained that you'd gotten stranded and were in search of employment and a permanent living situation as you were currently housed at Honey Hearth Bed and Breakfast. If you prove to be as enthralling as he claims, my partner and I may be able to offer a solution to your dilemma. We will, of course, pay for your time tomorrow regardless. Would a thousand dollars be sufficient?

For a moment, my words froze in my throat as my thoughts ping-ponged between the temptation to say hell yeah and the warning bells of caution that went off at the idea of meeting with a strange man and his partner alone without any way of knowing if he was being honest about his intentions.

I can understand your reluctance to accept, he said when several seconds passed and I still hadn't said anything. But Curtis can vouch for me and if it would make you feel more comfortable, I can arrange for him to be present for the duration of the audition process.

"That, um, that would make me feel a lot more comfortable," I blurted, hoping he wouldn't take it as an insult. It wouldn't be the first time someone had made me an offer like that only to act resentful when I'd taken them up on it.

And the price? I'm not sure of the going rate for a performer of your caliber, if it is too low of an offer, please don't fear offending me by telling me so.

"It's more than enough, thank you."

Then allow me a moment to ascertain his availability.

I could hear voices in the background, but not all the words. One thing that did ring through clearly was that his tone didn't change. It was just as warm and pleasant as when he'd been speaking with me. While his manner of speaking to me had been a hell of a lot more formal than I was used to hearing from people, there was nothing stuffy or pretentious about it. The low, rumbling cadence had helped calm the anxiety I usually felt when I had to talk to people I didn't know. I'd even detected a hint of amusement in it, like he wasn't afraid to laugh when the moment called for it.

Are you available tomorrow afternoon at three?

"Yes, sir."

Good, then I will text you the address. We look forward to meeting you. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to see if you will be the muse Tristan has been searching for.

"You're welcome. Thank you so much for reaching out. I'll see you at three tomorrow. I hope you have a wonderful rest of your day."

I wish the same for you, Zephyr, he replied before ending the call.

Why him saying my name sent a shiver down my spine I couldn't say, I just knew I'd better not get ahead of myself counting on a job I didn't have yet. The day was still young and there had to be places where I hadn't put in an application yet. Determined not to waste a moment of time, I continued my hunt, filling out five more before I returned to Honey Hearth for supper.

As always, it was served as a homestyle meal at a round table where everyone was encouraged to participate in the conversation, unlike the table in the home I'd grown up in, where silence was the best way to not invite criticism.

Aside from Bruce and Brenner, Alicia, her husband, Josh, and their adorable little boy, Grayson, were also at the table, Grayson babbling up a storm as he waited for his papa to fix his plate.

“Did you find the children’s museum?” I asked them as I took my seat.

The place had sounded positively amazing when I’d listened to them planning their outing this morning and low key, I’d been a little jealous, because it had been at the top of my list of places to visit while we’d been in town. After my job situation had fallen apart, I hadn’t dared spend the admission fee to see it.

“After Brenner told us about the art space and all the hands-on activities they offered for the children to try, we headed straight over the moment we left and spent most of the afternoon watching Grayson giggle as he decorated his own rainbow fish and made an octopus out of yarn and a tennis ball,” Josh explained as he cut up a banana and a small portion of the roast beef with roasted carrots and potatoes that made up the main course.

“You’ll all have to pop up and see them after supper,” Alicia offered.

“Heck yeah,” I replied.

“We wouldn’t miss it for the world,” Brenner said as he passed the steaming bowl my way.

“That smells so good,” I moaned, feeling my face heat up a little when Bruce chuckled and shook his head at me.

“Now those are the kind of compliments a cook always appreciates,” he replied, before the edges of his smile turned down a little as he watched me scoop a single spoonful of vegetables onto my plate before I passed it on. “There’s plenty, really,

don't be afraid to take more than that. You're already such a skinny little thing. I promise there's more in the kitchen."

"I've never been able to eat a lot," I explained as I added a thin slice of succulent looking meat before happily digging into the first bite and sighing at the burst of bright flavors that danced across my tongue. "And it's a good thing, too, or I'd never be able to pull off a snatchcannon."

Everyone looked my way, and it took a moment to realize that no one had any idea what I was talking about. Alisha's face had pinked up a little as she pressed her hands to her mouth, the light dancing in her eyes as she held back her giggles.

"I don't even want to know where your mind went with that," Josh said, chuckling as he slipped an arm around her, hugged her close and pressed a kiss to the side of her head.

"He-he said snatchcannon," she blurted, giggling more. "Now all I can see in my head is one massive rocket launcher aimed at some jerk putting his hands where they don't belong."

She didn't have to be any more explicit for the image to pop into my head, too. Snorting, I doubled over, giggling as the ends of my hair narrowly avoided a collision course with my carrots. Around me, I could hear Brenner and Bruce join in the laughter, and of course, little Grayson couldn't resist pointing and babbling Mama funny before laughing right along with the rest of us.

"So, what is it really?" Bruce asked once we'd all settled down.

"It might be easier to show you, if you're not busy later," I offered. "I was planning to practice in the yard once my food settled, since I've got an audition tomorrow."

“Outstanding, is it anyplace we know?”

“His name is Rowan Williams and he’s looking for a muse for his partner, Tristan, or at least, that’s what he said. His friend, Mr. Hanson, is going to be there, too, he was one of the men who hired my troupe to perform at the charity event.”

“Oh, we know Ro and Tristan,” Brenner said, his eyes having lit up before he tsked and glanced over at Bruce. “I don’t know why we didn’t think about them when you first mentioned looking for work. Tristan is a sculptor. He works primarily with metal and ropes, playing off the hard and soft and well, rather than telling you about his work, how about we show you one of his pieces after dinner?”

Bruce clapped his hands as he danced in his seat. “I love the way this evening is headed. Why, we’ve got a regular show and tell all lined up between Grayson’s artwork, your acrobatics and the eclectic collection of sculptures we’ve amassed.”

“The only thing that could possibly make it any better is if we’d remembered to make dessert,” Brenner pointed out.

“Then it’s a good thing there’s a bakery across the street,” Josh said. “Why don’t I pick up a cheesecake to go with that delicious ice coffee blend you’ve been spoiling us with?”

“We never say no to cheesecake in this house,” Bruce declared.

“Then it’s settled.”

As I dug back into my meal, I was thankful not only for the food but for the company and the feeling of home and family that sparkled in the air like fairy dust. Knowing that Bruce and Brenner knew the pair I’d be meeting and clearly approved enough of them that they’d have suggested it themselves if the idea had come to them, went a



long way toward making me feel comfortable about tomorrow's audition. For the first time since agreeing to the meeting, I was able to relax completely knowing that whatever else happened, I'd be coming back here with the ability to pay for two more weeks in this magical place. That alone was worth the world to me.

### TRISTAN

“Daddy, he’s magnificent,” I murmured as I watched Zephyr whirl into a sort of sideways cartwheel before propelling himself into the air to rotate three times before touching down on the grass of the courtyard again.

I was glad Daddy had held the auditions here, at his friend’s apartment complex, rather than at home. I’d grown tired of failed possibilities fluttering through, leaving the echoes of themselves in rooms I’d hoped they’d occupy forever. While it would suck to spend a week away from my playroom and all the tools in my workshop, I’d rather miss them than add another ghost to our home.

“He is, isn’t he? But let’s see how well he can hold a position before we get too far ahead of ourselves.”

“You’re right, Daddy,” I whispered as I held his hand, enthralled as Zephyr’s body corkscrewed through the air before he landed in a superhero-esque crouch, a bright, triumphant smile on his face as he stared at us.

I love how he paid attention to both of us, making eye contact occasionally, but mostly just acknowledging that we were both there by the way he aimed smiles in each of our directions. I’d lost count of how many times someone had tried to curry favor with Daddy because he was the one in charge, ignoring me except when trying to follow the instructions I gave, their eyes relaying the truth. They cared nothing for what I was trying to create. They were only interested in the security of being cared

for by Daddy.

Silly fools.

Daddy and I were a package deal and anyone who couldn't see that was someone neither of us had the time, nor the patience to deal with.

"Could you pick a pose you are comfortable holding for longer than a minute or two?" Daddy requested. "Something that shows off your grace and flexibility, while allowing you to remain absolutely still."

"I-I've played the part of a human table at several events," Zephyr stammered, a delicate pink blush spreading across his cheeks and nose before he ducked his head.

"That is nothing to be ashamed of," Daddy told him, smiling when Zephyr raised his chin and met his eyes again. "In fact, it is a beautiful gift of service to be able to provide such a thing. To us, you would be a living sculpture, there to be appreciated and admired, never ignored like you were merely window dressing for the room."

His eyes widened at that, but his pleased grin showed just how much he appreciated Daddy's words. I watched as he rolled his shoulders and let his head fall back, before he gracefully tipped over backwards, until his feet touched the ground behind his head, and he settled in. I saw Daddy hit the button on his phone to start the timer, then I turned my focus back to the serene look on Zephyr's face as he exhaled and seemed to drift off into another world right before my eyes.

I could tell Daddy noticed, too, with the way his breath sucked in over his teeth, making a rough hissing sound as he cocked his head.

"You get that same look on your face when you drop into subspace," Daddy whispered as he slid his arm around me and tugged me as close as the chairs would

allow us to get.

I thought about crawling into his lap, but that wouldn't have been professional, so I pressed my head against his shoulder and watched as Zephyr stayed as steady as a piece of oak. One minute passed, then a third ticked by and still he hadn't even wavered. Four minutes, seven minutes, at the ten-minute mark, the longest it ever took me to draw a series of gesture studies, Daddy called time and Zephyr gracefully straightened up, looking completely unphased after holding the pose for so long.

"Bravo," Daddy said as I clapped my hands beside him, excited at all the possibilities. On the other side of Daddy, Mr. Hanson stood, clapping his hands before sticking his fingers in his mouth and letting out a series of whistles that made Zephyr blush again.

He was adorable when he did that and looked like the sweetest little thing in his shorts and crop top, several bright tattoos on display when he twisted and flipped. He gave a little bow, then dropped to sit cross-legged in the grass when Daddy indicated the space, and the chair in front of us. Daddy quirked an eyebrow but let it go as Mr. Hanson resumed his seat. Clearly, Zephyr was comfortable there. He sat with his back straight and his head up, not quite making eye contact with any one of us, but watching us as a group as he waited for Daddy to speak.

"Should I assume, by what you said about playing the part of a human table, that you are familiar with many aspects of the kink community as well as what The Lactin Brotherhood is all about, since you were performing at one of their events?"

"Yes, sir, to both," Zephyr replied. "The father in the troupe I belonged to lactated, that's how he knew of the Brotherhood and was able to put our names in to be considered to perform.

"Did you ever nurse from him?" Daddy asked.

“No, sir, his wife was very jealous.”

“Which is a big part of why the troupe fell apart at the event,” Mr. Hanson explained. “It seems that while the wife was extremely possessive of her husband, she was of a different mindset when it came to sharing herself with others. Apparently, the husband had just been playing along, letting her think she was the one calling the shots, while he snuck off for trysts of his own. He was caught with Robbie McGee and when she threw a hissy fit, Gavin and Michael Collins stepped forward to say that she had no cause to be upset when she’d been busy demonstrating her flexibility to the two of them.”

“I just feel bad for Paulie, he’s their son. We always performed together. Now his folks are splitting up and when he left here it was to go see if his grandparents had a spot for him in their carnival. He wasn’t very hopeful, though, since he hadn’t seen them since they’d had a falling out with his parents when they’d taken off to perform on their own,” Zephyr replied.

“Which was why you stayed behind,” Daddy surmised.

“Yes, sir,” Zephyr said. “I hated saying goodbye to my friend, but I really thought we’d have better odds on our own, since the world isn’t exactly clamoring to hire acrobats these days.”

“Then it’s a good thing I am not the world,” Daddy said. “Because I believe we have just found the acrobat we’ve been searching for. May I ask if you would have been willing to nurse if it was offered to you?”

His eyes lit up before he spoke, and I knew the answer before he started blushing and stammering his way through an affirmative while promising that he hadn’t known anything about either member of the couple’s infidelities and would never get involved with someone who was taken.

Daddy held up his hand, halting him before he could continue his flurry of unneeded information. Mr. Hanson had already gathered that bit of information when he'd spoken with the father of the troupe, wanting to be certain he was making the right decision in allowing Zephyr to leave an advertisement on The Lactin Brotherhood's bulletin and message boards.

"None of that is my concern," Daddy said. "What I'm curious to find out is if you would get involved with individuals who wished to welcome a third into their lives?"

This time he just stared, eyelids slowly blinking several times before his mouth dropped open. "I'm not just interviewing to be a muse, am I?"

"Is that a problem for you?"

My artist's eye longed to capture the way his eyes lit up and his mouth opened and closed before he finally found his voice. "N-no, sir, not as long as both people are equally interested."

I smiled up at Daddy, silently waiting for permission to engage with him. When Daddy inclined his head, I slid from my seat and into the grass in front of him, so we were almost eye to eye. I was taller, which made him perfect little brother height. When he remained unbothered by me crowding into his space, I scooched closer, bouncing a little.

"We're looking for a little brother for me, too," I explained. "And a playmate and someone who doesn't mind being tied up because Shibari soothes me when I can't focus but Daddy doesn't like to be tied down except on special occasions."

This time, when he blushed, I could see that he had freckles across the bridge of his nose and that his hair beneath all the fading neon colors was white blond and curling on the ends where it had gotten sweaty. He looked like he belonged on a beach

somewhere warm and sunny most of the year, but I was really glad he was here, because so many possibilities had popped into my head since he'd started performing that I itched to have my sketchbook back in my hands.

"I love ropes, it's like being hugged but they aren't going to let go anytime soon and that's the greatest feeling, because I really like cuddles," he blurted.

I glanced back to see the pleased look on Daddy's face as he listened, then I turned my attention back to Zephyr, thrilled with the question he asked me.

"Do you do suspension, too? It's one of the best feelings. I can just drift and hang like a bat in a tree."

"We do. Daddy always does the rigging for me so I can focus on placing the ropes just right."

He cocked his head, nibbling his lower lip a little before meeting my gaze again. "I don't mind most textures, but I like soft textures best. It's okay if you like to use coarse ropes, though, as long you don't mind me wearing a sheer mesh bodysuit over my skin to make it less rough."

I wrinkled my nose when he mentioned rough ropes, because the feeling was a major ick for me. I couldn't stand to rub them against my fingers, and even with gloves on, would never want to subject anyone else to something I couldn't stand.

"I always use soft, and I'll always let you touch them beforehand, so you know what they feel like," I explained. "Touching the wrong thing can ruin the whole day and that wouldn't leave you in the mood to be a happy muse."

I could tell from the way he squirmed that while he appreciated the sentiment, he wasn't used to having someone else care more about his comfort than their needs.

We'd just have to show him that was the way it was supposed to be and erase any nonsense the people in his life had taught him up until this point. He looked so sweet and excited, with a bright, shimmering innocence that deserved to be preserved. I looked at him and all I could think was that he deserved to be loved, and Daddy and I were just the ones to show that to him. I was a good boy, though. I knew I needed to wait for Daddy to make that decision and propose the terms to him.

"You've certainly made a positive impression on us both," Daddy declared, "so what I'd like to suggest is a week's trial period here in our apartment and if things work the way I believe they will, we'd like to offer you a position of long-term employment as we see how things develop between us in all the avenues that we'd discussed."

Oh, please let him agree to living here with us. While the apartment was far more spacious than the rooms at the Honey Hearth, it didn't have the same atmosphere of our actual home. I hoped that didn't play to our disadvantage because I knew how warm and wonderful the bed and breakfast could be. Bruce and Brenner were amazing friends, and we frequently attended murder mystery nights there.

"I'll happily agree to a trial week to see if I really am who and what you're both looking for," Zephyr replied. "When would you like the time to start?"

"Tonight, please," I blurted, then hung my head, because I'd cut off Daddy's attempt to speak.

We'd said the same thing, though I knew my impulsiveness would earn me a warning strike. Each strike was an extra chore, and Daddy always picked the ones I hated the most, just to be sure the lesson stayed with me. Three strikes in a day and I'd have an afternoon date with a feather duster rather than the tools in my studio and that was never fun. It took forever to stop sneezing and feeling like I had cobwebs in my hair.

"I-it might take a few trips to collect my things," I explained. "I don't have a



vehicle.”

“Then please allow us to help you,” Daddy offered. “It’s been a few weeks since we’ve visited with Brenner and Bruce. It will be wonderful to catch up.”

“Oh my gosh, thank you, that will make it so much easier,” he blurted, bouncing like I’d been when I’d first approached him.

His enthusiasm was infectious, but it saddened me that he hadn’t even thought to ask. Was he so used to struggling to do everything on his own that he didn’t know how to ask for help when he needed it? Or was it that he was so unused to getting the help that he needed that he’d stopped asking? Either way, my heart hurt for him as every protective instinct kicked in. I had a little brother and I was gonna make sure he knew that I’d never let anything bad happen to him.

### ROWAN

Zephyr's meager array of possessions barely filled the cargo space in the back of the SUV, and according to him, the majority were his costumes. I'd seen the way his eyes had lit up when Tristan had gotten down on the grass with him and I could already tell that this one would delight in the playtime they'd get to share.

All work and no play made Tristan anxious and too critical of his own work. If left unchecked he'd pick at each concave of a piece until he saw cracks where there was nothing but a smooth expanse of metal and worry himself to tears in the process.

It was never a good feeling to hold my crying boy in my arms and not be able to soothe him until he'd sobbed himself into a fit of exhaustion after bombarding himself with criticism. I did my best to lessen the instances of that, though I was ashamed to admit that there were times when I still missed the signs or got so bogged down with some mess with my firm that I neglected to see them until it was too late.

Having a playmate would help, especially one who'd need breaks and time to relax between project sessions.

All the rooms in the apartment were sparsely furnished, but there was a bed in the room beside ours and that's where we directed him so he could get settled. As we guided him through the apartment, I wondered what our attempts to add a few touches from home looked like from his point of view. Would he think it strange that there were only a few scattered photographs, some throw blankets and an assortment

of kitchen odds and ends to rival a small eatery?

Those were the only amenities I refused to do without. We'd stocked the fridge before his interview, and I fully intended to be up bright and early in the morning to make crepes stuffed with bananas and brown sugar and served with a side of sliced andouille sausage sauteed in maple syrup. Tristan loved them and I was hopeful that Zephyr would, too. I could already hear him laughing with Tristan as they looked through his collection of costumes to pick the perfect ensemble for the sunrise session they had planned.

I'd allow it, despite it beginning before Tristan's usual start time, but I'd insist upon some fun activities before lunch so I could see how they played together. Before we'd parted ways at the Honey Hearth, Curtis had wished us luck, which I appreciated. My every instinct screamed that we'd found our boy at last, but I knew better than to get ahead of myself. Brenner and Bruce had assured me that they hadn't told him anything about where we truly lived or my standing within the community but that didn't mean he'd be happy sharing this cramped space with us. It was already a logistical nightmare just trying to find a space to comfortably sit with my laptop without having to hunch over to reach the keys. Tristan's workstation occupied the only thing resembling a desk, and there was barely room for him to work at it with everything set up the way it was.

It was only temporary, I reminded myself as I banged my elbow on the edge of the coffee table.

Just fuckin' temporary.

Another surge of laughter drifted from the room, distracting me from the injury I'd done myself. I looked up in time to see Zephyr spring through the doorway and twirl on one foot before tipping himself upside down into a handstand and walking across the floor toward me. He dropping into a graceful split at my feet and waved.

I applauded, much to his delight, because his tanned face lit up with a brilliant grin. This close, it was easy to see how much he enjoyed being outdoors. His skin had a healthy glow to it and yet I couldn't help noticing that he looked a bit underweight. I hoped he wasn't deliberately depriving himself of food in order to be able to perform the stunts he did. If I discovered that to be the case, there would be an immediate call placed to my personal physician so that he could ensure that Zephyr's health wasn't in any danger. I did not know what the physical requirements were for him to do what he did on a continuous basis, but I would certainly be learning all that I could if he became a permanent member of my household.

Now that I thought about it, I had noticed the amount of food on his plate tonight didn't come close to the portions everyone else took. Even Tristan, who didn't pack away a great deal in a sitting, still ate more than double the amount that Zephyr consumed, plus several morsels I'd fed him from my plate.

When I thought back to what the boy had said, about being willing to nurse if given the opportunity, I was eager to see how he reacted to our nighttime routine. I was curious to see if he'd display any interest in joining in and if so, I'd gleefully invite him to drink his fill.

The outfit he'd chosen was made of tiny, soft feathers that swayed whenever he moved, giving added motion to every movement. I knew Tristan would love capturing it on film as well as canvas.

"Is this what you'll be wearing in the morning?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"I think it's perfect, don't you, Daddy?" Tristan asked as he perched on one of my knees the moment I sat.

He usually took up the entire lap, but when I went to shift him, it dawned on me that he'd taken that spot deliberately, like he was trying to show Zephyr that there was room for him, too.

"I do, indeed, and I already have breakfast planned for the two of you when you finish your photo session," I replied. "Though if that is the outfit you'd like him in for tomorrow, then I think it's time to let him change and get settled in, don't you? Sunrise will come soon enough and you'll both need time to prepare before you start shooting."

"Ohh, Daddy, you're right," Tristan replied as he pressed his head to my shoulder. "You usually are."

"Just usually?" I replied, letting the hint of a growl creep into my voice.

His shoulders lifted a little as he gave a little shrug. "Mostly?"

I knew from his sassy tone that he was giving me crap, one of the many things I loved about him. He also knew just what was going to happen and almost got away before I started ticking him.

"Okay, okay," he squealed, squirming and trying to slide onto the floor to escape my grasp. "Daddy's mostly always right. Mostly, mostly always!"

His hollering earned us some banging from the other side of the wall, and I instantly quit tormenting him and covered his mouth with my hand until he settled down. After so many years of having the freedom to indulge in whatever type of play we desired at whatever hour we saw fit, this week was going to test my patience. I'd forgotten the inconvenience of having neighbors and wished I'd never concocted this little ruse to ensure that Zephyr's attitude and behavior were authentic. I hated that so many others had left us jaded enough to feel that we needed to protect ourselves this way,

but we'd been bitten more than once and the sting still lingered from the last betrayal.

"I'll go change," Zephyr said, hurrying to comply. The smile never left his face, and I could tell that he'd enjoyed witnessing our interaction.

When he emerged again, he was in a tank top and soft looking sleep shorts that I longed to run my fingers over. Tristan had already found a comfortable position sitting on a cushion on the coffee table, one arm resting across my waist as he fed from my left nipple.

"You are welcome to join, if you'd like a taste," I offered, stunned when he nodded so fast that I didn't have a moment to feel any nervousness about making the offer so soon.

As carefully as I could without jostling Tristan, I reached for the other accent pillow and passed it to him. Just from how jittery he was, I could tell he was struggling to take the time to get situated properly as he nearly missed the pillow and wound up sitting half on and half off of it as he leaned forward.

I kept my tone gentle as I reached out to rest my hand on his shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze. "Breathe," I encouraged. "I'm not going to change my mind and rescind the offer. I'll be right here when you're ready, so take your time and get settled in comfortably. I produce a lot of milk, so this doesn't have to be a quick lap and suck unless you want it to be."

The tip of his pink tongue darted out and his pupils dilated as he released the breath he was holding with a long, low hiss. Shifting my hand from his shoulder to the center of his chest, I was shocked to see that my palm nearly spanned from one side to the other. I could feel his heartbeat pounding, but it quickly began to settle the longer we stayed that way.

“There you go, now fix your pillow,” I murmured, drawing my hand away so he could move.

This time he took his time plumping it and making sure his behind was on it completely when he sat back down. Unlike Tristan’s long, wavy strands, Zephyr’s hair only went to his shoulders, but it curled at the end, framing his pixie face beautifully. His hands slid along his thighs as he leaned closer, but I hoped he’d soon realize that he didn’t have to keep them there. He was free to touch me, and I hoped he would once he’d latched on.

When he did, he proved to have the gentlest mouth I’d ever felt, all soft lips smeared with glittery lip gloss that left sparkles on my chest. His tongue stroked over my nipple, then he groaned as I felt the immense relief of my milk flowing. A low moan spilled from my lips as he began sucking, and I couldn’t resist stroking his hair to feel if it was as silky as it looked. It really was. The sound of him sigh-moaning with each little pull vibrated through me. I felt his hesitant fingers sliding across my abs, just below Tristan’s, and I looked down to see their heads almost touching while they nursed from me.

While Tristan fed with the same relaxed ease as he did every night, Zephyr started out gulping, until I started running my fingers up and down the back of his neck, pressing my fingers in more with every pass, until his shoulders relaxed and he leaned more of his weight against me, his pulls slowing as he realized that I’d been serious about not going anywhere.

Why would I want to?

After so many evenings of being engorged and uncomfortable until I’d been free to rush for my pump, my body was finally getting the relief it needed, and I was very happy indeed. Every now and again a little slurp or grunt slipped from one of them, signs that they were fully enjoying the experience.

“That’s it, little one, take all you’d like,” I murmured, not that Zephyr needed any encouragement.

The boy who’d taken so little at the table seemed to be hungry, hungry, hungry. His tongue massaged me, his lips caressed me, while on the other side of my body, Tristan sighed and lapped at my nipple, feeding lazily now as he coaxed it out in steady drops. The motion had a teasing feel that began to set my body on fire, and I tapped him on the nose to remind him that we would not be progressing past this point for the night.

Tomorrow, maybe we’d see how much Zephyr enjoyed being touched by something other than ropes, or maybe we’d save that for the day after, as Tristan had a good chunk of the day and evening already mapped out. I understood his need to capture all he could while he had such an amazing muse on hand, but as Zephyr let out the softest little rumble, I just knew in my soul that he wasn’t going anywhere.

My hands slid down his arms, lightly, just mapping the feel of him beneath my fingers. That crop top had shown off a pierced bellybutton and left me wondering if he had other piercings hidden beneath his shirt.

Those sleep shorts, damn, they really were as soft as they’d looked when he’d stepped into the room, and as my hands settled on the outsides of his thighs, he moaned and sent a vibration through my body that went straight to my cock. Tristan must have sensed it, too, because that adorable little ball of chaos dragged his hand down to rest in my lap, sweeping Zephyr’s right along with it.

One began caressing me, then the other joined in, slow, gentle rubs that weren’t nearly enough to get me off, but more than enough to blot out every thought, leaving me with nothing but pleasure and the soft haze of a mind that didn’t need to be concerned about anything. Time ceased to exist, not that I needed it to. Right now, in this moment, I had everything I needed, wanted and could ever wish for. Holding



him, feeling the way he'd trembled at my first touch, so eager for that physical connection, I began to feel like he might need us as much as we needed him. As far as I was concerned, that was the best scenario that could have played out for the three of us.

### ZEPHYR

Stepping outside, I sucked in a deep breath and tipped my head back to watch the moon slipping down the horizon. The view was perfect to make it my focal point as I went through my warmup sketches while Tristan set up his equipment and explained what he needed me to do.

“I’m thinking of calling these pieces greet the day,” Tristan said. “So, I’d love for you to ease in slowly, like you’re just waking up and shaking off the last remnants of sleep. Stretch like you’re doing now and build momentum as the sun comes up. When the light hits just right, that’s when you’ll go into your more complicated acrobatics, like that snatchcannon you showed me, that was awesome.”

I thought about it for several seconds, putting together a routine in my mind. “Basically, you’d like me to run through my warmup routine, then work my way through beginner and mid-level combinations until you’re ready for me to nail the more difficult techniques.”

“Exactly, yes, just that.”

“Would you prefer continuous motion or me to pause between each move?” I asked.

“Continuous, please. Oh my goddess, you can do that?”

“Yes. I know you have a limited window, so I’ll give it my all and you signal me

when you want the really creative techniques, and I'll crank it up another notch."

Tristan squeezed and pressed his fingers to his lips, then rushed forward to hug me. "Thank you."

It felt so good to be hugged, especially by the man who would be my big brother if I managed to earn the contract. I'd always wanted a big brother. Paulie and I had been the same age, and I'd always felt like I needed to act as a buffer between him and his folks so he didn't get dragged into their arguing. Every time that happened, one of them tried to force him to pick a side and he'd wind up in tears when they both turned on him, hollering about him being disloyal when he tried to point out the ways they were both at fault. In the end, I'd wished for someone to be a buffer between us and them, because it had all just gotten exhausting.

Right now, I was excited and hugged Tristan back before turning him loose so he could finish setting up. The moment the first rays of light drifted into the courtyard, he nodded at me to begin. He'd meticulously mapped out the path the light carved through the space with spray-painted lines to show me the area he needed me to stay in. The bright pink was impossible to miss, and I was grateful for that, because they were an easy cue to see against the shadowy grass. I quickly lost myself in the warm glow that fell over me as I flipped and spun.

The clicking from Tristan's camera was like a rapid-fire drumbeat, and each time he moved, I caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of my eye. As I kicked my heels over my head and flipped backward, I realized that the lines weren't only about the light. He'd created zones so neither of us would get hurt while we did our parts to bring his vision to life. I suddenly felt safe and protected, knowing that he'd had the foresight to safeguard us both. We'd already established the yellow flag signal, a bright, waving sign for me to kick things into high gear. In deference to the neighbors, the only music I had was in my ear buds, and it was all high octane. The moment I saw that brilliant canary bandana waving over his head, I did a double

handspring into a backward summersault, then hit the ground in a forward roll, springing to my feet only to leap into a twisting summersault. There was a stone wall in my zone, so I ran up it, using it as a springboard to propel me into a backflip followed by a trio of twisting backflips the moment my feet touched the ground.

I could flip, twist and turn with the best of them and ran my way through some of my favorite tricks until he waved the flag again, signaling that it was time for the finale. I might not have been able to see it, but I could feel by the way my body snapped into each rotation that the snatchcannon I pulled off was one of my best. I landed in that superhero crouch he'd applauded the day before, my eyes seeking his as he kept snapping away with the camera until he was just a few steps away.

That's when he dropped to his knees, threw his arms around me, and nearly squished out what little breath I had left. Gasping, I leaned into his embrace as he peppered my sweaty face with kisses and fervently praised me for my performance. Time seemed to melt into that golden sunrise as we clung to one another, but had I really given him everything he'd needed? It was all a blur now, every performance was when it was over, unless I'd botched something, which I hadn't even come close to doing this time.

I'd come to accept that mistakes happened and that sometimes they were extremely painful ones, but I was proud of the fact that nothing like that had happened today. Still, I was anxious to see the results of the shoot.

Only, when I went to stand, the world tilted a little. Tristan immediately steadied me as I blinked and waited for my vision to level out. It was almost there when I was swept off my feet and clutched against the strong chest I'd gotten intimately familiar with the night before.

"I'm okay," I murmured. "Prolly should have had a protein shake first, though."

“No more morning sessions without food first,” Mr. Rowan declared with the kind of finality that I knew better than to argue with.

He’d have probably been upset if I’d tried to explain that a protein shake in the morning was all I usually had, at least until landing at Honey Hearth, with all of the wonderful food Brenner and Bruce prepared.

“I’ll be back to help you bring your equipment in as soon as I have him settled,” Mr. Rowan called over his shoulder as he carried me inside.

“It’s okay, Daddy, I can get it.”

“What did I just say?” Mr. Rowan growled, the rumbling vibration making me shiver, or maybe it was just the rapidly cooling sweat drying on my skin.

When a hard wind blew, I was grateful for his body heat and that his much larger stature was acting as a wind screen as he carried me into the apartment. When he placed me on the couch, he tucked a pillow behind my back and draped a blanket over me, smoothing it down my arms despite the fact that I was sticky and gross. I never sat on furniture after performing, not until I’d had a shower first. But he told me not to move before he hurried back to the courtyard to help Tristan, so I stayed where he placed me and hugged the blanket to my chest, hoping I wasn’t in any trouble.

The longer I sat there, the more the fear set in. I was convinced I’d fucked everything up royally. Curling my knees to my chest, I hunched forward to rest my head on them and struggled to hold back the tears. Where the morning had once felt so promising, now there was only despair and a growing desire to flee into my room, gather my things, and go back to Honey Hearth before Tristan and Mr. Rowan asked me to.

The voice I could never quite bring myself to trust kept hollering that I was getting

ahead of myself and getting all worked up for no reason, but I couldn't slow my breathing down. It was almost as bad as at the end of my performance, only that had been sheer exhilaration, where this just felt like a panic attack coming on.

Yes, and you know what to do when that happens.

There was that voice again. I could hear it loud and clear, but I couldn't make myself listen. Not when another part of my brain picked that moment to remind me that my time in this town had already been running out when I'd auditioned, and I still hadn't heard back from any of the places I'd put in applications at.

Tristan's voice reached me first, but instead of the excitement I'd heard in it outside, there was worry and rambled apologies.

"Are you okay?" he asked, hands sliding up my arms moments later.

Hiccupping, I shook my head no. "I-I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to mess everything up."

The last thing I expected was for him to burst into tears. He was holding me so tight I couldn't hold him and now I was really worried, 'cause I had no idea how Mr. Rowan was going to react to me being the cause of his boy's tears. I tensed when I felt his arms wrap around us, but that just made him hug us tighter. Then I heard his voice beside my ear.

"You've done nothing to apologize for," he murmured as he stroked the sweaty hair back from the side of my face and neck.

I could feel his lips against my earlobe, his breath a warm woosh as he continued to speak.

“There’s nothing to be worried about, nothing at all. I should have insisted upon you having something in your belly when you went out there, but I wasn’t sure what to suggest or how long you’d need to wait before performing. I promise that I’ll educate myself better going forward,” Mr. Rowan said.

“Y-you’re not mad?” I stammered, stunned that the voice had been right, again, despite my refusal to listen to it.

“Oh, I’m fuckin’ pissed,” Mr. Rowan declared.

I immediately cringed and tried to pull away, not like there was any real chance of that happening. He was way stronger than me.

“At myself,” Mr. Rowan continued. “For not having a conversation with you about it last night. I got as caught up in the excitement as Tristan did and never once considered that you wouldn’t ask for something if you needed it.”

“I-I just didn’t think it would hit me before we could come in to get breakfast,” I admitted. “It was just a little sugar drop.”

“A drop of any kind isn’t little,” Mr. Rowan insisted. “And you will not be allowed to let that happened again, do I make myself understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now, you two are going to stay right here while I finish breakfast and don’t even think about discussing anything relating to work. I will bring the food to you when it’s ready and only once I’m certain you are steady on your feet will you be able to go clean up.”

Nodding, I finally met his gaze. “Yes, sir,” I said while Tristan chimed in with a

tearful sounding, Yes, Daddy.

He pressed a kiss to the side of my head and kissed Tristan on the forehead before tucking a blanket around us. The kitchen was only a few feet away, and the wall design had the center piece cut out so we could still see him as he started plating the food. Just turning my head made the dizziness come back even worse than the last time.

Moaning, I slumped against the back of the couch, until Tristan gently tugged me down to lie across his lap and started stroking my hair as my vision evened out again.

“You were so amazing,” Tristan praised.

“That kind of talk drifts dangerously close to talking about work,” Mr. Rowan called from the kitchen. “You may praise him all you’d like while you’re looking at the photos, for now, why not take a moment to see what else you two have in common.”

I cuddled closer to him, eager to learn more about him.

“Would it be too much like a dating app to ask what you like to do during your downtime?” Tristan asked.

“Not as long as it isn’t too much like a dating app for me to ask what your favorite movies are,” I replied.

Giggling, we hugged each other some more while he thoughtfully considered my question.

“I know it’s a bit all over the place, but I love pieces with mood and attitude. The Crow , Sin City , and Underworld are my go-to comfort movies, and I love both versions of The Punisher , just not War Games , it didn’t tick off the right boxes for



me.”

“I’ve never seen War Games , but I love both the Dolph Lundgren and the Thomas Jane Punishers.”

“Aren’t they the best?”

“Yeah, they are,” I said. “I love all of the ones you named and Interview with a Vampire . I love the whole tone of that movie.”

“That one is awesome, too, but I really felt like there should have been more explored between Louie and Lestat.”

“Right? Like how can people not see it?”

We giggled at that, heads pressed together as he hugged the blankets around us.

“ Sleepy Hollow is another of my favorites,” I admitted. “I know it probably sounds weird, but when I can’t sleep, I let it play over and over, so I can get lost in the story. It’s still resting, even if I never completely fall asleep.”

“Daddy doesn’t let me stay up all night anymore,” Tristan admitted. “I get frustrated with my sculptures because I’m too tired to focus on them properly.”

“Don’t forget cranky, anxious and weepy,” Mr. Rowan pointed out. “It’s never good to stress yourself out that way, though the occasional all-night movie marathon would certainly be permissible, provided there were no attempts to enter the workroom the following day.”

“Wanna do that?” Tristan asked. “Have a big, long movie marathon with me? We can add Snow White and the Huntsman to the list and The Dark Knight .”

“Ohh, that’s my favorite Batman movie,” I replied. “Have you ever watched Flatliners ?”

“Just the original, I’m not sure I wanna see the remake.”

“Me, either. The original was just so awesome.”

“And different.”

“Uh-huh, I’ve never seen another movie like it.”

“Then it seems like we have the rest of our day all planned out,” Mr. Rowan declared as he joined us in the living room with a platter of food that smelled delicious, though the thing I truly craved wasn’t on any of the plates. Two damp patches marred the front of his tank top and I licked my lips before I could stop myself and tried to look away.

“Though perhaps a drink would be in order first,” Mr. Rowan said, and just like that, he stripped his t-shirt off and patted his lap. Tray of food forgotten, I slid into it happy to latch on. As far as I was concerned, there was no better place I could possibly be.

### TRISTAN

It was usually a struggle to sit still and watch a movie, even one I enjoyed, without having something in my hands to occupy me, but with Zephyr pressed against my side on the cushions Daddy had removed from the couches and chairs to spread on the floor for us, and a bowl of nacho-jalapeno cheese popcorn where we could both reach it, I was completely at ease. Daddy always allowed me a notebook and pen, in case my imagination started running wild, but so far it was blank, and I was surprisingly happy about that.

After he'd fed from Daddy, Zephyr had only nibbled on the food, but by then he was no longer pale or trembling. The series of burps he'd let out afterward had brought a little pink blush to his face, and a smile to Daddy's. He hadn't needed to miss time with me to go use his pump, either. For the first time in a long time I didn't feel bad about not being enough. I loved drinking from him, but it was more like dessert for me, or a little snack. Zephyr had nursed from both sides, snuffling and growling on occasion as he'd sprawled across Daddy's lap, as content as a kitten.

A new name for him popped into my head, alongside little brother. Kitten. I could already tell that he was the sweetest little thing, softhearted with a gentle disposition. I ached to see what he thought of our playroom and all the toys Daddy had stocked it with. Would he enjoy building things with the huge assortment of block kits on the shelves, or would he prefer the puzzles, mazes and games that sat neatly arranged in their cubbies?

I hoped for both and then some, because there were several games I'd been dying to try but hadn't had anyone besides Daddy to share them with. He was an awesome player, but it was different when there was someone else in the same little headspace.

"Whoa," Zephyr breathed, squirming for the first time since we'd lain down.

He was up on his elbows with his eyes affixed to the screen, so I looked where he was pointing and saw the moon perfectly positioned over the chimney of a creepy looking house, just as a masked man winked and slid down the chimney, axe in hand.

"Oh yeah, someone's gonna die," I giggled, excitedly kicking my feet.

"That, too, but look, look at the moon."

He wagged his hand, insistently pointing, but I didn't see anything unusual about it before the scene changed.

"That was a nice shot, you could even see the craters," I said, figuring that was what he'd been focused on.

"Have you ever done anything with the moon like that?"

"How do you mean?" I asked, finally turning my attention away from the television and the slow stalking movements of the man with the ax as he crept down the hall.

"Like, timing it so it looks like someone is kicking the moon, maybe even while doing a flip, like it was a soccer ball in a pro soccer game," Zephyr said, the enthusiasm in his voice immediately igniting my own.

I could picture it and snatched up my notebook, making a rough sketch as well as written notes to help guide me along. I thought of Zephyr's earlier performances and

wondered if it would be possible to capture him doing a backflip over the moon, or to catch him mid-summersault frozen in the center of the moon.

“It would be so cool to cartwheel over it just as it was breaking the horizon,” Zephyr murmured, still thinking about the moon, the same as I was, despite the chaos and comedy unfolding on the screen.

I told you not to eat bon-bons in the bed! Now we’ve got rats!

I’d seen this movie at least a half dozen times and knew what was happening without needing to see it unfold. Sounds of destruction poured forth as the man attempted to chop up the rats, the box of bon-bons and the huge woman in the bed who had a bon-bon in one hand and a half-eaten rat in the other. It was gross and ridiculous, but also funny as hell.

I loved the spoof movies as much as I liked the real horror stuff, but Daddy always made me limit my intake of gore and break it up with something funny, even if it was still a little on the darker side. I loved *The Addams Family* and *The Munsters*, so they were always awesome choices, and the best part was that Daddy loved them, too. I couldn’t wait to learn what Zephyr thought of this one.

While another character joined the scene with a lighter and a can of hairspray, I scribbled away, trying not to forget a single thought that popped into my head before I could get it down on paper.

“I wish there was a way I could sit on it in a yoga pose,” Zephyr muttered and I froze, trying to remember a tutorial I’d tucked away but never had the chance to use.

It was a levitation effect, and it had all the steps needed to accomplish it. I’d have to find it, and practice, but if I could nail the techniques we could have a ton of fun.

“There might be,” I said.

Giggling, he wiggled a bit, clapping his hands. “Ohh, really? That would be so cool.”

“Yup, but we wouldn’t be able to do it here,” I blurted, almost flubbing completely by explaining that I needed my workshop.

I glanced at Daddy to see him watching me with a stern gaze, one eyebrow raised, his cautionary look a reminder to be more careful when I spoke. I mouthed sorry and he nodded, giving me a soft smile. All was already forgiven but he held up one finger to let me know that I’d have an added chore waiting at the end of the day.

That was so fair.

“You’d prolly need lots of space to set up something like that,” Zephyr went on, having missed the conversation going on over his head, thank goodness.

“Yes, I would,” I told him, and the rolling lawn beside the pool would be wonderful for that.

The moment that thought popped into my head, it was immediately followed by several others, and a desire to map out the moon’s trajectory over the pool.

“Can you swim?” I asked Zephyr, because I didn’t want to start down that road if he couldn’t. I never wanted to put him in any sort of jeopardy again.

I’m gonna be the bestest of big brothers.

“Uh-huh, I love being in the water, especially when I get to go skinny dipping.”

I never swam with trunks on unless we had company, but if I said that, I knew he’d

want to know where the pool was. His face had lit up with joy when I mentioned swimming, but for now, it, like my workshop, would have to remain a secret.

This was gonna be a long week.

I sighed and sketched several stick figures twisting and flipping off a diving board.

“I used to compete in that,” Zephyr remarked, pointing to the image. “I was too afraid to do the high dive, though. I just did the three-meter springboard.”

My thoughts came crashing to a halt, interrupted by images of the pool at home. Was our board high enough? Was our pool deep enough?

I wrote a note for Daddy, because lots of research needed to happen before this idea became a possibility. The levitation and the potential tricks that could be performed with the moon on the horizon line were photoshoots I could plan for, though, and I lost track of the movie filling page after page.

When Beetlejuice came on, my attention was immediately drawn back to the screen. It was one of my favorite movies. Zephyr looked really into it, too, and missed his mouth with a piece of popcorn that landed on the blanket beside his hand. I held it to his lips once I’d picked it up, and he smiled and let me pop it in his mouth before licking the cheese residue off my finger and making me giggle.

He snuggled up against my side, too, making it impossible to draw, not that I wanted to with him nestled against me that way. I draped an arm over him, tugged the blanket up over his shoulders, and got lost in the movie with him, giggling at all the silly parts and yelling Beetlejuice right along with the characters.

Daddy had to shush us, then held up a second finger to let me know I had another chore. One more and I’d be dusting, but at least the rooms in this space were a lot

smaller than the ones at home. We'd be able to laugh all we wanted once we got there, but that was so far away right now.

It felt like the whole ocean was between us instead of just a couple miles. I had a hard enough time being patient, being patient and quiet, oh man, I was gonna be dusting forever at this rate. We wiggled along with the shake your body song, bumping hips and giggling softly when we wound up nose to nose.

"Can I kiss you?" I asked, trailing my fingertips along his cheek.

"Please."

He was all sweetness as he opened to that kiss and pressed closer as we slowly melted against one another. Make-out cuddles were some of the best cuddles in the whole wide world 'cause they were gentle and unhurried. His soft sighs made my lips tingle, but none of this was about sex. We were getting to know one another and laying the foundation for what I hoped would be a long and glorious future.

His tummy rumbled and we both giggled as we drew apart. I couldn't stop staring at his lips as he licked them, which was why I didn't notice that the popcorn bowl was gone until he reached for some and encountered only air.

"Your lunch is ready," Daddy called.

He must have snagged the bowl without us even noticing.

"Coming, Daddy," I replied and helped untangle us from the blankets.

My leg had started falling asleep, making it difficult to get up, but Zephyr just uncoiled himself gracefully, stood, and helped me up, keeping hold of my hand and half supporting me as we headed for the breakfast nook. Zephyr and I sat on the



bench seat while Daddy sat across from us, a platter of sandwich quarters, fruit salad, and cookies already waiting for us. He'd made chocolate milk, too, and I always knew Daddy mixed in a bit of his own whenever he made it. Zephyr must have known it, too, or at least hoped, 'cause he went straight for the milk and drank a third before reaching for one of the sandwich squares.

"Make sure you at least eat two of those and some fruit," Daddy encouraged. "After that you can have all the cookies you'd like."

"Yay, cookies!" I cheered, making sure to keep my voice at a respectable tone so I wouldn't earn another strike.

Zephyr didn't join me in celebrating, in fact, he side-eyed the cookies like he was wary of them, even when his tongue darted out to run along his upper lip.

"Don't you like chocolate chip?" I asked.

With the way he'd dived into the chocolate milk, I didn't think it was an allergy thing. Maybe he just liked different kinds of cookies.

"I have to be careful of sweets, so I don't get fat," Zephyr explained.

There was a sad, wistful look in his eyes as he glanced at the cookies again. "They look amazing, though."

Daddy picked up a cookie and broke it in half, putting one piece on his plate and the other on mine.

"A half a cookie won't hurt you, not with all the energy you spend when you're in motion," Daddy said.

His tone was gentle and firm, one I knew well after the years we'd been together. He was concerned, but he was also unwilling to back down. He was right, too. Half a cookie wasn't going to cause Zephyr to gain an ounce of weight. The fact that he was afraid to eat one had me worried, too. I'd read about athletes starving themselves to maintain certain weights or attain physiques. I'd also read that many of them had been taught how and encouraged to do so by their coaches. I didn't know much about the troupe Zephyr had been traveling with, outside of the troubles that had caused them to break up. I hoped they weren't behind his fears about eating.

Another thought nagged at me, one that immediately made me fiercely angry on his behalf. Those fuckers better not have been limiting his food intake and controlling what he could or couldn't have and they damn sure better not have put it into his head that a single anything was going to make him fat. That was a dangerous way of thinking. I'd known a friend back in art school, an awesome guy who was in the sculpture program with me. He'd been a little husky when we were freshmen, but no more than a lot of other guys on campus. We were art students, for fuck's sake, not athletes. Each year he'd gotten thinner and thinner, and shyer and shyer, avoiding the gatherings, the birthday parties, the midnight Chinese food runs and pizza parties during gallery week. I'd thought he was just laser focused on landing a spot in one of the local gallery displays. There were always one or two reserved for students at the university, since we were also some of the biggest patrons when they had events, and they loved being able to say that they were among the first to display an artist's work if they blew up in the mainstream. It wasn't until he was taken out of the dorm in an ambulance, suffering from organ failure due to starvation and constant purging. All because he'd been picked on and bullied so badly in high school that he'd chosen a drastic course of events to ensure that the same thing didn't happen in college.

It took me a moment to pull out of the memory, and refocus on the conversation taking place, and the way Daddy was studying Zephyr, concern written all over his face.

“I understand that moderation is important,” Daddy said, keeping his voice steady and non-judgmental. “But you shouldn’t have to deny yourself everything. You’re tiny, maybe a little too tiny even for your stature. Would you be agreeable to seeing a physician, just to make certain that you’re healthy and in peak performance shape?”

I knew good and damned well that Daddy cared about way more than if he was able to twist and springboard all over the yard, but Zephyr probably would have protested if he’d put it any other way. We’d both noticed how little he ate, and now we knew at least one of the reasons, but was it healthy? That’s what we were both eager to find out.

He was super tiny for a grown man.

Almost fragile when I’d been clinging to him beneath the blankets.

“I’d be okay with that,” Zephyr replied. “I wouldn’t want to sign your contract and not be able to do what you need me to do. If I, um, earn the contract, anyway.”

“You are well on your way,” Daddy sought to assure him.

I’d hated how sad he’d gotten this morning when he thought he’d screwed up the shoot and I never wanted him to feel like that again. I knew Daddy didn’t, either. We’d already come to feel very protective of him in the short time he’d been with us, and while the trial wouldn’t officially end for a few more days, I’d already come to think of him as my kitten and I wanted him to stay that way.

Always.

### ROWAN

One thing I'd come to appreciate over the years was the close bonds of friendship I'd forged through membership with The Lactin Brotherhood. Among our ranks were bakers, musicians, accountants, mechanics, and yes, even the doctor I called on to come examine Zephyr. Phillip had seen me through rehabilitating the damage I'd done to my knee during a snowmobile accident and been my personal physician ever since.

Now, as he stepped through the door of the apartment, I was grateful for him being in private practice, with the ability to shuffle things around so he could drop in this evening, before Zephyr's anxiety had the opportunity to rev up again. Despite telling him that the contract was within his grasp, I knew he'd never be able to relax completely until he had it. One of a dozen reasons that I was already regretting the ruse I'd concocted.

At this rate, I doubted my ability to last the week, and Tristan was already struggling not to rack up a plethora of extra chores. I'd never imagined it would be so difficult to rein ourselves in, but then, we'd had the freedom to express ourselves however we chose for so long that the concept of acceptable levels of noise and activities were ones that had been lost to us years ago.

It was hard to enforce rules we'd never had before, and it seemed a bit unfair, too, in light of how hard Tristan was trying. I loved hearing his laughter ring through the house. He'd never been able to tone it down when he was excited about something,

especially when it was something he was creating. It was like trying to silence a bird when it was happily singing.

It just didn't feel right to me.

I'd noticed how easily Zephyr laughed right along with him, and when they'd been plotting out their moon shoot, I'd witnessed the same excitement from him that I'd fallen in love with seeing from Tristan. There had to be some way of shaving time off this little experiment. After all, Zephyr hadn't balked once upon seeing the cramped living space we had to share at the apartment. He'd been too interested in us and the projects Tristan had in mind. After learning of his nomadic lifestyle with the acrobatics troupe, I'd begun to realize that he'd come to us just hoping to be a part of something that would let him use the amazing talents he'd amassed over the years.

There was no purer intention in my book.

"So, you said on the phone that he'd engaged in some acrobatics this morning and suffered a dizzy spell afterward that left him wobbly until he'd gotten something in his stomach," Phillip said as I led him through to the living room where Tristan and Zephyr sat waiting for us. "That sounds consistent with a sugar crash, which you already knew, but your main concern is how little he eats at mealtimes, is that accurate?"

"Yes, especially as a professional performer," I said as he removed his shoes and left them beside ours at the end of the hall. "Aren't they supposed to consume meals more often and in greater amounts, because of the energy they expend?"

I could see the tops of their heads over the back of the couch before they turned azure and honey-hued eyes upon us, both looking nervous.

"In theory, you would be correct," Phillip replied. "But you fuel a body differently

for playing football than you would acrobatics where keeping within a specific body mass index is crucial to one's ability to perform."

That's what I'd figured, too, which was what had led to my not saying anything when he'd rushed out the door that morning to stretch after only a glass of water to hydrate. Should he have had milk instead, or would it have curdled in his belly once he'd started working up a sweat?

So many questions, but my hope was that before Phillip left, I'd have some definitive ideas of what I needed to keep stocked in the fridge to keep him healthy.

"Zephyr, this is my friend Phillip, Dr. Levine, who I was telling you about earlier," I said by way of introduction. "Are you still okay with him examining you and talking to him about your health and eating habits?"

"Uh-huh," Zephyr replied. "I think I'd better."

"Is there a reason you feel that way?" Phillip asked as he pulled up a chair closer to the couch as I moved the coffee table out of the way so it wouldn't impede him when he went to examine Zephyr.

I knew he wouldn't jump to that right away; he never did. Even the standard vital checks, temperature and blood pressure cuff, waited until he'd had a chance to speak to the patient first. There was nothing more frustrating, at least not to me, than going to the clinic or hospital and having something rubbed across my forehead and strapped to my arm before I had the opportunity to even mention what had brought me there in the first place.

"Just that a lot of foods make me feel yucky, especially meat," Zephyr admitted. "I really like it, too, especially steak, but I can only eat a little bit at a time. I love seafood, but I can only eat a little bit of that at a time, too."

“What about fruits and vegetables?”

“I love them, but I’d rather drink them. Before the troupe fell apart, I had drank several a day, Paulie and I both did, but he ate a lot more solid food than I did.”

“So, it isn’t a restriction that’s been imposed on you in order to keep your weight down?” Phillip asked.

“It’s always been stressed to me that it’s a good idea to drink more than I ate and to keep away from sweets, but I’ve never had an issue doing it,” Zephyr explained. “The few times I’ve had fast food I could barely finish a happy meal. Any more is just too much.”

“Have you ever had a problem with overeating or with deliberately throwing up your food after you’d eaten it?” Phillip asked, his tone both blunt and kind.

“No, sir, but I will throw up if I eat too much,” he explained. “I had an aunt who used to try and make me finish everything on my plate, but she always put too much. After I threw up all over her when she shoved a bite of mashed potatoes into my mouth, she pretty much left me alone.”

Snorting, it took everything in me not to say what popped into my head, that she’d deserved it. My old man was from a generation where you ate what was offered or you starved, and you finished what was on your plate or you sat there until it was empty. Because it had been done to him more times than he could count, he’d refused to do it to me, which I’d appreciated. Some things, like mashed turnips, were never meant for the human pallet. I’d die on that hill if it ever came to it. I couldn’t even think of an animal that ate turnips. Shouldn’t that have been a clue to people everywhere?

“So, it sounds like you know the limits of what you can consume in a single sitting,”

Phillip went on to say, looking thoughtful as he studied Zephyr. “Is there a reason you had to give up your smoothies after the troupe fell apart?”

Zephyr nodded, fidgeting a little. “Just, um, the cost of fruit,” he muttered. “I knew Mr. Bruce and Mr. Brenner at Honey Hearth wouldn’t have minded me using their blender to make them as long as I washed it after I was through, but I wanted to make sure I saved all the money I could for paying for my room so I could keep staying there until I could find a job and put money aside for an apartment.”

“That wouldn’t have been easy if you were also paying for a room.”

“I know, but they weren’t making me pay the full rate as it was. They’d given me a discount, since I was renting by the week. I wanted to make sure I’d have the money I owed them first, before I worried about anything else.”

“And meals were included in your room fee, so it made sense to eat what you were provided,” Phillip added, coming to the same conclusion I had after I’d witnessed him eat there.

“Yes, sir.”

“So let me ask you this,” Phillip said. “On a normal day, what would you have before practice or a performance?”

“A smoothie,” Zephyr nodded.

“Do you add anything like protein powder or vitamin supplements to it?”

“Protein powder sometimes, but not too much. I really get all I need just by mixing different smoothie recipes and eating small amounts in between.”



“So more like snacks?” Phillip asked.

“Yes, sir, but not like snack foods, like chips and stuff,” Zephyr explained. “I love finger foods, like meat and cheese roll ups, sandwich squares and bruschetta. Those are the perfect size foods for me.”

So, I’d knocked one out of the park by cubing the sandwiches, good to know. I knew how to make pinwheels, too, but I did need to touch base with him about one thing first.

“Were you okay with the lunch meat slices, or would you prefer real sliced turkey, roast beef, chicken, and ham?” I asked.

When he licked his lips, looked down, squirmed and lifted his shoulders into a little shrug, I knew I had my answer. The question was if he’d trust me enough to tell me the truth.

“It’s okay,” he hedged. “But I like the slices carved off the bone better. Sometimes the stuff from the deli counter is too salty and I end up guzzling a bunch of water, which just makes me feel really full even when I’ve barely eaten anything.”

“Thank you for being honest,” I said, gently touching his knee so he’d look up at me.

The look in his eyes was guarded when he did, but I hoped he’d see, by the way that I was smiling at him, that it was okay to tell me these things.

“I don’t like deli meat, either,” Tristan blurted, sticking out his tongue.

Now that threw me. He’d never mentioned anything about it before. “Really? Why didn’t you ever say anything?”

“With everything else you’d already provided me with, I didn’t wanna ask for anything more.”

Stunned, I just sat there staring at him. “But that was years ago.”

“I know.”

“Tristan?”

“I’m sorry, Daddy. You already do so much to make it so I can focus on my art,” Tristan explained. “And it was such a little thing, to me, since we don’t have a lot of sandwiches except in summer and when we have soup.”

Yes, he did have a point there. I employed a chef for a reason, one of which being that neither he nor I were very fond of spending time in the kitchen. I knew enough that we’d never starve, but no one would ever refer to some of my culinary concoctions as masterpieces, though I was proud to say that I could pull them together without the aid of a box. When Theo had responded to the advertisement I’d placed for a chef not long after my business had really taken off, I’d been shocked at the diversity displayed in his credentials and wondered why he hadn’t opted to open his own restaurant rather than become a personal chef.

Man, had he schooled me about all the things that went into that kind of business venture. Not only in the area of capital needed to ensure that a place had up-to-date equipment, but in the man hours he’d need to put in.

Being a personal chef means that I get to do what I love and have a life, unless you plan on hosting dinner parties seven days a week. In that case, you might want to think about hiring a battalion of chefs and providing them living quarters as they’d never have time for anything else.

We'd laughed at that, because I was way too hands on with the day-to-day operations of my security firm to ever consider entertaining that much. Hell, I didn't like people enough to want to subject myself to that much socializing, though for my boy, I'd learned to play the host for one social event a month. That was more than enough peopling for me.

It turned out that Theo adored that once a month time to flex his chops and really wow the art community that came to see what Tristan was unveiling next. Some of the meals had been talked about as much as the artwork, including some of the soups he'd crafted over the years and oh, did that man love to cook seafood. He was going to enjoy having Zephyr around.

"Switching away from deli counter meats will be an easy adjustment to make," I said, ending anymore debate about the subject.

I'd send Theo a text later, so he could dispose of what we had and stock up on sufficient quantiles of the meat we'd need. And bacon. I might be in the minority, but I loved thick slabs of sizzling, maple smoked pork layered between the cheese and meats on my sandwiches.

"Are there foods besides snack foods that you try to avoid, or that bother you?" Phillip asked.

"Pasta," Zephyr blurted, scrunching up his nose. "It's already heavy without sauce and then once the sauce is on, I can't eat more than a tiny dish before I feel bloated. It feels like it stays in my tummy forever, too. I never eat it before I have to perform."

"Another thing that's very good to know," I said, an idea beginning to form. "Would you be able to provide me a list of good pre and post-performance foods, as well as things you like and don't like?"

“I-I can do that,” Zephyr said.

“And maybe even a schedule of how you like to position your meal and smoothie rotations,” I continued, keeping my voice encouraging.

I needed him to know that this was important to me and would not in any way make him a burden. Then I saw him glance between myself and Phillip and lick his lips before his eyes darted to my chest.

“It’s okay,” I said, covering his hand with mine, which easily dwarfed it. “He’s a member of The Brotherhood, too, as well as my personal physician. He’s the one who provided me with the certifications of health I showed you.”

His mouth formed a little ‘o’ then he broke out into a wide grin.

“Then is it okay if instead of smoothies in the morning and before bed, I got to drink from you?” he asked.

“It is more than okay,” I told him, preening now.

I was thrilled to know that he wanted more of my milk and I couldn’t wait to provide him with more tonight. This morning I’d pumped while they’d been outside conducting their shoot, and it had been nowhere near as pleasant of an experience as feeding them the night before.

“If you’re nursing from Rowan, you might find that you no longer need the protein powder you were using,” Phillip said. “Have you ever fed from anyone on a regular basis before?”

“Regular, no, but whenever I’ve had the chance to, I always felt really good afterward, just like with having my smoothies,” Zephyr explained.

“Sounds to me like the three of you have a good plan to get you started,” Phillip said. “So how about I take a listen to your heart and lungs, check your blood pressure, and your blood sugar, too, as well as get your weight. We can do a follow up visit next month, just to touch base and see how you’re feeling, and take it from there.”

“I-I don’t know if I’ll still be here in a month,” Zephyr stammered, glancing over at me.

“He’ll be here,” I assured Phillip and Zephyr, too, leaving it at that for now, until Tristan and I could talk about pulling the plug on our time here and taking him home.

“Okay, then I, um—I’m good with a follow up in a month,” Zephyr replied.

“Perfect,” Phillip replied as he bent to unzip his carrying case.

As he always did, he made short work of this part of the process, declaring Zephyr’s blood pressure, heartbeat and respiration rate to be perfectly normal, while his blood sugar and weight were a bit on the low side.

“I’ll be looking for those to come up between now and our follow up,” Phillip said as he began meticulously packing away his things. “Though I doubt that will be an issue with the plan you’ve already begun to work out. Just remember that when keeping to little portions, you have to eat them in greater frequency or replace one with a smoothie if you don’t feel up to solids. Can you do that for me?”

“Yes, sir,” Zephyr said without any hesitation.

“Good. Then I will see you next month.”

“When, um, you say you want to see my weight come up, how much do you mean?” Zephyr asked.

“One pound,” Phillip said. “That’s all, and you shouldn’t have to do anything to gain that besides stick to the plan you’re already laying out.”

When he smiled at that, I felt myself relax a little, glad it wasn’t some number that would throw him into a panic or a fit of anxiety.

“All right, I’ve got another patient to see so I’d best get going,” Philip said. “Good to see you again, Tristan.”

He waved but kept silent, always a little wary of Phillip since his visits to the house to see him usually involved a tummy ache induced by over-indulging in the decadent treats Theo made on occasion. He hated enemas, but they tended to be the prescribed course of treatment, something I knew he held against Phillip, just a little.

“Thank you for coming,” I said as I walked him to the door.

“Anytime, you know that. I think you called it right when you contacted me, though,” Phillip said. “I can only see him thriving once he’s in your home.”

He winked when he said it and I tipped my hat as he stepped out the door. He was right, though. We couldn’t begin to implement a meal plan or any changes until we were back home. Someplace I longed to be more with every passing moment. I was just about to pull Tristan aside for what I hoped would be a quick conversation when my phone pulsed with the tones of “You Ain’t Seen Nothin’ Yet.” Sebastian calling me was never a good sign and I felt my soul groan as I slid my finger over the icon to answer the call.

There was a reason I’d assigned that ring tone to him, dammit. Every time it went off I knew down to the tips of my toes that someone had gone and fucked up spectacularly, usually in a new and more disastrous way than any of the crew had ever fucked up before.

### ZEPHYR

Loud, growled rumbles echoed up the hallway as Mr. Rowan told someone off. I'd heard a burst of music first and wondered if it was a neighbor being loud the way he kept warning us not to be. We were really trying, but the walls in the building seemed really thin, maybe because it was a newer place, unlike Honey Hearth, which had been an amazing Victorian Era home more than a hundred years old. I'd never even heard Grayson crying on the nights Josh claimed that he'd been fussy, and they'd been in the room next door to mine. I felt bad that Tristan was racking up chores when I was laughing and being loud right along with him and planned to ask Mr. Rowan if it was okay for me to help him, since I'd helped get him into trouble.

I just had to wait for him to be done grumbling at whoever had made him mad.

When I looked over at Tristan, I saw him staring down at his hands where they were clasped together in his lap, his lower lip trembling when Mr. Rowan's bellowed Is he out of his fuckin' mind? drifted up the hall. We both flinched before Tristan wrapped his arms around me and kissed my temple.

"Something bad happened at Daddy's work," Tristan explained. "He never gets mad like this unless someone screws up badly."

Tensing, I made a mental vow never to fuck up. It was scary listening to him tell whoever it was that they'd better fix whatever had gone wrong before he was forced to get involved.

“Not me,” Tristan blurted, still holding on to me. “He’s never once yelled at me that way, and he won’t yell at you like that, either. He saves that for the people who work in his security business where messing up can get someone killed. If we mess up and get hurt or something bad happens to us, Daddy will blame it on himself for not watching us better or thinking ahead and planning accordingly ‘cause he’s supposed to be the one guarding us.”

When Tristan said it that way, I could see where it was different. Every time he called Mr. Rowan Daddy and me his baby brother made me long to call Mr. Rowan Daddy, too, but I was waiting to be told that it was okay.

And to earn the contract.

He’ll be here.

Mr. Rowan had been adamant about that when Mr. Phillip had wanted to set up my follow-up appointment, but it was all so fast. I knew better than to settle in completely until all the I’s had been dotted and the T’s had been crossed. I’d had contracts fall apart at the last minute through no fault of my own, like when the carnival owner who’d planned to hire me for the season was told by his accountant that not only couldn’t he afford me, he was going to have to cut three other acts loose before they got on the road, or he’d run out of payroll money before they’d earned back their operating costs. That’s how I’d wound up with Paulie and his family in the first place. They’d been one of the other acts let go, and with our complementary skills, it had only seemed wise to head out on the road together.

You tell him that I want his face on my video screen in thirty minutes or he can consider himself fired with no chance in hell of receiving a reference from me. As it is, I’d like to speak to Kelly when I’m finished with Ryan to see why the fuck he suggested him for the position in the first place if this is the bullshit he was known to pull. Why are we only hearing about this shit now when he’s been on assignment for



the past twelve days? I needed to know these things before I trusted the safety of one of my clients to an incompetent who allows a kid without proper documentation into Katana's dressing room on just his word that he's Katana's son! Was he smoking something that I need to know about? If that's the case, then he's still fired but at least it's half a good god damned reason for that kind of abject stupidity.

"Oh yeah, Daddy is pissed," Tristan murmured.

"Is there anything that we can do to make it better?" I asked.

"Not until he's finished with them. Then we can crawl in his lap and cuddle with him and have a little suckie, that really helps calm his nerves and settle him down when someone's upset him," Tristan explained. "If Mr. Phillip was here with his blood pressure cuff, it would prolly burst trying to get a reading on Daddy's."

I giggled at that, because I could picture the dial spinning with an angry red face at the center, steam streaming out of its ears as the needle fell off.

"Can you see it in your head?" Tristan asked.

"Uh-huh," I replied. "With an angry face and steam and everything. You should draw him a picture."

"Let's draw it together," Tristan suggested as he let go of me so he could retrieve his sketchpad and some colored pencils.

With the contents spread out in front of us, we stretched out side by side on pillows we hastily plunked onto the floor, a blanket over our feet to keep them warm as we started drawing. I really needed to get some socks the next time I was at a store that sold them. The weather was warm enough now, but when winter rolled around, I knew I'd want something between my feet and the wooden floors.

That's how he found us when he returned to the living room, his hair standing out on one side like he'd been running his fingers through it.

"Oh good, I see you've found something to keep you occupied," he said, looming over us for a moment. "I'm afraid I need to retire to the bedroom for a little while to deal with a bit of incompetence. There's fruit and a few sandwich squares left in the fridge, though damn it all, those were made with the deli meat."

I leapt up to give him a hug, snuggling against him when he wrapped me in his embrace and sighed. "It's okay," I murmured. "I can eat the fruit and a square won't hurt me any if I'm hungry enough to have one."

"It will be the last time you have to eat that crap, either of you," he said as he opened an arm so Tristan could join us. "Just let me deal with this mess and you'll be back to having my undivided attention."

"Okay, Daddy," Tristan said. "We're coloring a picture for you."

He hugged us tighter at hearing that and kissed the tops of both of our heads. "You guys have already made things a thousand times better."

"Then we'll have to shoot for a million when you're done," I said, feeling a little snarky.

When he threw his head back and laughed while squeezing us tighter, I knew it had gone over well. The few Daddies I'd known had never minded a teensy-weensy bit of snark from their boys, as long as no lines were crossed. It seemed like Mr. Roman might be okay with that, too, as long as I didn't go overboard.

"All right, you two, back to your drawing while I go get ready to take a bite out of someone's ass."

“Wish it was mine,” Tristan muttered, prompting another round of laughter from Mr. Rowan.

“Go on now, get,” he said, turning us loose only to smack us both on our asses as we walked away. Nothing too hard, but it did sting a little, just like I imagined his teeth might if he ever bit into my bottom.

Shivering, I squirmed against the pillow as I struggled to get comfortable, the image that had popped into my head had left me with a little problem tenting the front of my shorts. It had been months since I’d been filled and fucked until I was completely sated that it was hard not to think about the bulge that had been in his pants that morning when he’d tugged me onto his lap while I’d nursed.

“What’s wrong, is something poking you?” Tristan asked. “Lift up and I’ll help you smooth out the blanket.”

“That’s not it.”

“Oh.”

“The pillow’s just making me a little uncomfy at the moment,” I grumbled as I squirmed a hand down the front of my shorts.

“Ohh, I can help with that if you want me to,” Tristan offered, setting the sketchpad aside so he could slide a hand up the back of my shirt.

“Please,” I groaned, squirming closer.

Now that he was touching me, every memory of our make-out session the night before came flooding back and I was curious to see how much further we could take things.

“We should get these out of the way,” he remarked, giving the bottom of my shorts a little tug while his other hand rubbed up my back.

“Let’s just ditch all the clothes and get nakey,” I suggested, already starting to wiggle out of those shorts.

“Heck yeah!”

His shirt flew over my head and my legs got twisted up in my shorts when I tried to remove them. He had long sleep pants on and got caught up in them worse than I did. Laughing as hard as we were made it difficult to free ourselves, but he was as hard as I was when we crashed together, naked as our lips met, and the immediate brush of skin against skin made us both groan.

His hair was so long and thick that when I ran my fingers through it, the strands fell in waves over my hand. He tasted like the strawberry milk we’d had right before Mr. Phillip had arrived, and as his finger skimmed down the center of my back, I flicked my tongue over his lips, tasting them. He cupped my ass and dragged me closer, using his hold on me to rock our bodies together as we made out.

“Is it okay if I touch more?” he murmured against my lips, even as a finger slid down my crease, not very far, just enough so there wasn’t any mistaking what he was talking out.

“Can I touch, too?” I asked as my hand glided up his hip.

“I’d be sad if you didn’t.”

I wanted to see if his nipples were sensitive, like mine were, and the moment I glided a fingertip over one, he gasped and pressed his hips against mine, grinding our erections together. Giving it a little pinch produced a shudder, and he whined as he

kissed along the edge of my jaw, his breathy words sending puffs of warm air against my skin. He barely ghosted a finger over my entrance, and I could feel the growing wetness between us as precum dribbled from our cocks, the constant friction ratcheting the level of pleasure up with every glide.

“Y-you don’t have any toys, do you?” he moaned as I twisted the nipple I’d pinched. “M-mine are stuck in the room with Daddy.”

He cried out the word when I pinched a second time, a shiver running through his body while I tried to figure out why he wanted to play something now when we were already having so much fun. It only dawned on me that he meant the other kind of toys when he slid the tip of a spit-slicked finger inside me and all I could think about was that it wasn’t enough, and I needed more.

“N-o,” I choked out, squirming as my cheeks heated up a little. “N-never had the n-n-nerve to b-buy one.”

Purring in my ear, he nuzzled my neck, lightly nipping the skin as we caressed one another. “Hmmm, we’ll have to fix that.”

I’d have asked why he needed toys when he had a Daddy, but this moment made it painfully obvious. I doubted he topped and I knew I didn’t, so heavy petting, frotting, and fingering were just going to have to get us where we wanted to be. Not that I minded. I was already so keyed up that when he pressed his finger deeper, I squirmed and rocked against him, pinched his nipple and twisted until he cried out, coming as hard as I did when he hit that magic spot inside of me and made everything explode.

In the aftermath, as we lay gasping and panting, lips so close together we could share lazy kisses as we sighed and moaned, I couldn’t think of a single moment that had been more perfect. His hand still pressed against the curve of my ass, holding me tight to him, and I wondered if he had the same fear that I did, that if one of us let go,

the other would just vanish and we'd wake up alone, horny from the remnants of a dream. I'd lost track of how many times I'd woken up that way, sad to discover that the fantasy my dreams had created was nothing more than a memory evaporating into a haze of fragmented memories.

"I don't wanna move," he murmured, "even to finish Daddy's drawing."

"I think he's gonna be awhile," I said as a whisper of a curse drifted out from beneath the door.

"Yeah, he's still chewin' someone's ass."

Giggling, I rested my head on his shoulder and settled in for a little nap, wondering how long it would be before he finished ripping someone a new one and emerged to discover us naked and messy from dried sweat and cum. My last thought, before I drifted off, was to wonder if he'd clean us up before he fed us, or if he'd just make us messier once he'd seen what we'd done.

9

TRISTAN

All right, boys, I need you to wake up and focus on me, come on now.

Daddy's voice dripped into my dreams, melting the naked image of Zephyr with his legs wrapped around the moon as he dangled from it, holding a star out to me.

"Don't wanna," I grumbled, trying to tug the blanket over my head only Daddy yanked it away.

Evil Daddy.

There was no light streaming in through the windows when I cracked one eye open, which meant it was nighttime already, which was sleepy time and I was sleepin'. Couldn't Daddy see that? We were fine right here on the pillows, even if we didn't have as many as when Daddy had laid them down for our movie time. Zephyr was all warm and soft, clinging to me like a contented little koala, we'd be fine spending the night this way.

"You might not want to, but you are going to get up and go get your things together so we can meet the plane."

"But I don't wanna go anywhere, 'specially not nowhere we gotta fly."

"Tristan, you will get your behind up this instant and do as I say, please," Daddy said,

scowling at me as he gently shook Zephyr, who slept far more soundly than I did.

“Come on now, baby boy, time to get up. That’s it, open your eyes for me.”

I was still pouting about having to move at all as I watched Zephyr stir and blink sleepy, confused eyes at me.

“Is it morning?” he murmured as he clumsily tried to brush the hair from his eyes.

It just made a bigger mess when I tried to help, but I wanted to remember that soft look on his face for the next time I was sketching, because tousled, sated and sprawled out with ropes still coiled loosely around his body was a look I was going to have to capture, and soon.

“No, but I still need you to get up and go put some clothes and essentials in a backpack, please,” Daddy explained. “We’re taking a very unplanned excursion that I am not happy about and I’d like us to be in the air within the hour.”

His little mouth formed an ‘o’ before he scrambled to his feet, naked with a corner of the blanket stuck to his belly.

“I- I-I’m a mess,” he stammered, but instead of waiting for Daddy to tell him what to do, he whirled around and raced for the shower, the water coming on almost as soon as he’d gotten the door closed.

“Now why aren’t you moving?” Daddy asked when he turned back to look at me.

“Because I don’t wanna go,” I declared. “I want to stay here.”

“Now when have I ever left you alone when I’ve flown out of the area?” Daddy asked.



“But I wouldn’t be alone, Zephyr can stay, too,” I explained. “We can start on our moon series and our scary movie marathon.”

“You can have your scary movie marathon in the hotel room, where the both of you will be staying until I fix this shitstorm Ryan has unleashed with Katana’s management team,” Daddy snapped in that fierce, no-nonsense tone that I almost never argued with.

Almost never.

Today I wasn’t feeling very compliant. I was still getting a feel for where all my stuff was here, now he wanted me to figure out what to bring and what to leave behind when I had so many ideas running through my head that I needed all of it and my studio back home.

“But why can’t Zephyr and I stay here?” I whined, clutching my pillow to me since he still had hold of my blanket.

“Because this isn’t our home, for one thing, and I don’t have time to remedy that little issue while I am dealing with this one,” Daddy growled. “Nor am I about to leave the two of you here without my supervision, so one of you can overdo it again and it won’t necessarily be him. So no. That is not what will be happening. We will be getting on the plane and we will be flying to Manchester together, as a family, the way you and I always have in the past. Now that is the last time I am going to tell you to get your ass in gear.”

I scowled my hardest scowl, until my face hurt, it was so scrunched up from glaring at him. Arms crossed, I adamantly remained in my spot on the floor, stubbornness having made me brave and even a little foolish to think that my refusal would mean that I’d get my way. In the four years we’d been together, Daddy had never flown off and left me, even just for a weekend to go touch base on a few things and make sure

proceedings were up to his exacting standards. Clearly, he was done trying to reason with me, because his eyes narrowed more and he nodded, then stood and began gathering up my sketchbook, colored pencils, and the notepad on the desk. He only glanced back at me once before heading into the bedroom to grab the rest of my stuff, and though I knew resistance was futile, I stuck my nose in the air and turned my face away from him. I peeked when the door to the bathroom flew open and Zephyr rushed out in a towel and hurried into his room. Opening my mouth to call out to him, I was stopped by the furious look on Daddy's face when he poked his head out to still see me sitting there.

Maybe I'd pushed my luck as far as I should, but coming here had been enough change, and it was only the second night. If I couldn't wake up in my own bed then at least there was enough of my stuff here to make it feel sort of homey, or at least familiar enough to me that I'd started settling in. I'd flown with him to Manchester before. It was long, long, long and the last time we'd gone, we'd had to get a train and sit on that for another hour before we got to Blackpool where a member of his staff had somehow managed to get arrested along with their principal and created a bit of an incident in the process.

I hated trying to get set up in hotel rooms, even posh ones. I always had to move the chair around to find the best spot for drawing beside the window and even then, there were times when the natural lighting was weak. Plus there was the headache of getting my supplies laid out just right so I wouldn't keep getting pulled out of what I was working on in order to find what I needed. Traveling overseas meant the plugs were different and I didn't have my little kit here with all the plug-ins so I could use my drawing tablet. That meant I'd have to limit how much time I spent on it until Daddy could get me one. The last time it had taken two whole days before he'd remembered.

I was still in a huff when he emerged with two backpacks over one shoulder and nearly collided with Zephyr as he came out of his room with a bag that was

practically bursting at the seams, and almost as big as he was.

“Good boy,” Daddy praised. “Go get your shoes on and wait for us by the door.”

My eyes met Zephyr’s right before he hurried to do as he’d been told, and in them I’d seen nervousness and confusion, and with good reason, considering that I was still sitting there naked and pouting on the pillow. Not that it deterred Daddy any. He dropped the bags on the floor beside me and snatched up the blankets, winding the first one around me so tight I couldn’t squirm. He added a second before tossing me over his shoulder, snatching up the bags and stalking to the door with long strides while I dangled there, too stunned to pout any longer. He carried me outside that way, silently heading down the walk on the way to the parking lot.

“Get in and put your seatbelt on,” Daddy instructed Zephyr after he’d unlocked and started the SUV with his fob. Zephyr ran around the other side and did as he was told, while Daddy pulled open the door, plunked me on the seat, and buckled me in so tight that if I hadn’t already been wrapped up like a butterfly in a chrysalis, I still wouldn’t have been able to move.

Then he slammed the door and rocked the whole vehicle in the process.

Rude much?

All I could do was huff and kick my legs, which were so tightly encased in the blankets that it was like having a mermaid’s tail. How cool would that be? I’d never lose a race to cross the pool again. Could have been in the pool too, if he’d let me take Zephyr home if he didn’t want to leave us in the apartment. I’d have explained everything to him on the way, and we’d have been super good and even cleaned out the apartment so he wouldn’t have to do it when he got home. I’d have been the bestest big brother ever and gotten him all settled in and everything. At night, we’d have played with the moon and my toys and watched all kinds of movies with

Reece's Pieces and caramel corn and everything.

We'd have been so good, and we wouldn't have had too much candy either.

Now I was pouting again, and steadily kicking a beat on the back of his seat which I knew had to be annoying him, but I was annoyed, and I wanted him to know it too.

Daddy said nothing all the way to the airport, and he left the music off too, which made it a long forty-minute ride to the airport where his company jet was kept. It was waiting for us, and I felt a small measure of satisfaction at seeing that it was thirteen minutes past ten.

So much for leaving within the hour.

Okay, so maybe I was feeling naughty and mean and needed to rein it all in before Daddy unleashed the most dreaded punishment of all and assigned me to weed all the flower beds on the front lawn, and there were a lot of them. He usually took care of those, since he said it helped him think and he could snarl curses at the weeds for invading his flower beds without worrying about me thinking I could get away with cussing, too.

My kicking had pretty much slowed to nothing as we pulled up, and I stopped completely when I saw the wide-eyed, slightly-panicked look on Zephyr's face.

"I'm scared," Zephyr whispered, tears shimmering in his eyes. "I've never been on a plane before."

I couldn't even hold his hand, I was so bundled up in blankets as Daddy turned to look at us and reached back to cup his cheek, cradling it against his hand as Zephyr nuzzled against it.

“There’s nothing at all to worry about,” Daddy told him. “There’s a big, comfy seat waiting for you right next to Tristan’s and plenty of movies on board. Can you be a big boy and get your bag and wait for me at the bottom of the stairs so we can all go up together?”

“Uh-huh,” Zephyr replied, nodding despite still looking terrified of the plane waiting for us on the tarmac.

He licked his lips and took a big breath, turned those azure eyes on me and nodded. “I-I can do that.”

“I know you can, sweet boy,” Daddy said. “So, hop to it.”

He scrambled to do as he was told while I sat there feeling guilty for being disobedient and not being able to hold his hand when he was trembling. Only after Zephyr had closed the door and was several feet away from the car did Daddy get out, dragging the bags off the passenger seat with him, so he could open my door, unbuckle me, and drag me back out and over his shoulder like a flour sack. This time he’d thrown our bags over the shoulder first, pinning them in place with my body, which unfortunately left his other hand free to swat my bottom all the way to the plane.

They weren’t nice swats either. They stung even through the blankets. I’d feel those when I was sitting in my seat, and I knew he knew it, too.

Evil Daddy.

The only time he stopped swatting was as we headed up the stairs, so he could hold me steady, but once he’d set me back on my feet, he delivered three more swats, each one harder than the one before.

Talk about ouchie.

Tears sprang to my eyes and ran down my cheeks as he turned me around to face him.

“Now, what are you going to do the next time I tell you to get your ass up and get packed?” he asked, face still stern and furious as he glared down at me.

“Do it, Daddy,” I murmured.

“You’re damn right. You will do it and without kicking the back of my chair the whole way here. That’s what those last three swats were for in case you were wondering. Now, are you ready to put some clothes on and behave?”

“Yes, Daddy,” I said, eager to rub my sore behind.

“Good. That’s what I was hoping to hear out of you.”

The only problem was that I was still all wrapped up too snugly to free myself with the way Daddy had tucked the ends of the blankets beneath other layers so they wouldn’t unravel. I had to stand still and wait, backside warm and stinging as he opened my bag and took out the sleep pants and t-shirt he’d left on top. He unwrapped me in a swirl of material that distracted me from my aching backside, for about a second, until he delivered the hardest crack yet, right on my naked behind. Now that one was gonna leave a handprint. I yelped and covered my butt with both hands, backing away a half step when Daddy held my clothes out to me.

“That was the last one,” Daddy said, so I accepted the clothes and scurried away before I did something to earn another swat.

I was done being bad, though. Not being able to hold Zephyr’s hand when he’d been

scared and near tears had reminded me that part of being a good big brother was setting a good example and I hadn't done that with the way I'd acted. Time to do better and be the good big brother I'd promised to be.

I quickly slipped into my outfit and hurried to get buckled in before takeoff. Daddy had closed the windows beside our seats as well as the ones across the aisle for us and tucked one of the blankets around Zephyr. The other he tucked around me the moment I sat down. He kissed my forehead and buckled me in the way he always did, and I knew everything was forgiven. The moment we started moving Zephyr laced his fingers with mine and pulled the blanket tighter around him, the large, thickly padded leather seats nothing like the ones you'd find on a commercial airline unless you had a first-class ticket. We had plenty of legroom, wide armrests, and movie screens that pulled down from above like the visors in a vehicle.

"You can start your scary movie marathon now, if you'd like," Daddy offered, while Zephyr yawned beside me, curled on his side and rested his head against the plush leather. "Or not."

"We can wait, Daddy," I said, feeling contrite about earlier and extremely tired myself. "It's sleepy time now."

"In that case, I'll say goodnight," Daddy said.

"Night, night, Daddy," I said, while Zephyr gave a little wave before burrowing his face in the blankets.

"Dream well, little ones."

I smiled at that and snuggled down to go back to sleep, secure in the knowledge that Daddy still loved me, even when I was being chaotic evil, like the characters I loved to play in our Dungeons and Dragons games, which made it so much easier to want to

do better. I'd find a way to make it up to him, too, I always did. Sometimes I was just too stubborn for my own good. Change always seemed to trigger me to dig my heels in, but I'd been doing better about not giving in to the temptation. Until tonight. When he'd needed me to be on my best behavior and do what Zephyr had done. Yawning, I grimaced at the crusty feel of my skin as I twisted in my seat. Guess I hadn't wiped off well enough in the bathroom. I should have jumped in the shower with Zephyr. No. Bad idea. That would have gotten both of our butts smacked when one or both of us gave in to the temptation to go to our knees and give the other suckies. Okay, to be fair, it would have totally been me initiating it. I'd seen the look on Zephyr's face when Daddy had started getting pissed with me. My little brother wasn't the sort to poke the bear, or in this case, the Daddy the way I had done and I shouldn't have been disrespectful and done it when it wasn't okay. Especially when Daddy was stressed. Closing my eyes, I vowed to wake up in a better mood with a much better attitude, as well as a plan for how I was gonna say sorry with more than words.



### ROWAN

I'd hated checking in and immediately having to abandon my boys, but the mess I'd been faced with had only grown during the time I was in the air. The fury I'd felt at learning what had taken place still hadn't cooled by the time I'd fired the idiot that caused it and demoted the fool who'd recommended him to the team in the first place. This wasn't how we did business, something that I'd had to reassure my client's management team of more than once over the past few hours. It was only my willingness to substantially reduce our fee that had allowed us to retain them, something I'd informed my ex-employee that he'd be helping me recoup the cost of, in the form of the forfeiture of his final paycheck. He might not have been happy, but when faced with the option of blacklisting him throughout the industry, he'd agreed to walk away without it or references of any kind. I'd advised him not to even bother listing my firm as a former employer, because I wouldn't lie about what had taken place if I heard from anyone. In the conversation we'd had, I'd strongly urged him to seek a career change immediately, before he truly put someone's life at risk.

I could only hope he listened.

Now that the unpleasantness was over, I could turn my focus back to the two young men waiting for me at the hotel. I needed to plan something fun for them so the trip across the pond wasn't a complete waste. Putting them back on the plane for an immediate trip back wasn't even on the table, not after Tristan's little bout of defiance. I knew what had caused it. Relocating to the apartment had already upset the apple cart, especially when he'd been forced to leave his safe space and all his

materials behind. When I'd told him to get on the plane, I'd expected a full-blown tantrum. What I'd gotten was considerably milder, and I appreciated that, though what I would have appreciated more was his full and immediate compliance.

I just hoped my cranky chaos orb was in a better mood now that he'd gotten some much needed rest. I was well aware that I hadn't been available to enforce bedtime or any of our evening rituals, something else that had been simmering in my mind when I'd lit into Ryan and Kelly. Honestly, it was Kelly I'd been the most pissed off with. Ryan wouldn't even have been on my hiring radar if it hadn't been for him. I'd told him in no uncertain terms that he'd find himself kicked to the unemployment line if he ever recommended anyone to me again. I didn't care if they were fresh from guarding the god damned president, I didn't want anything to do with anyone he spoke highly of.

Shit. Now I was fuming all over again.

No more work. At least not for the rest of the day.

After Zephyr's declaration that he'd never been on a plane before, I didn't need to ask if he'd ever been to Blackpool. Now that he was here, a trip down to the pier to explore the boardwalk and the amusement park were in order. Tristan had fallen in love with the rides and the arcades on our last trip over, not to mention the candy store where he'd tried to eat his weight in licorice twists and wine gums, which I'd had to admit packed an intense punch of flavor. I was curious to see what Zephyr would choose, and if his face would light up the way Tristan's had when he took in all the games.

But first, I needed to deal with the ache that had been growing in my chest, and the leaking that was only being concealed by my trench coat. All the way up to the room, I found myself hoping that they were hungry enough to help ease it, my spirits taking a serious nosedive when I noticed the covered tray waiting to be picked up outside

their door. I'd brought my pump with me. I never traveled anywhere without it, but it was going to be a miserable experience, with as engorged I was.

I opened the door to laughter and a full-on tickle fight taking place on the bed, their giggling voices washing over me as I stepped into the room. Damn, they were adorable. I spent a minute just watching them after I secured the door, then Zephyr rolled off the bed and landed with a thud on two of the pillows that had already landed there, his shaggy hair obscuring his gaze as he struggled to right himself.

"Daddy!" Tristan squealed, rushing into my arms the moment he spotted me.

I held him as Zephyr waved at me from the floor, but the moment I opened an arm to him, he saw it as the invitation it was and rushed to join in the hug.

"I looks like you two found a way to occupy yourselves," I said as I kissed the tops of their heads. "Good job remembering to order something to eat, too."

"I ate, Daddy, but Zephyr only had a little yogurt and fruit. He wasn't hungry for any of the other breakfast foods."

Those sunken spirits of mine started dancing at hearing that, and I gave my baby boy a squeeze. "Then it's a good thing Daddy has something for you that's just aching to be consumed."

Zephyr whisper-squealed, the tip of his tongue poking out to run along the seam of his lips before he nuzzled closer, wiggling his body between the flaps of my coat so he could suck on one of the damp spots on my shirt.

"Mmmmm," he hummed, sounding almost as urgent as I felt.

"All right, little one, let me get that shirt out of your way and wipe down so you can

eat properly,” I said, stroking his hair even as I urged him back.

He whined, but he complied, eyes never leaving my chest as I stripped off my coat and the black button-down beneath it, found the wipes I used to clean my chest, and got settled against the pillows Zephyr had picked himself up off the floor and propped against the headboard. His enthusiasm as he crawled across the bed left me aching to feel his mouth on me, the milk beginning to leak down my chest as he got comfortable.

“Will you read to us, Daddy?” Tristan asked and he joined us on the bed, holding up one of the books he’d pulled from his bag.

“Of course,” I replied, taking the book so he could get settled on the other side of me. “That will be a wonderful way to pass the time.”

And settle the last of my fury, I thought, though I didn’t say that part to him. I always tried to keep the ugly parts of my business as far away from my boy as I could manage, something that would be doubly important now that I had two boys to watch over. Safeguarding their emotional wellbeing would always be a priority of mine. As far as I was concerned, ugliness had no place in their lives. I would always stand as a barrier between them and it and do everything in my power not to let things slip past me, though realistically I knew that I’d never be able to shield them from everything.

Zephyr’s tongue lapping at the dripping milk made me groan and when he latched on, my cock twitched. I knew it would be as engorged as my nipples were before he finished draining them. It was going to be hard as fuck to focus on the story, but I was Daddy, and I prided myself on the control I’d cultivated over the years. I opened that book and dialed in on the page, displaying the bright yellow and brown ducks gathered around a tiny puddle.

“Can we feed the ducks at the park this time?” Tristan asked around the thumb he’d

stuck in his mouth as he waited for me to start reading.

“We sure can,” I replied. “Do you remember what we learned, about the right things to feed them instead of bread?”

“Uh-huh. We can get birdseed and blueberries and dried mealworms,” he replied.

“That’s right, good job remembering,” I said, hugging him close as I began reading the story.

Midway though, Zephyr squirmed just enough to change sides, draping himself across me in the process. His hand brushing over the front of my pants made me groan and shift a little as my swollen cock responded to his touch.

“Are you going to let Daddy bury that in you when you get done eating?” I asked him as I stroked my fingers through his hair.

The humming sound he made revved up the pleasure I already felt, while Tristen giggled and slid his hand up my thigh until it rested beside Zephyr’s.

“Oh really,” I muttered, locking eyes with him. “Well, if that’s the way it’s going to be, why don’t you get your mouth down there and get Daddy nice and wet for your brother?”

Heat burned in his gaze as he scrambled to do as he’d been told, while Zephyr lifted up so they could work to remove my pants without dislodging him. The disgruntled sound he made when his lips nearly popped free of my skin got Tristan giggling again, then his lips were on my cock, and I melted beneath them.

All the stress of the trip and the worry that the business I’d worked so hard to build up was going to be irreparably damaged by an irresponsible fool had left my

shoulders and neck rigid. The tension had caused a low-grade pulsing at the base of my skull that could have easily morphed into a full-blown headache, but my boys soon made me forget that it was ever there.

Now this was exactly what I needed.

I let the book slip from my hand so I could glide my fingers through Tristan's hair, tug and listen to him growl around my cock as he sucked on the head. He loved things a little on the rough side and I knew the little pinpricks of pain he received from my tugging would just rev his pleasure up more. The last thing I expected was to hear Zephyr growl, too, as his teeth grazed my nipple. There wasn't a lot of milk left and yet, I could tell, from the way he whined and shifted his hips, that he wouldn't stop until he'd consumed the last drop, despite the hand Tristan had slid beneath him.

"Flip around," I urged, releasing Tristan's hair so I could grab Zephyr's and tug him into a rough kiss.

It took some maneuvering, and a lot of grunting and growling on Zephyr's part when I didn't let him latch back on to finish nursing until I'd slid lower on the bed. With Tristan kneeling over me and Zephyr having wiggled across the bed to finish his feast, I could lavish Tristan's cock with attention while he pleased me.

My boy was already dripping precum when I licked over his head, a low, keening whine beginning to spill from between his lips, the vibrations bringing on an orgasm that caught me completely off guard. So much for Daddy's hard-won control. Holy shit! While I lay there panting, my boys shared a filthy kiss, my milk and cum dribbling from the corners of their mouths as they shared their feasts.

"Fuck your brother and get him ready for me," I snarled as I reached up and yanked Tristan down so I could kiss him, too, the heated look he gave me one I wouldn't

forget anytime soon.

It was extremely rare that he topped, but I knew my boy enjoyed the moments when they arose. Judging from how quickly Zephyr flipped around so I'd have the perfect view of Tristan's cock when it slid inside of him, he was excited at the prospect, too.

Gods, just watching the prep, as Tristan grabbed a condom off the nightstand and donned it before patting around beneath a pillow for the lube. They must have been up to something earlier, to have had it there instead of on the nightstand with the condoms. Tristan took his time coating his fingers with it, and got his tongue involved, too, as he loosened Zephyr's hole. Holy shit. Zephyr rode those digits with the same enthusiasm as he'd nursed from me, and when he threw his head back and cried out, I knew he was more than ready to take Tristan's cock.

"Make him howl for you," I urged, slapping Tristan right on one of the handprints that remained from the spanking I'd given him. "But don't make him come, that's my job."

"Yes, Daddy."

I knew I'd be hard again in no time, just from watching them. The way Tristan glided his hands over Zephyr's hips, kneading, caressing. He didn't just shove in, despite how well he'd prepped Zephyr to receive him. He bent low over Zephyr's back, kissed up his spine, brushed the hair back from the nape of his neck, and licked, prompting a crop of goosebumps to break out down Zephyr's arms. His moan was better than being front and center for my favorite band, and the way he widened his knees, ducked his head, and raised his bottom a little higher, was one of the best damn invitations I'd ever seen. Tristan eased the head of his cock inside the tight hole I couldn't wait to feel stretch around me. Having his brother warm him up would make it easier for him to take my girth, though I knew he'd be feeling me for the rest of the night and tomorrow, too.

Just the thought of that filled me with pride and got the blood flooding south again as Tristan yanked him back, sinking farther into him while Zephyr shuddered.

“Mmmm, yeah,” Zephyr breathed, squirming to take more.

The graceful way he impaled himself was breathtaking, like a dance, wild and uninhibited. When he threw his head back and moaned, Tristan tangled one hand in his hair and gripped Zephyr’s shoulder with his other one, fucking into him until he came. The breathless little imp had the nerve to moan tag at me when he pulled out, while Zephyr whined and begged one of us to fuck him, please, he was so damned close.

“Oh no you don’t,” I said, gripping the base of his cock to starve off an impending orgasm. If I’d had ice....heh, the idea had already taken root when I glanced around, hoping there was some left in the ice bucket Tristan always asked for his juice to be brought in.

Bingo.

Snatching up a dripping cube, I ran it around Zephyr’s hole, digging my fingertips into his hip when he yelped and tried to jerk away.

“Be a good boy and cool off a little for Daddy,” I growled as I pressed the ice inside him and watched it disappear while he whined and shivered. When the heat from his body began to melt it, I added a second one, then rubbed my cold fingers over his balls, pleased to see that he was no longer as hard and ready to get off as he’d previously been.

Now I could roll the condom on and proceed to fuck him, slowly, letting him get used to my girth.



“F-f...” he stammered, quivering as he choked back the word.

I thought at first he was trying to say fuck and I wouldn't have penalized him for it. The bedroom was the only place where filthy words from my boys were welcome.

“S-so f-f-full,” Zephyr moaned as I bottomed out, shivers making his hole tighten around my cock.

“So tight,” I growled, nibbling his earlobe and tugging a little. “Is Daddy the biggest you've ever had?”

The moment he hissed yes , whined and rocked against me, I snapped my hips, determined to rock his world and leave him with a lasting reminder of just who was laying ownership to every last, delectable inch of him.

### TRISTAN

“Ghost train, ghost train, we have to do the ghost train first!” I declared, clutching Zephyr’s hand as we raced toward the creepy, nostalgic ride.

And there wasn’t even a line.

Getting to be first in the park was the best thing ever, ‘cause it was really hard to wait and watch the rides whirl past. Sometimes I got pouty and impatient, and Daddy had to threaten to revoke my shopping privileges at the gift store.

Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, this was Zephyr’s first time. We’d have to find him the perfect stuffie and a warm, oversized hoodie like the one I’d gotten to snuggle up in the last time we were here. Two of me could fit in it, it was so big. I’d wanted one that fit Daddy, too, so he could wear it and get his scent all up inside of it, for those times when he had to leave me alone in the hotel. Yesterday had been the first time it had been fun being left there without him, ‘cause I’d had Zephyr. Having my kitten was already the best thing in the world and today was our very first grand adventure.

He kept ahold of my hand once we were seated. The cars were only big enough for two, so Daddy sat in the one behind us and soon we were rattling along those old tracks, doors parting as we rolled into the darkness.

“Ohhh!” Zephyr gasped and pressed his face to my shoulder, only peeking out when I stroked his hair.

He clung as things flashed and ghostly faces appeared in glass as lights pulsed an eerie green around us, but he was giggling by the time we popped out, right before the last ghoul appeared, when he shrieked and would probably have leapt into my lap if it hadn't been for the seatbelts.

"That was so much fun!" Zephyr declared, still holding on to me after we'd stopped. "Can we go again?"

"Sure, there's no line," Daddy said from behind us, as the attendant approached.

"Going through again?" he asked.

"Please," Daddy replied, so the man waved us on.

This time, Zephyr didn't hide his face, though he still held on to me and flinched occasionally, squealing several times when something startled him.

"That's better than any of the carnival funhouses I've ever been in," Zephyr declared as we stepped off after the second time through.

"I'd never been in anything that fun before the first time Daddy brought me here. Now it's one of my favorite places out of everywhere we've been."

"What's that one?" Zephyr asked as he pointed toward a big blue loop high above a section of the park.

"That's the Infusion, it's my favorite roller coaster, 'cause I get to dangle and get flipped upside-down."

"Ohh, let's ride that one next!"

Now it was his turn to tug me along the path, while Daddy followed, occasionally bellowing after us to slow down so we didn't trip. It didn't matter that we raced past a bunch of rides to get to that one. I always zig-zagged my way through amusement parks, letting impulse and whatever caught my eye decide what ride I went on next.

And Zephyr was the same way, how awesome was that?

Most people followed the path and went one at a time, which meant there wasn't a line here, either. Daddy found it a little maddening and exhausting to rush from one end of the park to the other. Man was he in for it today. I heard him holler a reminder not to let go of one another's hands, and felt Zephyr curl his fingers tighter against mine. We'd slowed down to go up the ramp, waiting for Daddy to catch up 'cause he always went on every ride with me, even if he grumbled about a few of them.

This one was wild and twisty.

My heart hammered while Zephyr laughed and hollered beside me. His hair was a mess, windblown and framing his face with gentle waves that made his eyes stand out. I kissed him right there on the platform. Then Daddy kissed both of us and kept his arms around us as he walked us down the ramp.

"Let's do all the roller coasters now!" Zephyr declared. "That one first."

I caught the look on Daddy's face when Zephyr pointed at The Avalanche. It was a bobsled coaster, and the only one in the whole park that scared Daddy half to death.

I was about to tell Zephyr that we always saved that one for right before we left the park, but Daddy gave a little shake of his head and waved me toward it.

Ohhh.

I got it in an instant.

Zephyr was so happy, Daddy wasn't going to dull that look for anything in the world. The artist in me longed to capture the joy that made his skin glow and his eyes light up as he skipped along. My baby brother loved thrill rides, and he could handle them better than I could. I flopped on a bench after we finished the last one, flipped a hand over my eyes and started fanning myself with the other one while Zephyr bounced and climbed up on the edge of the bench so he could see what lay past the brightly colored awnings of several games.

Games!

Yes, game time would be perfect.

"Can we...play a few...games now?" I panted.

I'd have waved a white flag, or a white handkerchief if I'd had one. Daddy would have been happy to honor the hanky code and stroke me off before we went to bed.

"Some time at the arcade would be the perfect way to recharge," Daddy muttered as he leaned against the bench, face considerably paler than it had been when we'd gotten there.

"They have games?" Zephyr asked as he bounced down from the bench and turned, searching for where they were.

Daddy must have sensed that he was about to bolt and trapped him in a hug until he settled a little.

"It's getting crowded now, so I'll need you both to hold my hand from here on out," Daddy said as he held one out to me to help me off the bench. "I wouldn't want to

lose either of you.”

“I don’t wanna get lost,” Zephyr said, pressing right against Daddy’s side and clinging there, so I did the same on his other side.

“That would be scary,” I remarked, almost stuffing my thumb in my mouth for a bit of comfort. Instead, I remembered the necklace Daddy had given me. It was made of silicone and looked like a lollipop, so I could suck it when we were out in public without drawing people’s attention.

The last time that happened I’d wrinkled my nose, pulled my thumb out of my mouth, and told them all to mind their own damned business. I’d gotten an extra chore for cursing, just a little one, wiping the counters after supper, but Daddy had been proud of the way I’d stood up for myself.

“They’ve got tons of games,” I told him. “And we get to win prizes, too.”

That held his attention while Daddy walked us there, the wind blowing in off the water keeping the day from being too warm. I hoped they still had snuggly hoodies in the sweatshop. I really, really wanted to help Zephyr pick one. As small as he was, he’d be cold when we traveled this winter, and we always traveled to the mountains, where Daddy had a cabin with a stone fireplace and sleds to play on.

I always went for the games with the tickets, like skee-ball, where I could throw the balls and listen to them clack and rattle into their holes. Balls went in, tickets went out, and there was always a reward for trying.

Zephyr played a few games of skee-ball with me and Daddy before turning away to study the claw machine with colorful octopus stuffies inside of it. A moment later he was back at Daddy’s side, peering up at him with hopeful eyes and a puppy dog expression. He’d soon learn that Daddy always came prepared. Moments later Zephyr

returned to the claw machine and those octopus with a pocketful of tokens, while I went back to playing skee-ball until there was a pile of tickets beside my foot.

“I’m out of tokens, Daddy, but look what I got,” I said as I held them up.

“Good job,” Daddy replied, sliding an arm around me and turning so we could get Zephyr and turn in the tickets.

What I saw made me drop my tickets as I reached for my phone to snap off a couple photos of him with the tip of his tongue poking out of his mouth, a purple octopus clutched between the tines of the claw as he guided it to the drop slot. It was only after it had plunked safely into the slot that I realized it wasn’t the only stuffy he’d pulled out of the machine. Two others sat on the ledge of the machine beside his hand. One orange and one teal. I made sure to get a picture of his face when he stood with the purple one in his hands, clutching it to his chest.

“This one is mine,” he declared, before pointing to the other two. “And those are for you...and...and Daddy.”

Daddy’s arm tightened around me, and when I glanced up I saw the huge grin on his face right before he swept Zephyr into the hug.

“Now that is as wonderful a gift as my new octopus friend, who will have a place of honor on my desk,” Daddy declared before pressing a kiss to the side of his head.

I got one, too, then we picked my tickets up and took them to the prize counter, where I turned them in for buttons this time. I had enough that we each got to pick one. Daddy put his on his jacket. It had a dagger in the center and red letters reading Try Me , standing out against the black leather he wore. He helped Zephyr and I attach ours to the mini backpacks he’d gotten for us to carry. We’d found them in a little shop not far from the pier. The north pier. I kept forgetting that there was more than

one.

I'd chosen a blue backpack with Stitch's face on it, and Zephyr had chosen a plush purple monster with a creepy grin and scowling red eyes that terrified me a little. His button said Shine So Bright You Burn Their Eyes! And it was perfect for him. It was had a night sky for a background with rainbow-colored stars shimmering around sparkly words.

Mine simply said Create. But it was perfect, because that was all I ever wanted to do. Even here in this amazing place, with all the rides we still hadn't gone on yet, my mind was alive with ideas I itched to get down on paper.

On our first trip here, I'd snuck away from the hotel and tried to go exploring without Daddy, but I hadn't found anything fun until a group going to Blackpool Tower invited me to come along to see them dance. Before I'd run into them at the bus stop, I'd just been asking directions from the people I met. The problem was that I'd been asking for the pier but not being specific. So some folks had been sending me north while others had been sending me south, and all I'd done was weave back and forth several blocks from the water, and find my way to an industrial park and a Starbucks that wouldn't take currency.

It had started drizzling, too, but not long after I'd gotten on the bus with them, and listened to them tell me about the dance competition they were involved in, the rain stopped, and the sun came back out. I'd spent hours sketching in the tower while I'd watched them dance, and more time drawing beside the ocean, until Daddy had blown up my phone with texts after he'd gotten back to the room and discovered me missing.

Texting back I'm not missing, I'm right here , and sending it along with a picture of the view I'd had of the ocean hadn't been the best idea. I'd gotten my bottom paddled after Daddy had come down to the waterfront to escort me back to our room.



Ohh, the waterfront, we'd have to take Zephyr for a walk along the sand and some ice cream before we went back to the hotel. Tomorrow we were going exploring so I could take pictures, and I didn't know if we'd make it back this way before we headed home.

But first, Valhalla and the carousel, we couldn't forget that, or the free fall. Daddy had stopped looking pale, I was sure he could handle that one, as long as we made it the last one before we left the park.

I pointed the way as Zephyr chattered to his octopus, promising to keep a tight hold on him and keep him dry no matter what else we rode on. So not just a muse then, my kitten was creative, too. He could explore any medium he wanted once we got him home. Daddy and I hadn't talked about it yet, but I didn't want to go back to the apartment. I wanted to go home to my playroom and studio, and I wanted Daddy to know that, before we got back on that plane.

If he said we were going back to that tiny place where we couldn't even laugh without getting in trouble, I was just gonna have to be naughty again and remind him how much trouble I could be. I know I promised to be good, and it didn't feel good even thinking about being a brat again so soon. My bottom gave a little twinge as I straddled a bright, silver horse, a reminder of the handprint-shaped welts I'd gotten a glimpse of when I'd stepped out of my shower.

There would be more of them if I acted up again, lots more and maybe even a stripe or two from Daddy's belt, but it would be worth it to get back home where I could start working and playing with my baby brother.

Please just say yes, Daddy, I thought as my butt bounced on the seat and I winced at the ache that spread across it. While I might be willing to cause a bit of chaos to get what I wanted, I wasn't looking forward to the consequences.

### ZEPHYR

“Beach! Beach, beach, beach!!!”

I took off running the moment Daddy and Tristan let go of my hands. My feet sank in and the sand squished between my toes, but that just meant digging them in harder as I raced through the surf. Laughing, I launched into a series of backflips, flicking sand on my face each time my hands touched down.

Daddy had gotten us swim trunks at Paradise Beach, right before we’d gone on all the water rides. Now I understood why he hadn’t made us change back after we’d gotten drenched. I waded into the water, leaping and splashing it everywhere, losing track of how much time passed before Tristan joined me. I bet he was taking pictures. Having the freedom to be myself and enjoy something without feeling embarrassed about my enthusiasm was life altering. After so many years of being considered a pest, and so many others caught up in the whirlwind of life on the road, it felt downright amazing to kick my heels over my head and walk along the sand on my hands as the water lapped at them.

For a moment, it shocked me that he wasn’t still taking pictures, it had been getting harder and harder for Daddy to keep his phone out of his hands the longer the day stretched on. Then it dawned on me that maybe he needed me to be more than just a muse. Maybe he needed me to remind him to take breaks and have fun.

I grabbed his hands and together we danced and twirled. We played ring around the

rosy and fell into the water at the end of the song, laughing as we kicked our feet and made absolute messes of ourselves.

Behind us the sun was turning a stunning shade of crimson and cream, and we held hands waist deep in the water, staring at it until I started getting cold. One good wind was all it took to send me scurrying for dry land and the humongous beach towels and overstuffed hoodies Daddy bundled us in. Daddy and Tristan held towels up so I could change out of my board shorts and back into my jeans, then I held a towel so Tristan could change, too.

“I’m starving, Daddy,” Tristan declared.

“I’ll bet, since the only thing you’ve eaten since lunch is cotton candy.”

“It was so yummy, but now my tummy is empty and sad.”

“Mine’s empty and sad, too,” I chimed in. “Can we get fish and chips?”

“Yes, please, Daddy, please?” Tristan added.

“Of course we can, that sounds like a wonderful idea. Would you like your mushy peas again?”

“Yes, please,” Tristan said.

“What are mushy peas?” I asked.

“Just mushy peas, kinda like a mashed potato, but with peas. Or you could have roasted carrots.”

“I’d love roasted carrots, but could I taste your mushy peas?”

“Uh-huh,” Tristan replied. “Of course you can. How else will you know if you like them?”

A week ago I’d been alone and scared, now I had a big brother who looked out for me the way no one ever had. I hugged him and Daddy hugged us both, reminding me that he was there, too. I had a protector, one who was already opening my eyes to just how big the world truly was. With all the traveling I’d done, I’d maybe become a little jaded. Waking up in one spot, going to sleep in another, napping as we rolled down the road. It had all become a blur. I’d seen tons of amazing things in between which had made it harder for me to be surprised, until they’d brought me here.

Everything about this country was different.

On the train ride I’d seen sheep grazing in fields that were greener than any I’d ever seen, even in Kentucky, where the blue grass waved with every breeze that blew. The hills rolled and the grass swished and curled, like it had never seen a pesticide or chemical. Maybe it hadn’t.

“How about we get our food at the little pub inside the arcade,” Daddy suggested. “That way we can play some games before we go back to the hotel.”

“Yes, please,” I said, taking one of his hands while Tristan took the other one.

Even on the walk to the pub there was so much to see. One place had rows and rows and rows of the brightest colored rock candy I’d ever seen, like, in every color. Holy crap, the colors. I felt a light tug on my hand, but I couldn’t take my eyes off the sparkly towers of candy on a stick.

“Would you like some?” Daddy asked, voice suddenly right by my ear.

Nodding, I licked my lips, tasting plenty of salt but none of the sugar I longed to. It

was rare that I craved sweets, but they looked so inviting and rock candy sticks had been my favorite treat when I was growing up. Anytime I could scrape up a quarter, or got lucky enough to find one in the street, I went running straight for the drugstore's candy aisle to select a flavor.

"You may pick ten but you can't eat one until after you'd had your supper."

"T-ten," I stammered, eyes widening, because I was used to having to narrow it down to one, or on rare occasions two, if I'd skipped getting a milk at lunchtime. Ten, ten meant I could get my favorites and try ones I'd always been curious about.

Sour apple, lime, and watermelon, those were the first three to go in the brown paper sack Daddy handed me. I heard him tell Tristan that he could only pick three boxes of fudge, then I turned all my focus to selecting my last seven flavors. Holy crap, they had root beer. I snagged one of those and a honeydew melon flavored, along with a tangerine, so excited to still have four flavors left that I was practically dancing in front of the rack as I read the labels.

Berry blue swirled with cosmic grape looked like it was gonna turn the inside of my mouth colors, and I looked forward to having a purple and blue tongue to go along with the tingling of the intense sour they promised. They had black cherry but they also had pickle flavored and I couldn't turn down the opportunity to try that. The black cherry I left alone, since cherry sometimes just tasted like cough syrup. I still wasn't willing to waste a spot on banana. I'd yet to try a banana flavored candy that actually tasted good. I'd try mango lemonade, though, and cherry limeade. There, that was ten.

I proudly carried my bag over to where Daddy was helping Tristan narrow his choices down from four to three, the amount clearly set in stone. Tristan's eyes darted between the two he still held, before he finally put the cookies and cream back on the shelf and hugged the sea salt caramel.

“Okay, let’s go pay for these things before I’m tempted to break my own rule and buy more than four packs of gummies,” Daddy said as he wrapped an arm around of each of us and escorted us to the register.

I was really hungry now and everything got a little swirly for a moment, so I pressed against his side and closed my eyes.

“Getting tired, little one?” he murmured as our treats were being run up.

“No, but I think I’d better eat soon, everything just got tipsy,” I explained.

“Yup, time to get you fed. No more stops, no matter what you spot along the way.”

“It’s close, right?”

“Four doors down. We can always go back and look at something after you eat if it really holds your attention.”

Sighing, I rubbed my face against his shirt, “Okay.”

I’d already seen so much today that nothing in the brightly colored souvenir stands could distract me from the rumbling in my tummy, though I did hope that we’d still have time to visit the bookstore Tristan had told me about. He said they sold puppets to go with some of the books and that Daddy loved to put on puppet shows. I loved puppet shows, but it had been a long time since I’d seen one. I couldn’t even remember the town we’d been visiting that day, just that I’d annoyed the hell out of my aunt by slipping away to see it before she was able to dump a whole bunch of chores on me.

Even the arcade held little appeal until after I’d devoured all the fish on my plate and a piece from Daddy’s, which I’d traded him my chips for. They were super good, but

I wasn't the biggest fan of fries, which wasn't what I'd thought they'd be. Fries always made me feel too full. Potato chips, the way I'd imagined them to be, would have been too filling, too, but I'd have probably been able to eat more of them than the thick cut fries. The fish was amazing, though. I couldn't get enough of it. Tartar sauce covered my fingers by the time I'd finished dunking my last bite, and I chewed it slowly, savoring it before washing it down with root beer. Even the root beer was different, the flavor deeper, like I could really taste the depth and bite of the sassafras, crisp and so refreshing I finished two glasses.

Squirming out of the booth took way too much effort and I felt like I was waddling as I followed Tristan to the coin machine, where Daddy filled buckets with twenty-cent pieces for us to play games with.

There were games with bundles of tickets inside of them, along with trinkets and pieces of candy and even tiny stuffed toys that would fall when the coins they were sitting on slipped over the ledge in the machine. I'd only ever seen the game played with quarters and I'd never seen anyone get pieces to fall the way Tristan did when he started playing. Then Daddy started doing the same and I realized that the games were meant to let people win and have fun on, unlike the way the carnival games had been set up. We had fun just playing our way through the room, collecting as many tokens as we spent, until Tristan tugged on Daddy's sleeve, pointing to where a little girl with bouncy curls was just getting started with a little bucket of tokens.

Daddy grinned and gave him his bucket, then Tristan bounded over to me.

"It's time to go to the bookstore, but we still have all of this," Tristan said. "So I asked if we could give it to the little girl."

"Ohh, okay," I replied, passing over my bucket and going to stand by Daddy while Tristan took it to her. He came back beaming moments later, because she'd been so happy and announced that it was her birthday and she'd just turned three. That made

it extra special. I hoped she had fun the way we had playing all those games.

It had gotten colder, and I was grateful for my new hoodie as we headed up the block to the bookstore. Even my hands stayed warm when I tucked them in the pouch and with Daddy's arms around us, we got to share some of his body heat, too.

"They close in thirty minutes," Daddy announced as we stepped inside. "So make sure you don't take too long picking out your books. You may choose four each, or three books and a puppet."

Four books, or maybe three and a puppet, and rock candy and a new hoodie and the stuffie in Daddy's bag that Tristan had helped me pick out. My octopus and rock candy were carefully zipped up inside of my own bag, where my pin from the arcade was proudly stuck to one of my backpack's paws. It might not have been my birthday, but it sure felt like it.

Four books in thirty minutes, though.

Holy crap!

Eyes darting around the room, I struggled to choose a starting point, until I spotted a really cool cover with a lizard man and a bunch of other characters on it. Lizards were apparently going to be my theme, because I wound up with a chameleon puppet and the matching book to go with him, as well as a book about a frog named Bay who takes a wrong turn into the bayou and nearly becomes dinner, several times over. I couldn't wait for Daddy to narrate the voices of all the creatures that try to eat him, as well as Bay's when he was hopping around trying to escape them. Daddy had books when we got to the counter, too, one was even a storybook, so I knew he had to have gotten it for us.

"Is tomorrow a work day?" I asked as we waited for the taxi back to our hotel.



“Only half, then it’s back on the plane,” Daddy reminded me. “We have to be up early, so we can get checked out before we photograph the cemeteries and architecture, but we’ll have a car to chauffeur us around so it will be a lot easier.”

“You won’t really have to do anything,” Tristan said. “I’m just gonna be taking pictures, though we might do some things back at home, in front of the green screen, that I’ll add to the images.”

“Ohhh, okay.”

That meant I could hang back with Daddy, hold his hand and let my mind wander. Daydreaming had always been a special escape for me. Everything around me got all soft, faded around the edges, and fuzzy everywhere else. Sound was muffled and my steps tended to slow down unless someone was guiding me, which Daddy had patiently done earlier, when the lines at the park had finally grown so long that it stopped being fun waiting to get on the rides.

“There’s something we need to talk to you about when we get back to the hotel,” Daddy said.

“I’m still hired, right?” I asked, hoping that this whole magical day wasn’t an I’m sorry day out to try and soften the blow of telling me there wouldn’t be a contract after all.

“You’re more than hired, you’re ours,” Daddy said. “And when we go home, we’ll be going home to our real home, which isn’t that apartment.”

“But I go with you?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, Daddy, is that it?”

“Is that...” Daddy murmured as he brushed the hoodie back from my face so he could gaze down at me in the glow of the streetlight. “Sweetheart, do you understand what I just told you?”

“Yes, Daddy,” I replied. “You said we’re going home to your real home and that I get to go with you.”

“And you’re not upset?” Daddy asked.

“Upset about what?”

“Us pretending that apartment was where we lived when we set up your trial?”

“Why would I be upset?” I asked, looking from Daddy to Tristan, who grinned and looked quite pleased with my answer. “You could have stayed in one of the rooms at Honey Hearth for the trial and that would have been okay, too. I’m just glad you chose me.”

Daddy crushed me to his chest, then Tristan squished me from behind as a car honked, the arrival of our cab saving me from being squashed completely.

“Any other choice in the world would have been wrong,” Daddy told me as he opened the door so Tristan and I could get in before he joined us in the back.

It was a good thing I was small or they’d have been squashing me again. As it was, Tristan cuddled against my side with most of his weight leaning against me and I could feel how tired he was after the long day we’d had. I wasn’t tired exactly, more like content and ready for cuddles and a long session nursing from Daddy, whose milk was beginning to soak the front of his shirt again. At home I could help him with

that more often and maybe there would be room on the floor for him to stretch out and draw with us, too.

Or it could be smaller, the little voice in the back of my head reminded me. True, it could be smaller, so maybe we'd have to have coloring sessions at the table together sometime. That would have space for the three of us. Surely with Daddy and Tristan working, I'd need to start watching online videos so I could brush up on my cooking skills. I'd never had the chance to really develop any, outside of what you could do on an RV stove or over a grill, but I wanted to be able to contribute as much as I could to my new home.

I was just grateful to have one.

"Don't you at least want to know why we did it?" Daddy asked once we were underway.

"Not really," I said. "That's kinda your business. I'm sure you had a good reason but I don't think I need to know it. The only thing that matters to me is that you want me with you. I'm good at doing chores and there are videos for every recipe imaginable, so I'll learn how to help in the kitchen."

"Awe, cutie, that's one chore you don't have to worry about," Daddy said as he hugged me close. "Theo prepares all our meals and keeps the fridge and pantry stocked with a variety of snack options. You won't have to worry about having options you enjoy, I've already given him the list we made, and he assured me he'd have your favorites by the time we got home."

"Who's Theo?"

"Our chef," Tristan explained. "He's awesome. He always matches the theme of the meal to whatever I'm unveiling, but I love his everyday meals best. He makes the

most amazing chicken and dumplings, and his steaks will melt on your tongue.”

“Mmmm, I love chicken and dumplings,” I said. “So, I really don’t have to learn to cook? That’s a relief.”

“It was for me, too,” Tristan admitted. “I’m a menace in the kitchen.”

“And in the living room, the library and most spectacularly, in the bedroom,” Daddy murmured as he reached past me to tug Tristan into a kiss.

It was a good thing we pulled up to the hotel or things might have gotten even more heated than the electrically charged energy that crackled around us as we got out of the cab. Tristan no longer looked tired and that gleam in his eye, as he helped me out of the cab, was filled with wicked promises.

“Get your butts upstairs before you start anything,” Daddy warned. “Or no one will have any fun tonight.”

His threat was the only warning we needed. We behaved ourselves on the ride up in the crowded elevator and all the way down the long red hall to our room. It was as creepy as the one in *The Shining*. I kept expecting to step out of our room to see little girls in blue dresses walking toward me.

Inside was another story. Tristan pinned me against the wall and started kissing me, while Daddy complained about not being able to shut the door. Somehow we managed to shuffle walk, banging our hips against the edge of the dresser and our toes against the suitcase Tristan had left in the middle of the floor.

“Oofff.” I hit the bed with a bounce, then Tristan landed on top of me and squished the air from my lungs. Giggling, I tickled him in retaliation, until he clocked me in the face with a pillow, which morphed into out and out war. Squealing, we bashed

one another, and the wall, and headboard until our swings were halted by Daddy, who held each of our weapons tight in one of his fists.

“Really?” Daddy muttered, shaking his head at us.

We should have known not to let go. Daddy was a trickster Daddy, and he thwacked us with those pillows and tickled us until I had to race to the bathroom before I had an accident. Talk about the best day ever. I didn’t know how I was going to turn my brain off tonight with the way it was still replaying everything we’d seen. What I did know was that I’d be going to bed looking forward to tomorrow, and that was something I hadn’t felt in months.

### ROWAN

“Here we are, you can leave your backpacks in the car, we’ll be getting right back in when we’re through here,” I explained as I held the door open for Zephyr and Tristan.

“Whoa, it’s so old, but it’s so beautiful,” Zephyr gushed as he stepped out onto the sidewalk.

Looking down at the awe on Zephyr’s face and the curiosity in his eyes, I knew I’d found another boy who was going to love being introduced to new wonders.

They were both respectful as they moved along the path, Tristan never stepping off it to take his pictures, while Zephyr was content to follow him and study everything. It wasn’t a big place, but walking any grounds with a photographer was a different experience. We’d found a boy who didn’t whine or get bored. He just eagerly took everything in, even cocking his head and studying the headstones from different angles the way Tristan was doing with his camera. When we finished, he was just as excited as Tristan to see the next site I had in store for them, and skipped to the car, getting his seatbelt buckled before I’d even climbed in. Still, I checked it to make certain it was secure and snug.

“I’m going to make tombstones,” Tristan declared. “It’s going to take a lot of Styrofoam, like big blocks of it, and I’ll have to hit up the craft stores when we get back and see what they have for fake vines in their flower section. I’ll have to practice my airbrush techniques, but if I can make the Styrofoam grave markers look

like the ones in the cemetery, we can combine them with the ideas we already had for the moon shoot and create some creepy bondage pieces.

“Ohh, does that mean I get to wear makeup?” Zephyr asked. “I can go full on goth if you need me to.”

“Even your hair?”

“I love going deep black and then dying the tips white.”

“That would be prefect. I’ve got a costume trunk we can dig through, and I’m sure we can find stuff at the thrift stores, too, that’s where I get my best pieces from.”

“Me, too. Those purple and silver jeans with the chains that I showed you, I thrifted everything to make them. The chains were just pet chains that I spray-painted, and the extra loops were cut from another pair of jeans and sewed on, along with the cargo pockets and the patches.”

“They’d be perfect with a mesh crop top.”

“I love wearing them,” Zephyr said. “I keep meaning to get a few more piercings to show off underneath, but I’ve chickened out every time I’ve gone to have my nipples done.”

“Maybe you just need someone to hold your hand,” I offered.

“Maybe,” he said as I glanced down at himself.

I wonder if he was picturing what the piercings would look like, the way I walked beside him with an image stuck in my head of twisting them and listening to him cry out while I fucked him. As exhausted as I’d been when I passed out last night, I’d

clearly not gotten enough of my boys.

“Do you have to travel like this often?” Zephyr asked as we walked.

“You mean at the drop of a dime? No, usually I have time to plan a trip out weeks, if not months in advance,” I explained. “The only time I have to rush off the way we did to come here is when someone screws up royally.”

“Did they get fired?”

“You better believe it. My clients trust me with their lives. I hate getting frantic calls telling me their security has been jeopardized. There are many things that I believe in second chances for, but not when it puts someone else in danger. That’s non-negotiable for me. I don’t let the people I love put themselves in danger, either, so you best keep that in mind when you two are planning out your stunts. I’m all for pushing the envelope, but I insist upon every conceivable safety measure being in place and having the opportunity to study any plans or blueprints you draw up, before you start practicing anything.”

“I’m okay with that,” I said. “I’m used to having a spotter when I’m trying anything new, so I’ll stick to the things I know I can perform effortlessly, until something comes up where I’ll need one.”

“That sounds like a good plan. I’ll expect you to keep to it,” I insisted. “I’ll want to vet any spotter that you require to be certain that they have the knowledge and training to do what you need them to do.”

“I will. I promise,” Zephyr insisted. “And I’m perfectly fine with you vetting my spotters. I don’t know anyone outside of Paulie that I trust and could recommend.”

“That’s my good boy,” I said. “And if your friend Paulie is available when the time



comes, I'd be happy to fly him in to assist with the project."

He preened at hearing that. Praise would clearly be the easiest means of encouraging him. With Tristan, there were times when he was so critical of himself that he was unable to hear others when they tried to tell him how spectacular he was. He required distraction and immediate removal from whatever it was that was stressing him out and making him anxious and obsessive. Sometimes I required the same, especially when I was deep in negotiations with a new client's management team.

Growing a name for myself within the personal security industry had taken a great deal of hard work and sacrifice. I'd spent a lot of time scouting and hand-picking that first team and being cautious about the clients we took. I'd never wanted us to be mistaken for mercenaries, or the kinds of men who could be hired to look the other way when crimes were being committed. We were not enforcers, and we were a hell of a lot more than hired muscle. We were bodyguards. We didn't just protect. Our job was to ensure that our principals were able to live their lives as uninterrupted by their status as was safely possible. We scouted locations, mapped out routes, and accompanied them on damn near every aspect of their daily lives, right down to checking stalls before they were allowed to piss. We could not afford missteps or momentary losses of focus, something I'd drilled into the heads of everyone who'd worked for me over the years.

We'd had some good ones, too. Ones I'd have given anything to have back now, though I could appreciate Sully's desire to go out on his own and specialize in guarding rock musicians, who lived a very different kind of lifestyle from those on my own clientele list. His Damage Control Inc. group was starting to be in demand, something that had cost me two guys about five months back, when they'd jumped ship to go work for him. I was still struggling to find the right person to fill one of those slots, and now I'd need two to bring the crew back up to full strength again. Divas, dancers, and society princesses, that's who made up my client list. High-end engagements required different handling. There were subtleties and niceties that even

the guards had to know. Hotheads and social climbers need not apply, though too many of them were tempted to do so. Few made it through the vetting process and the ones who did never lasted long on one of my crews. My long-time people had been taught to keep an eye on the new hires, and I knew damned well that I'd earned the kind of loyalty from them that kept fuck-ups from getting swept under the rug.

Would other firms have let Ryan's mistake slide? You're damned right they would have! I'd worked for a few.

It's what taught me not to let things go, because once you let something minor slip through the cracks, people decided to test how deep the crack was and how much it could withstand. Maybe they didn't mean to find the breaking point, but it never failed to happen, usually on a catastrophic level. Sometimes it was something so bad that the rest of the team, and even the company, had never been able to bounce back from it.

"What happens when we get home?" Zephyr asked. "Do you go to work each day?"

"Nope, I have an office in the house that you are always welcome to join me in. I have even a bench that pulls right up to my desk if you need a little midday snack," I explained.

"And I have a studio space," Tristan explained. "You can join me in there anytime, too. And there is a pool outside that you can swim in."

"You have a pool?"

"Yup."

"Oh my gosh, yay!"

He didn't even ask how big it was, just yay , and a joyful smile, celebrating any chance to be in the water. That kind of appreciation was rare these days.

"We have a big library with all kinds of books and a bunch of streaming services, too," Tristan said. "There will be plenty for you to do once I organize the projects you've already inspired, but there are like five of them. It might take me a couple days to sort them all out."

"Good, that will give him time to settle in," I reminded Tristan, cutting him a look.

I knew he'd be tempted to hit the ground at a thousand miles an hour, but we had all the time in the world. We'd found our boy. This was no longer a temporary engagement. I wouldn't have Tristan frantically running himself ragged because he was afraid of the opportunity being snatched away.

"Because we both tend to get engrossed in our work, we've had to institute a daily schedule, of sorts," I explained. "It's nothing rigid, but work hours end at seven each night and aren't allowed to resume until after seven in the morning. Emergencies are exceptions, some things just can't be helped. Theo serves three meals a day and he does not appreciate them getting cold, so we have set mealtimes, and we are all expected to have our asses parked in our seats for those. The last time we upset our chef we spent the next week eating tuna melts and tater tot casserole. If I never see a tater tot again it will be too soon."

"I'm not a fan of tater tots, either," Zephyr admitted.

"I imagine not, with the way you so eagerly give away your potatoes."

"That's 'cause I wanted the extra fish. Seafood is my favorite, but I really loved the carrots and mushy peas, too."

At least he liked his vegetables. Theo was forced to get creative from time to time, in order to get Tristan to eat them. His latest trick had been to combine them with whatever protein he was serving and stuff the mixture in something else, like a large portobello mushroom or a giant tomato, which Tristan was much more receptive to when they were covered in a cheesy sauce. He'd tried stuffing green peppers, but Tristan had balked after the first bite, not that I could blame him much, I only managed half before suggesting they not make a return appearance on the menu.

As always, Theo accepted the criticism with grace and a reminder that if we wished to have something else for dinner, we'd better send for Door Dash because the kitchen was closed for the rest of the night.

That was fair, and exactly what we'd wound up doing, after a mini debate of what the hell we were even in the mood for. If anyone ever got around to creating a pizza place that also did Chinese food, we'd be their most frequent customers. It seemed like every time I wanted one, he wanted the other, though we had come across a killer crab rangoon pizza that sated both of our cravings.

Wait.

Hadn't that place been just a few blocks from here?

Glancing around, I took a moment to orient myself then I typed what I thought was the name into my GPS, and laughed, because hot damn, it was just three blocks east, right across the street from the chapel Tristan had wanted to photograph. That's how he'd discovered it the last time we were here, but we hadn't had time to stop, we'd barely had time to gobble a few slices before packing up the rest and hurrying to a meeting with my crew.

Two birds, I thought as I guided the driver that way.

Somehow, it worked for them not to have traffic lights on every corner. Traffic flowed, people crossed, and no one lost their fucking minds honking because they were in a rush to get to the next stop sign. I could tell the moment Tristan spotted the chapel, because he started leaning forward, fingers gripping the back of the seat in front of him. It was a good thing we weren't walking; I'd have had to grab hold of his beltloop to keep him from taking off down the street.

I placed a hand on his knee and patted it gently, a silent urging for him to be patient and wait until the car was fully parked before he went charging off anywhere. My good boy settled down, just as I expected, and the three of us walked together to the chapel.

"Do you see that building right there?" I asked, pointing across the street.

"Oh my gosh, that's where we got the crab rangoon pizza!" Tristan declared. "Are you going get another one?"

"That's the plan," I explained, before I turned my attention to Zephyr. "They have traditional flavors, too. I can get whatever you'd like."

"I'd like crab rangoon pizza too," Zephyr declared.

"Perfect," I said. "While I do that, you two stay together, and I'll catch up to you once I have our food."

"Okay," they replied, perky and cheerful as they hurried off to take pictures.

I'd hired the car to take us to the airport, and with food on board we'd be able to eat before we got on the plane. It was hard sometimes, having to pack a whole lot into a tiny window. Had I been afforded the opportunity to plan a trip over, I'd have cleared at least a week of our schedules, but Tristan was less than eight days away from his

next reveal, and there was still a great deal left to be done to prepare for it. At least we had Zephyr to be his display piece. I couldn't wait to sit back and watch how Tristan and Zephyr interacted when Tristan was tying him up. So far, I'd only walked in on a mini-session, when Tristan had been introducing him to the texture of the ropes he liked to use. He had a woven chain of them that he carried for a stem toy and could practice tying into knots when he started feeling stressed, but it was only long enough for binding hands together.

The look on Zephyr's face, though. The way his lips had parted, and his pupils had dilated. That had gotten my engine revving even more than when he stripped his clothes off. There would be plenty of practice workshops I'd be privy to, as well as any rigging that would need to be placed. I wondered what Zephyr would think of this part of our lifestyle. Private demonstrations of his Shibari skills and even private lessons were some of the other ways Tristan made his living. Sometimes clients paid him to tie one of them up for the other, a tool in a scene, but never fully part of it. On our dinner party nights, he also auctioned off a few of his sculptures, never more than three, and always ones fitting the theme he and Theo introduced.

They were truly breathtaking evenings and I couldn't wait to see what Tristan dreamed up for his new co-star. While I'd never been a fan of social gatherings, I always looked forward to seeing Tristan shine. The way his face lit up when he talked about his work and the inspiration behind it, the way he invited all our visitors forward and invited them to look for the hidden things embedded within the sculpture, it all had a real theatrical quality about it. He came to life when the spotlight was on him, and he was a gracious host, welcoming both praise and critique from those who'd come to know his work.

Yes, I was a proud Daddy.

Proud to see twin smiles on their faces when I joined them with our meal. That's all I ever needed. Just to see happiness on the faces of those I cared for and to know that I

had a small part of bringing that light of joy to their eyes.

### ZEPHYR

“I-it’s huge.” Fear surged through me as I peered out the window at the house we’d pulled up in front of. Never in my wildest dreams had I imagined anything like this. “How do you not get lost?”

“It’s not that big,” Tristan declared. “Some spaces, like my studio and Daddy’s office, are double rooms, so there’s only one door going in and out. Those are downstairs, along with the den and the library, they’re double rooms, too, and connected by a door in the middle. It’s got video game consols and a ton of games. We can stream on every TV but the one in the den is huge. There’s a little dinette in the corner, with a fridge that’s always stocked with drinks and snacks. Daddy even has a popcorn maker with a bunch of toppings to shake on.”

“Cool.”

“Our bedroom and the playroom are on the first floor, and there’s a special room between them that only Daddy has the key for. That’s for kinky time. Wait until you see all the toys Daddy made.”

“Like paddles and floggers?” I asked, suddenly very interested to see the contents of the kinky room.

“Uh-huh, and he carves his own canes, too. The bamboo ones make my bottom sting, but he doesn’t use those very often. Only when I’ve been super, super naughty. He



mostly just makes soft things to torment us with, like velvet cuffs and fluffy blindfolds, ohh and a cat of nine tails that will make you beg, it's so slinking and cold when Daddy soaks it in ice water."

I couldn't hold back the little shudder that tore through me, then Daddy's fingers skimmed up the back of my neck and I groaned and melted against him.

"You'll have your introduction to the room soon enough," Daddy murmured. "But I believe a tour of the rest of the place is in order first."

"O-okay," I murmured, still intimidated by the looming manor house that sat on top of the hill we were currently driving up.

If it wasn't a mansion, it was close, and I just knew that I was going to get turned around and lost in there.

"Is my room close to yours?" I asked, a little ball forming in my throat, making it difficult to swallow. "Is it close to the bathroom?"

"Our room is your room, and it has an ensuite bathroom," Daddy explained. "There's always a nightlight on, so you never have to worry about being able to find it in the dark, and there are LED lights along the baseboards of every hallway."

"I don't like the dark, so Daddy had them installed," Tristan explained.

"What about all of our things?" I asked. "Don't we have to go back to the apartment to get them?"

"Nope," Daddy explained. "I already had everything moved while we were gone. Your things are in our room, and you have your own dresser and space in the closet to use."

“Whoa.”

I stayed in his arms as the car had pulled up beneath a vine-covered gazebo behind the house, and the driver got out and opened the door.

“Come on, you’ve gotta see the playroom first,” Tristan said, nearly falling as he tried to tug me out behind him.

“You may take him to see the playroom last ,” Daddy cautioned. “But no playing. It’s almost lunchtime. We need to show him the whole house before one of us gets sucked into something and he’s left to fend for himself.”

I kept a firm hold of Tristan’s hand as I followed him out of the vehicle, but a shimmery sparkle caught my eye two steps from the door, and I turned to see a pool bordered by bamboo, hedges, a wooden deck and several deck chairs. The whole space resembled a zen garden, with a large lotus fountain prominently placed at the center of the little pond bordering the pool. I wondered if there were fish in there and would have wandered over if Tristan hadn’t given my hand a squeeze and reminded me that he was waiting to show me the inside of the house.

“We can swim after our food settles,” Tristan said, following the line of my gaze to the pool. “We have to wait a half hour after we eat, though, Daddy’s rule, so we can play a little then.”

“Okay,” I said, following him inside to be greeted by the best scent ever.

“Ohh, that’s Theo’s chicken and dumplings!” Tristan squealed. “He’s baked something, too, I can smell it. We’re in for an awesome welcome home lunch.”

“Will I get to meet him?” I asked. “Does he live here, too?”

“He does, his room is up the hall from ours. This is his home, too,” Daddy explained as he joined us in a sunny space filled with couches, chairs and several small, low tables strategically placed between them.”

“This is the lounge where we entertain guests before we head into the formal dining room, which is right through here,” Daddy said before ushering us through tall French doors and into a space with the longest table I’d ever seen.

Fifteen chairs sat around it. I knew because I counted while I listened to Daddy explain that we never ate in there unless we were hosting a dinner party and those only happened once a month. Talk about a sense of relief. While I was used to performing, I wasn’t used to socializing with the people I performed for. In fact, I’d been taught to look fabulous and stay silent, it was supposed to preserve some of the mystique and allure. Paulie’s mom had pulled us aside several times, to caution us about not going off with anyone. I used to think that she told us that to keep us safe. Now I wondered if she only said it because she didn’t want any competition when someone caught her eye.

There was a wide ledge along the wall at the head of the table, a wall that was empty of everything but the ledge, which stuck out so far that it rested right beside a tall, wing-backed chair that looked more like a throne than an actual seat.

“That’s where you’ll be, during formal suppers,” Daddy explained, walking me over to the ledge. “And this is where I’ll be, right beside you so I can feed you from my plate.”

“That’s what you meant by being a display piece,” I said as I turned to Tristan.

“Yup, you won’t have to talk or interact, and no one is allowed to touch you,” Tristan explained. “That’s why the ledge is designed that way. We cover it with blankets and pillows, too, and I only tie you up right before Daddy is ready to bring our guests into

the room. We'll practice beforehand to make sure the position is comfortable for you."

"And I'll be right there if you need to get down before the meal is through," Daddy explained.

"Do I get to nurse from you before I get up there?" I asked, loving the setup the longer I studied it.

"Of course," Daddy said. "You are welcome to nurse any time of the day or night, even if it's just for comfort and not because you're hungry."

"Really?"

"Until you joined us, I'd been ending each day uncomfortable and engorged, having to pump just to be able to fall asleep. Some mornings I've had to pump, too, when I woke up too early to be able to wait for Tristan. I hate waking him because once he's up, he's up, no matter how early it is, and he always rebels against taking a nap, even when he needs one, which is why bedtime is strictly enforced."

Tristan gave a sheepish little shrug, and I felt for him. I never wanted to take naps, either. I hated missing any part of the day, or evening, so I never slept more than six hours anyway. I'd noticed that even in the hotel, lights out had been at midnight and it had been non-negotiable, no matter what we were watching or doing at the time. It meant I'd been awake at six and fidgeting when Daddy had woken up not long after. Recalling how eager he'd been for me to latch right on, I now knew I'd have that kind of feast to look forward to every morning. Talk about starting the day out right.

"I'm sure that there will even be times when I seek you out to have you nurse, just because things are getting uncomfortable for me, or because I have a long video call to be on, or a tedious morning ahead. I want you cozy and latched on, where I can

stroke your hair and nuzzle you while you nurse as I deal with whatever tedious thing already has my blood pressure spiking before I've gotten started."

Now that made me feel super good. I'd still been worried about what I'd be able to contribute when I wasn't being Tristan's muse, now it was clear just how much they both needed me and in very distinct and specific ways. I'd always longed to be a companion, hell, I'd always longed to have a patron who let me create performance routines of my own to entertain his friends with. Now I had that and so much more. I had an actual purpose. I couldn't wait to see what a full day here would be like and the routine they followed, so I could find my place within it.

"Up here is where we eat our regular meals," Daddy said, as we went up three short steps, into a cozy little nook with a huge bay window and a picnic table in front of it. It reminded me of the one at the apartment, only this one had seating for six and a bouquet of fresh cut flowers in a vase at the center of it.

"We might as well sit down," Daddy said as he pulled a chair out for me. "Theo will have lunch on the table momentarily. The rest of the tour can wait until after we've had the chance to eat."

As if on cue, my tummy rumbled and I sat beside Tristan, where I could look out the window at the pool and the rings the inflatable rafts hung off of. The one in the front looked like a giant slice of pepperoni pizza.

"I love to float and draw," Tristan explained. "I can spend the whole afternoon that way."

"Ohh I bet. I can spend all day floating, too."

"Then we'll all head out after the tour," Daddy declared. "A bit of floating and some music are exactly what we need after the delay at the airport and the long flight we

had.”

Daddy still wasn't happy about having to conduct a last-minute meeting at the airport last night, but he'd said that flying out without sitting down with Sebastian first and hearing what he had to say would just have led to him having to turn around and fly right back in less than a week, something he wasn't in the mood to deal with. I couldn't blame him. The flight had been long and even bundled in my hoodie and an extra blanket Daddy had tucked around me, I'd been restless and cold. Daddy had kept a steady stream of movies playing and sometimes Tristan woke up and watched a little bit with us, but mostly, he'd slept the whole way back, while I'd nursed from Daddy and watched all the *How to Train Your Dragon* movies.

It would be so cool if dragons were real, I'd love to ride on the back of one, even if it meant that I risked getting eaten trying to train one first. It would be so worth it. I wondered if they made dragon floaties for the pool. If I couldn't have a real one, that would be close enough. Or even one of those dragon bean bag chairs, that would be cool to watch movies in. Tristan said he had a huge one that looked like a cat's paw and that Daddy would get me one, too, if I wanted. I didn't want a kitty's paw, but I'd love one of the dragon ones I'd seen on social media. They did look kinda big, though. There might not be room in their den for one that size.

A pang of worry rippled through me when a large, imposing man stepped out of the kitchen with tribal tattoos running down his arms. His long midnight hair was pulled back in a thick braid, and he had a black and silver bandana tied around his forehead. His apron matched. The front was covered with the image of a shiny silver knife that looked like it had been forged out of lightning bolts. Beneath it was the word sizzling.

The little dish of bacon bits and caramelized onions he set beside my bowl crackled, and I glanced over at Tristan, to see him carefully pour them over the contents of his bowl, which was a whole size bigger than mine. He even knew my portions. I wouldn't have any trouble at all finishing what he'd served me.

“Thank you,” I said, flooded with gratitude while I smiled up at Theo.

Daddy hadn’t been embellishing the degree to which he’d relayed my food preferences. Instead of sparkling lemonade, like Tristan was given, I received a smoothie that smelled like lemons and strawberries. I could taste both and coconut water when I took a sip.

“Oh my gosh, that’s so good.”

“There are three containers in the fridge that already contain the correct fruit portions,” Theo explained. “Whenever you need another smoothie, just add lemonade from the pitcher and attach the blades. Have you ever used a bullet blender before?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Ohh, now don’t you go sir-ing me,” he replied with a chuckle. “It took me long enough to break Tristan of that mess. While I appreciate the show of respect, we’re family here. You just call me Theo, but don’t call me on my day off.”

Daddy and Tristan chimed in with him at the end of his statement, the three of them laughing together as Theo brought his food and Daddy’s and joined us at the table.

“So, what’s on the agenda for the rest of the day?” Theo asked.

“How about you hook us up with a fruit salad and a caprese tonight, and I’ll put some steaks on the grill,” Daddy said. “We can eat poolside and break out the floating flamingo ring toss game, and that inflatable cornhole set we picked up a few weeks back. It hasn’t even made it out of the box yet.”

“Now that we have enough for teams, it should,” Theo declared as he dug into the meal. “As long as the chaos gremlin doesn’t decimate the strawberry margarita

cupcakes I made for lunch, we'll have plenty for supper. Zephyr, I made mini cupcakes for you, so you wouldn't have to worry about cutting a big one in half. You will never offend me by having to do that, just so you know. I don't want you to feel like you're going to hurt my feel-bads if you can't finish what I give you, either. It might take me a little while to get your portions just right."

"This is perfect," I replied, touched by his thoughtfulness with the cupcakes. "And I super appreciate you making mini-cupcakes. I really do like sweets, I've just always been afraid of indulging. What are feel-bads?"

He chuckled at that, and I could tell that he loved to laugh. He wasn't the least bit scary, either, just tall and muscular with a demeanor like Daddy's, stern and laser focused. I was glad that I wasn't a food thief like Tristan. I'd have been shaking in my socks at the thought of facing his wrath if I went raiding. Something told me he'd have as many creative punishments as Daddy and probably some that would involve scrubbing pots and pans.

"Just feelings, kid, just feelings," he replied. "Food is supposed to be a fun experience, not something to fear. I don't think people ever realize how much you can traumatize someone, especially a child, when you criticize the way they eat. As long as you're putting something in your belly, we'll get along just fine."

"As yummy as this is you won't have a problem with me eating."

"Good, as long as we're understood," Theo said. "I picked up a few sets of shallow bowls and small dishes, which will help me keep my measurements right. You just let me know anytime something needs changing, or you need something added to the list of things that you can't stomach."

Worry hit me as I stared across the table at him. "Are you sure it won't be too much trouble to do that every day?" I asked.



“My title is personal chef, not head cook at the buffet stand. That means I tailor meals to the individual people in the home, I don’t just make blanket dinners. Tristan doesn’t eat pork, so when I make bacon, his is turkey. Rowan won’t touch rice no matter the color or flavor. Says it looks too much like a pile of maggots to him. I can see it, sort of, but I love me some rice and Tristan is a huge fan of fried rice bowls, so when I make them, Rowan gets rice noodles or Lo Mein instead. Would you like rice or would you prefer noodles?”

“I love rice noodles,” I said, pleased to have been given options and to already feel comfortable enough just in talking to him, to be specific about the kind. “I like fried rice, too, especially when it has fluffy egg pieces in it.”

“Theo’s are the fluffiest,” Tristan pipped up before immediately diving back into his favorite dish.

His bowl was almost empty while mine was, whoa, almost empty, too, even when I’d just been nibbling while listening to Theo. My tummy didn’t feel stuffed, either, not even after I took a few more sips of my smoothie. I just felt good and excited to see the rest of the house.

“I do pride myself on that,” Theo said. “You can ruin a whole dish with rubbery eggs.”

“Ain’t that the truth,” Daddy added.

“I think a few virgin daiquiris will be in order tonight, too,” Theo said. “I still have plenty more strawberries left.”

“You make sure you throw a shot or two of the good stuff in mine when you’re making yours,” Daddy said, prompting a chuckle from Theo.

“When I mix up that fruit salad, I’ll make some sweetened lime juice to drizzle over it, and some cream for the top,” Theo said. “Would you like me to put some aside in small portions, so you’ll have a snack to go with your between-meal smoothies?”

Daddy smiled and gave me a little nod, letting me know that it was completely up to me.

“I’d love that,” I said and watched Theo’s face light up in a grin.

Performing in front of crowds had taught me how to read people. He really was okay with having to do a little extra just for me. It would have been more than enough to get three meals a day that I didn’t have to worry about scrounging up or retrieving from a cramped kitchen space where two people were fighting. Tensions had been simmering on the last leg of that trip, so much so that Paulie and I had taken to warming things over the campfire while we tried not to listen to what was going on inside the RV. A few times people had complained about the noise, and once we’d had to pack up and move in the middle of the night, when Paulie’s folks had pissed off the couple next door so bad they’d bypassed the campground manager and just called the cops.

Okay, so it hadn’t been the noise that had been the biggest issue, it had been the way Paulie’s mom had dressed and the way she’d only chose to practice her splits and contortions when the husband had been outside of their trailer, unabashedly drooling over everything he saw. It had been a big part of the argument, too, only Paulie and I had just thought she was doing it to get his dad’s attention, since he’d been super busy lately and constantly leaving the campgrounds to meet up with people and work out the details of the gigs he’d been setting up for us. There had probably been some truth to that, too, but by then, I’m guessing there had been a lot more to it.

This space felt nothing like the vibe in that RV. It was tranquil and laid back here. The conversation over the meal slipped into one that involved Daddy and Theo

chatting about a mixed martial arts pay-per-view that they intended to watch later in the week and if a wing platter or meatball subs would be best to accompany the entertainment.

“How does wings and cheesecake bites sound to you boys?” Daddy asked.

“Real wings or fake nuggies?” Tristan asked. “Please no fake nuggies. Wings are supposed to have bones in them, otherwise, they’re just cut up pieces of chicken breasts.”

“There will be real wings or no wings at all,” Daddy promised.

“I love wings!” I declared. “And cheesecake bites sound awesome.”

“Just make sure you pick up an assortment this time,” Theo chastised, prompting a sheepish grin from Daddy. “I know you don’t mind chocolate on top of brownie batter, on top of more chocolate, but some of us wouldn’t mind a little cookies and cream, or even key lime on occasion.”

“You tell him, Theo,” Tristan said, happily waving his fork. “Even strawberry swirl would be nice occasionally, and he completely forgot to get my cappuccino and cream bites last time.”

“In my defense, I took one look at the chocolate covered espresso beans on the top and started picturing you with the zoomies and me spending the rest of the night having to chase you just to bundle you into bed.”

I glanced over at my new big brother just in time to see Tristan scowl and begin to pout. “Awe, it wouldn’t have been that bad.”

“There were three beans on top of each piece,” Daddy declared. “That’s two more

beans than you should ever be allowed to consume at once.”

It felt good to sit at a table where everyone was laughing, happy, and giving one another shit like the families on television. It had been like that when I’d first joined Paulie and his parents, which was what had made me fall in love with living on the road with them. It was all that I needed to see to know that I was going to love living here with Daddy, Tristan and Theo. I just hoped it lasted forever this time.

### TRISTAN

It was a beautiful night, which made it easy to avoid thinking about my studio despite being seven days from my next reveal. The statue was done already. It was basic and I hadn't been happy with it, but I doubt I had the time to create anything new out of any of the dozens of photos I'd already taken of Zephyr.

Well, maybe if I went smaller.

What about a trio of tabletop statues? The kind that could sit on the mantle over a fireplace. I could pick three possess from him playing in the water at the beach in Blackpool, when the sun had been setting behind him. The windows were perfectly placed to afford us a view of the setting sun, and I knew there were sunset-themed cocktails that could be made both with and without alcohol. What if Theo used them for inspiration for the meal? I could even change the ropes between courses and turn it into a demonstration for our guests.

Floating on the surface of the pool always relaxed me, and tonight, Daddy had Eric Clapton's "Slow Hand" album playing in the background, while he floated halfway across the pool, on a big, three-person raft he shared with Zephyr, who was curled up beside him, suckling on one of his nipples. Daddy had made us each bowls of cubed steak pieces, medium rare and piping hot. He'd topped them with Yum Yum sauce and then Theo had presented us with little bowls with our caprese and fruit salad in them. I'd eaten my fill and not had to worry about leaving a lot of room for later, or disappointing Daddy, which had been one of the best feelings ever.

Now that I wasn't stressed about letting him down and not being enough to handle his needs, I could actually think without being distracted by stray niggles of worry. They'd been creeping in a lot lately, and I knew that was why I'd wound up with a piece that I was completely unhappy with and didn't want to unveil to the special group of collectors I'd cultivated over the years. Some traveled hundreds of miles to be here and only attended one or two dinner parties a year. The last thing I'd ever want was for one of them to feel cheated and not want to return for another viewing.

Some were even gallery owners, while others came to dinner parties and later commissioned their own pieces, often of the longtime subs they brought with them. Giving everyone the best experience possible was a big part of how I'd come to Daddy's attention in the first place. He'd come to one of my earliest showings, at a lake house owned by a friend's family. They'd been my first patrons, allowing me the use of the garage and the space to create anytime the lake house was empty, and in return I'd gifted the family with several pieces that decorated the lake house to this day.

Daddy and I always spent a week out there fishing and racing each other across the lake with Hamish and his husband. I couldn't wait to introduce Zephyr to them when they came to the unveiling. I'd only told them a little about him over text, when I'd touched base to let them know I'd received their RSVP and couldn't wait to see them. I always sent them one, on the off chance that they could make it, but Hamish had married a professional hockey player and they spent a lot of time on the road. It would be so good to see them again, and they always stayed the night and spent at least a day with us catching up before they headed back home. Hamish loved movie marathons as much as I did, and I just knew that he was going to love Zephyr.

My little brother was wide awake and listening to the story Daddy was reading him, but he waved and his bright blue eyes lit up when I paddled over. Theo was drifting nearby, too, splayed out like a starfish in a float that looked like a strawberry donut with sprinkles. All of our floaties had food themes. The big one Daddy and Zephyr

floated on looked like a waffle, with butter, syrup and little square compartments and everything. Daddy liked them because he could put things in them, like the mini shot bottles from the bar beside the grill, where the smart speaker sat. The speakers were all over the house and sometimes, we cut in on what someone else was playing and a real battle of the bands ensued as we each demanded that the streaming service play something different. He might have to finally consider expanding the plan now that we had Zephyr. He had an amazing playlist on his phone that I'm sure he'd want to listen to without always having to be tethered to the device. I kept a box on the counter by the door of my studio for mine, so nothing would befall the one I had now the way it had my last one.

Molten metal versus plastic and glass hadn't been a war my phone had been able to win, but I had managed to salvage things a little, by making the spill, complete with my cell phone imbedded in it, the base of the project. I'd crafted the model mid-bend, with one rope-encased leg extended toward the sky while they'd bent to retrieve it with bound hands and a torso covered with a rope corset. With a little work, I'd made a metal casting of words drifting up from the phone and mounted it in a crack I'd jabbed through the screen with the metal edge of the casting. It hadn't been easy, but I'd cemented it there with carefully poured metal that I'd feared would well up and wreck the glass, or at least be extremely noticeable. It had been tedious work, and Daddy had still needed to replace my phone after he'd seen what had happened to it. He'd been proud of the way I hadn't let it derail me, and my resourcefulness in making the mistake turn out in my favor. Considering the cost of the phone I'd wrecked and its replacement, he'd proudly claimed the finished piece after I'd unveiled it. It now sat in a place of honor in the dining room where I held my unveilings, along with several other pieces he'd refused to see sold off.

I had a savings account filled with money I never had to spend unless I wanted to, which I sometimes did, whenever I spotted something to surprise Daddy with. He loved getting gifts and I loved seeing his eyes light up whenever I presented him with something I knew he'd love but would never in a million years get for himself. Like

the Joker cookie jar in the kitchen and the Court of Owls comic arc, complete with the amazing ceramic mask that had been packaged with it, I'd found the last time he'd turned me loose in a comic shop with a stern warning not to go anywhere until he came back for me.

While he'd been raiding Home Depot for things he could turn into implements of fun, I'd found a pile of Nightwing comics that I cherished and read way too much, and an awesome cape I only wore for special times with Daddy. Ohh, that was another place I needed to take Zephyr. During our morning in the hotel, I'd discovered that he loved anime, though he only owned a few books, since they took up a lot of space and were heavy to carry around. He'd have bookshelves to put them on here. There was plenty of room in the playroom, which was where I kept my comics. It was huge and had plenty of empty spots.

As excited as I was to tell Daddy and Theo about the theme I'd come up with for the unveiling, I waited until the end of the story, not wanting to interrupt, though I'd heard it before. It didn't mean that Zephyr had heard it, and he really seemed to be fascinated by Daddy's words, or maybe it was just the soft lull of floating with Daddy. I loved that, too, when I wasn't feeling squirmy, and my mind wasn't racing with ideas I was struggling to stitch together. It was never good for me to be on the waffle float with him when I was feeling that way. It just resulted in us landing in the water, and a grumpy, damp Daddy for the rest of the night.

Ohh yay, he's almost done.

I listened impatiently, with my fingertips stroking over the slippery edge of my floating pepperoni slice until he'd finished the final word, nearly flipping myself over the edge of my floatie in my excitement.

"I wanna do a sunset theme for my unveiling," I declared, having to force myself to slow down so the words didn't all run together. "But I'm going to redo the statue, too.



I really don't like the one I was gonna unveil."

When Daddy's eyebrow shot up, I rushed to explain my plan before he had the chance to caution me against stretching myself too thin and stressing myself out.

"I know I don't have time to make another large piece, but I can make three smaller ones from the beach shots I took of Tristan playing in the surf. I think they'd be awesome, especially with a resin base of sand and shells. I have plenty of both from our trip to the shore, and I'd just had a ton of resin delivered right before we moved into the apartment, and shimmer powder to color it. I already have the perfect molds for the bases, too. I can pour them in the morning, then start working on the sculptures. I know I have enough time to do a trio of them, and if it's okay with Zephyr, we could put on a Shibari demonstration for our guests, which would allow me to change his bindings throughout supper, so they'd match each display."

Now that I'd gotten my whole idea laid out, I no longer felt restless or anxious, and in a hurry to blurt out my thoughts.

Zephyr released Daddy's nipple was a soft pop and gazed up at me with a milky grin and heavy-lidded eyes.

"I don't mind changing positions and bindings whenever you need me to," Zephyr explained. "That means you'll get to touch me during dinner, and I love having your hands on me."

Now I nearly tipped the raft out of pure joy as I slithered off mine and onto theirs, helped by the arm Daddy held out for me. He cuddled me close to his side and peppered my face with kisses until I was giggling and almost flipped us again.

"All right now, settle down, squirmy, and tell me how you came to the conclusion that you needed to scrap your current sculpture," Daddy said.

“That’s easy, Daddy,” I replied as I settled my head against his shoulder. “It just makes me sad to look at. How am I supposed to pull off the cloth with any confidence when I already know that it isn’t my best work? I want to be proud of the pieces I show off and I want our guests to leave still talking about them. I want them to talk about our dinner party unveiling on social media and to their friends when they go to work. I want my sculptures to make an impact and I always know when they’re going to. I can feel it in my tummy. It makes me feel giddy with anticipation when they start gathering around to wait for the unveiling. I wouldn’t be able to hold my head up, let alone smile at them if I have to bring that statue to the dining room. It’s good enough for a functional piece, maybe in that spot you have reserved in the tulip bed. I could put a water can in its hand and have resin water pouring out of it.”

“Having seen it, I think it would be perfect for the space,” Daddy said thoughtfully. “I’d be happy to have it installed there, once you’ve deemed it ready. In the end, you have to be happy with the unveiling or I see no point in us having one. If you feel that you can be ready for Saturday, then we will keep things the way they are scheduled. But if at any point I feel like you are pushing yourself too hard, or you start breaking into uncontrollable bouts of sobbing the way you did before the March unveiling, then I will pull the plug and we will reschedule. No arguing and no negotiation, understood? This is the negotiation, and it is the only one that we are going to have.”

Gentle and firm, that was my Daddy. There would be no wiggle room, but I also understood why he was laying down the law. March’s unveiling had been a nightmare of nervous energy and constant tweaks, right up until the day I’d brought it out. Even after it had sold and was carried out of the house that night, I’d felt like there was still more work I could have done on it. Some tweak I could have made to elevate it from a beautiful piece to extraordinary.

Yes, I set the bar high for myself. I always had. Being mediocre had never been something I’d been willing to accept. I challenged myself, constantly worked to perfect new techniques, and I pushed myself harder than any of my early critics,

mostly art teachers, had ever tried to push me. Hell, some had attempted to stifle my ideas and had even marked me down for not submitting the same old tired piece as the example we'd been given. I always read the rules and the requirements, I just tended to get a bit extra and struggled to dial back my ideas to something more...ordinary.

I hated being ordinary more than anything. It wasn't that I wanted to live in the spotlight, I didn't. It would suck to have everyone's eyes on me, waiting for me to mess up or suffer the slightest mishap so they could splash it all over the internet. But I did want my work to be distinguishable. I wanted my creations to be conversation-worthy. I wanted them to evoke feelings in people, and maybe even challenge the way they thought. I wanted to share with them the juxtaposition of soft and hard and what I felt whenever I got to weld those two things together. I wanted my sculptures to tell stories and hoped that one day, someone sitting and staring at one would be inspired to break out a notebook and pen and craft the story of what was going on in the moment I'd captured. Daddy had even found a group that paired sculptures with poets where the sculptor brought the poet's words to life with their piece and both were unveiled at an awesome gallery night that had been amazing to attend. But it wasn't the same as having it work the other way. I wanted to be the one to inspire someone.

Daddy got that, though. He got me. Even if Zephyr had only been with us for a week, I got the impression that he got me, too, and that was awesome. He was a member of my circle now, and as more than just my muse and my kitten. Looking across Zephyr at Daddy, I just knew I'd also found a friend.

### ROWEN

Day two and I was already regretting the devil's bargain I'd made with Tristan. My boy had been distracted at every meal, barely finished his food, and forgotten to eat the snacks I'd deliberately put in the mini-fridge I'd had installed in his workshop. I checked it constantly, stocking bottles of water, juice, and iced tea when he forgot to put them in there. I also removed the energy drinks he didn't need but occasionally tried to sneak in with his online orders.

An overcaffeinated Tristan was a force to be reckoned with and not one I was equipped to handle when I was still cleaning up the mess one stupid decision had gotten my company into. Now it was looking like the teenager that Ryan had allowed into Katana's dressing room had stolen a ring and a necklace, both of which held a great deal of monetary as well as sentimental value. Needless to say, we were on the hook for them if we weren't able to retrieve them, a task I'd assigned Sebastian to handle personally, which meant I needed to get more manpower to him, like yesterday. Suing Ryan to recover costs had already been one of several things I'd discussed with my attorney this morning, and I would be pulling the trigger on that option if we were unable to retrieve the items in the time frame Katana's management company had given us.

Two weeks.

I should have just said fuck it and started the lawsuit, but if anyone could pull off a recovery in that kind of window, it was Sebastian, though I'd had rather have had him

use that time fulfilling his duties as head of the security team. All the calls, the promises, the assurances and emails I'd been forced to pen had left me no room to insist that Tristan spend a couple hours in the playroom today with Zephyr, not when I needed my new boy in the office with me. I had interviews lined up all morning, and the bench behind my desk already set up for him, once I figured out where he'd gotten to the moment he'd been excused from the table.

I probably should have mentioned to him that I was looking forward to having him with me for the afternoon before I cut him loose. That was on me, but I'd been distracted watching him and Tristan share a buttery, dripping French toast stick. Better than spaghetti and meatballs any day, at least in my opinion.

Now, I poked my head into the den in the hopes of finding him sprawled on the couch watching a movie, but the room was silent and dark. I should have known he'd be engaged in some outdoor activity, with as beautiful as the day looked.

I could have kicked myself for not checking poolside first, where I found him seated naked in the grass in what I was certain was a yoga pose, with his feet tucked beneath his behind and his hands resting on his thighs while he soaked in the sun. It was easy to see why Tristan found his grace so inspiring. My feet felt rooted to the stone path as I watched him lie back until he was flat on the grass, his legs still folded beneath him, only now, he cradled his head beneath his hands and closed his eyes as he lounged beneath the warm rays.

He was the picture of grace and contentment. That light, laid back way of his was like being in the presence of a walking weighted blanket. A calm, soothing energy seemed to follow him everywhere he went, making me long to seek him out, even when I didn't need anything.

Today I did.

I really did.

Azure eyes popped open the moment my shadow fell across him, and he smiled up at me and drew one of his hands from beneath his head so he could wave.

“Are you goin’ swimming, too, Daddy?” he asked. “I set the alarm on my phone so I wouldn’t go in before the half hour was up. I was going to play some music while I waited, but the fountain sounded so beautiful that I didn’t want to drown it out.”

“This is one of my favorite spots to just sit and listen to the water flow and the bees buzz around,” I replied as I sat beside him in the grass. The sun had burned off the morning dew, leaving it warm beneath my fingertips. “I wish I could stay out here for a few hours and get lost in it.”

“Do you have a busy day today?”

“Unfortunately. Conference calls and interviews. I prefer conducting them in person, but with the time crunch I’m under and Tristan’s upcoming reveal, that just wouldn’t be feasible.”

“Do you need me in the office with you?” he asked, already beginning to sit up. “I can swim after supper.”

Bless him for not making me ask. My boy’s sweet offer erased the guilt I’d begun to feel the moment I’d spotted him enjoying the soothing trickle of water and the sweet scent of the honeysuckles on either side of him.

“That’s exactly why I came out looking for you, though I hate to pull you away from all of this.”

“It’s not going anywhere,” Zephyr replied as he stretched his legs out in front of him

and bent to touch his toes. His swim trunks sat several feet away, folded neatly on the end of a deck chair, though why he'd bothered wearing them out was beyond me.

We all enjoyed swimming naked here. With no neighbors for miles and plenty of hedges and a stone fence, we were truly protected and enjoyed all the privacy we could ever want. He certainly wouldn't need to wear them in the office. He wouldn't be on camera, unless his hair slipped into view, and I rather enjoyed having his body bare for me, where I had unlimited access to touch wherever I wanted to.

"How soon do your meetings start?"

A glance at my phone showed that I had less than twenty minutes, which didn't make me happy now that I'd gotten comfortable.

"Fifteen minutes, but I feel like wasting five just sitting here with you."

"Then how is it wasting?" he asked as he leaned to pillow his head on my thigh, letting out a contented sigh as he got comfortable.

He was right. We might only have five minutes to enjoy the space, but it was our five minutes, and nothing more needed to be said. As I let my fingers slide through his hair, I listened to the fountain, and started letting go of all the things that were upsetting me about the process. It wouldn't do to go into an interview immediately putting the interviewee on the defensive. I'd always prided myself on being able to learn more about a person's values and commitment to a job through conversation, not a bullet point question and answer session. I wouldn't be doing myself or Sebastian any favors by going that route today. We needed to fill those slots with reliable individuals who would stick with the company for years, not use it as a steppingstone to something better. We were as good as we were because we cared about what we did and being the best at it. If everyone didn't share the same belief and wasn't working together toward that same goal, then I needed to know before I

put them on the payroll.

We sat in silence as I used him as a touchstone, breathed in the scent of those honeysuckles and let myself think about how fortunate I was to be right where I was this morning. No matter what else the day brought, the headaches, the frustrations, the people who really should have thought twice before sending in a resume, nothing could take this moment away from me.

I thought about what Zephyr had said, about coming out after supper to swim. Some laps would be a smooth, rhythmic way of putting the day behind me so that I could enjoy the night with my boys.

Mandatory playtime.

That's what we all needed and that's what we'd get. I was Daddy, dammit, and if I felt a break was in order, and I knew one would be by the end of this afternoon, then it was my job to impose one and make sure my boys were in the right headspace to enjoy it. Zephyr and I might need to do a bit of tag-teaming on Tristan to get him to come around to my way of thinking, but something told me Zephyr would be more than up to the challenge. All he'd have to do was bat those baby blues up at his big brother and beg for some playtime, and I knew Tristan would fold.

He needed to.

He'd already pushed the limits of his work hours by starting before breakfast, even if it had been with the notebook and sketchpad he kept in the nightstand on his side of the bed. While working in bed was frowned upon, he hadn't technically been breaking any rules, so I'd let it slide. What I would not let him do was let him linger in his studio past eight tonight the way I'd done last night. I'd only given him that extra hour because he'd been in the middle of a crucial step and there was no way to pause without wasting materials.



The alert on my phone chimed and I sighed and ran my fingers through Zephyr's hair one last time. I didn't have to tell him it was time to go in, as soon as I stopped touching him, he stood with far more grace than I managed. I loved the way his smaller hand fit in mine as we walked to the office, where he hesitated at the door.

"Do I have time to grab a few things from our room?" he asked.

"As long as you make it quick."

"I will, Daddy," he replied, then he kissed me on the cheek and in a flash, he went dashing bare-assed up the hallway, while I chuckled as I watched that perfect bottom bounce.

I had a few surprises I needed to get ready, too. I'd taken them out of the playroom this morning and placed them in the center drawer of my desk. Now I retrieved them and laid them out beside the files I'd carefully organized, ready to add a little thrill to my day. I was curious to see how long it took before Zephyr noticed them.

I'd barely taken my seat when he returned, hair tousled like he'd been running his fingers through it. I wondered if he'd struggled to remember where he'd put his things, since everything here was still so new to him.

"Was that fast enough?" he asked, as he placed a book, his phone and a pair of earbuds on the bench, on top of the blankets and pillows I'd already arranged for him.

"It sure was."

He added the little notebook and two googly-eyed pens he'd gotten in Blackpool to the pile, then climbed up and pulled a furry purple blanket up to his chin.

"Is it warm enough for you?" I asked.

“It is now.”

“Good, you let me know if that changes, okay? I have a thermostat in here that I can easily adjust, and look right here, under my desk, is a mini-fridge you can easily reach. It’s already got some of your fruit cups and two juice smoothies in it if you need them. There are other things to nibble on in there, too. You just help yourself to whatever you’d like. You don’t have to ask, the same as if you need to use the bathroom. You just slip away and do whatever you need and come back when you’re finished.”

“I will, Daddy, and I’ll be as quiet as a mouse.”

“Oh, I know you will, even when it’s difficult,” I said, grinning at him as I tapped the desk to draw his attention to the little bullet-shaped vibrator I’d placed there beside the remote control I intended to use to torment him.

The tip of his pink tongue poked out and his eyes grew wide, right before his face broke into a wide, excited grin as I stood and picked up the vibrator and lube.

“Do you see that candy jar on the edge of my desk?” I asked, pointing to it to make sure he wouldn’t miss it.

“Uh-huh.”

“It’s filled with little maple stars. They are a very special treat that I only keep in here because keeping them in the kitchen means they vanish too soon. Every time you stay quiet when this toy is on, I’ll feed you one as a reward for how well you’re doing. If you’re a super good boy, I will have an even bigger reward for you after I’ve concluded business for the day. Is that acceptable?”

“Perfectly acceptable, Daddy,” he replied as he spread his legs for me, leaving me

little to do but fold back the blanket and reveal that pretty cock and perky ass I wished I had time to play with.

Time was of the essence, though, so I prepped him fast, leaning over him to suck his cock several times, just to tease him a little as I worked the toy in. The heat in his eyes nearly made me cancel my whole afternoon, but I was an old hat at this, dammit. I knew how to rein myself in while keeping him on edge.

Until he nuzzled up beside me with those earbuds in his ears and his book open in front of him. The shirt I'd chosen was one of several specially designed for me. It had buttons on the side that allowed the front to stay closed, even when I had a boy burrowing beneath it. While I wasn't in need of that attention yet, I'd deliberately put it on knowing I'd need him to nurse before my meetings were through. Getting too stressed always made it difficult for my milk to release, which led to discomfort and irritation I couldn't afford. I hoped that having him beside me, getting to touch him and play with him during my meetings, would keep me from losing my shit completely, but it was always best to come prepared.

Ten minutes in, I was glad I had. The first interviewee had obviously failed to do his homework about the company or what his duties would entail.

"Let me interrupt you right there," I said as I hit the button on the remote control and felt Zephyr stiffen beside me.

He didn't make a sound, though. His lips pursed, his eyelids fluttered, but he was perfectly silent as I caressed his cheek, then ran a fingertip over his lips. As I'd hoped, he opened right up and sucked it in, allowing me to soften my expression a little as I sought to bring an abrupt end to the interview.

"What we do is far more involved than escorting cash drops to the bank and protecting clients while they transport valuables or spend time at a casino," I

explained to the man on the other side of the screen while Zephyr steadily sucked away on my finger until my pants started feeling tight and I had to ease my finger out from between his lips and turn the toy off so we could both settle back down.

“There is no going home at the end of a shift, there is only endless preparedness, daily briefings, constantly shifting schedules and a variety of engagements I cannot begin to describe. You aren’t a proper fit, nor are you ready for what a detail like this entails. Thank you for your time, but this interview is over.”

I didn’t wait to hear what he sputtered, I just clicked the curser on the button I’d already poised it over, and the screen went blank.

Fuck, I was hard.

There were still five more interviews and a conference call to get through, but cutting things short meant I had a good forty-five minutes before the next interview was set to kick off. Zephyr had relaxed and even gone back to reading his book, oblivious to what was about to happen. I mashed the button the remote as I spun out of my chair, anticipation making my fingers clumsy as I fumbled with my belt. The book fluttered in his hand, his finger barely keeping the page marked as he struggled to hold on to it. I plucked it from his grasp and slid a sticky note between the pages, dropped it on my desk and shed my pants.

Though the blanket concealed my boy’s body from my view, I could see him writhing, please on his face as he squirmed. The bullet was going back in, just as soon as I’d finished with him. Hell, he’d probably be stuffed with my cum before the end of the day. When he raised his hips and whined I shoved the blanket back, tugged the string to pull it from him and watched his body fight to keep it in and retain the pleasure.

I’d give him enough to send his eyes rolling back in his head, if he’d relax, for just a

moment. Pinning his hip in place helped, he couldn't buck and when those trusting azure eyes sought mine, and he saw my state of undress, he let his body go lax and the vibrator just slipped right out of him. Gods, the look on his face when I popped the head of my cock inside of him was almost my undoing. His lips formed a perfect 'o' as his eyes widened more with each fraction of an inch that disappeared into his body.

"Daddy!" he cried, letting me hear his voice unrestrained for the first time since he'd come into my life.

It was like a song, the way he wailed for me. I'd had the bench specifically built to be the perfect height. One tug brought him to the edge and impaled him completely. There it was, the sight I'd been longing to witness. His eyes rolled back, his body shuddered, then my boy rolled his hips and ripped the control right out of my hands with the way he started riding my dick. All I could do was clutch his hips and let him pleasure us both as he undulated against the blankets, moans spilling from his lips as he sent us spiraling through the galaxy.

### ZEPHYR

Mornings were the best times here. Just lying in bed, cuddled up to Daddy, my lips wrapped around his nipple with my head touching Tristan's as he nursed on the other side. Today was a big, big day, and Daddy had been very firm this morning when he'd told me that I had to keep my shorts on once people started arriving, which would be just after three. I loved the way he laid out the schedule for the day while we lay warm and snuggled up with him. His voice had a lilting rumble to it that always sounded like music to me. It was super easy to listen to and he never made things confusing. Everything was always black and white and free of bewildering details.

Today we had Tristan's big unveiling, and Daddy had forbidden us to do anything but play until it was time to get ready for the big event. He'd handle greeting our guests and keeping them entertained until then, and I'd get to meet Tristan's best friend, Hamish.

"Try not to wear yourselves out playing, you don't want to be tired and cranky when we've got a house full of guests," he murmured as he stroked our hair.

"We can build our racetracks," Tristan said. "Racing cars won't make us too tired."

"Can we put Cars on while we play them?" I asked, lacing my fingers with his where they rested on Daddy's abs.

I licked the last traces of milk from around Daddy's nipple, which was sadly empty now. His milk was always so yummy. Starting the day out with it meant that I never had to eat much at breakfast, usually just a fruit parfait or one of the nummy smoothies Theo and Daddy made for me. Last night he'd given me one with peanut butter and bananas in it after he'd seen how much I enjoyed the toasted peanut butter and banana sandwiches Theo had made for lunch. He'd even cut my crusts off, too, after he'd noticed me carefully peeling them off the turkey sandwiches he'd made the day before.

Something about the texture of crust just felt weird in my mouth. Rough and a little hard when it should have been soft and squishy. I loved just about everything soft and squishy, even the mushy peas we'd had in Blackpool. They'd been as much of a treat as the soft roasted carrots that had been glazed with butter and brown sugar. I'd never had sweet carrots before, just ones from the can and carrot sticks that always tasted like bitter water and felt like they took forever to chew.

"We can have a Cars marathon," Tristan said, giving my hand a little squeeze. "Are you nervous?"

"A little, but I'm always nervous before a performance."

"I'm always nervous before an unveiling, too," he admitted. "But I think it's supposed to be that way."

"As long as they are good nerves," Daddy said. "And not the kind that leave you sobbing and afraid to come out and show us what you've made."

"These are good nerves," Tristan said, and now I squeezed his hand, because I knew how hard he'd worked on the three tabletop pieces he'd be unveiling tonight. "I love these pieces and Zephyr and I have practiced the poses. I know that I can finish the demos in between courses and have him securely tied in his new pose before Theo

brings the next one out.”

“Just don’t forget what he said, about sending a message to him in the kitchen if you need more time,” Daddy cautioned.

“I won’t.”

“Then I think we’re ready to start our morning, unless either of you has anything to add,” Daddy said, not that he moved his arms. He still held us gently, his fingertips caressing our sides as we lay cozied in soft sheets and the huge, fluffy comforter.

I loved that Daddy and Tristan liked soft things, too, and believed in comfort over appearances.

“I don’t have anything else, Daddy,” Tristan said.

“Me, either.”

“Then I guess we’d better get in the shower before we decide to stay here until the doorbell rings.”

“That could work, too,” Tristan muttered.

“Don’t temp me more than I already am,” Daddy grumbled, his arm tightening around me.

Sighing, I rubbed my cheek against his shoulder and kissed his neck. “But it’s nice here,” I whined.

“So nice,” Tristan added.



He looked just as cozy and content as I felt. With our hands still joined over top of him, Daddy wasn't making any effort to move.

"I suppose it wouldn't hurt to lie here a little while longer and enjoy my boys," Daddy said, tugging me all the way up for a kiss, then doing the same to Tristan after he'd let me go. "Tomorrow is a no work day. We'll have guests to spend time with and we're all due for a bit of down time after the week we've had."

"Even me?" I asked, because it really hadn't felt like I'd done much but be a very pampered kitten all week.

Even the time I'd spent in the studio with Tristan hadn't felt like work. It had been fun, getting to touch all the ropes and help him choose which one to use in each design, and the whole time he'd been tying me up, he'd talked to me and praised me for my ability to comfortably hold the positions he put me in. It was so easy. He never tried to move me or arrange my limbs in a specific way. He always asked me to stretch my arm or leg in the direction he wanted it, then checked to make sure it was a comfortable one for me before he started tying. In just a short time together, he'd already shown me how we'd be working together during each demonstration, and while I didn't fully know what to expect from the evening, I was eager to give everyone the best show possible.

"Even you, little one, you've been a marvelous help this week and worked really hard to make sure that neither Tristan nor I got stressed out or lost our tempers."

"You've been awesome," Tristan said. "Thank you for being so patient with me. I know it wasn't fun going through all the different kinds of rope."

"But it was fun," I insisted, sitting up a little so I could see his face better. "I never knew there were so many different kinds of ropes. If you hadn't done like you promised, and let me touch them all, we wouldn't know that polypropylene makes

my skin sweaty and break out, or that nylon feels nice but not as nice as silk and satin.

“Did you try the natural rope that Simon sent over?” Daddy asked.

“Yeah, but we hated them,” Tristan said.

“They were so itchy,” I groaned, scratching at a phantom spot on my arm where I’d rubbed one of the manila ropes to see what it would feel like against my skin.

Uck. That’s what.

“Is that why the two of you were playing in the bathtub last night when I came upstairs?” Daddy asked.

“Uh-huh,” Tristan said. “He was itchy after we’d touched all of Simon’s ropes, so I was trying to make it better. I know I need to send him a thank you letter for thinking of me when his company made them, but those aren’t the kinds of ropes I like to touch.”

“You did more than try, you made it so much better,” I told him, giving his hand another squeeze.

He beamed at me across Daddy, who hugged us both and pressed kisses to the tops of our heads.

“Good boy, I’m proud of you, helping your brother that way after the way he helped you,” Daddy praised Tristan. “I’m sorry I was so caught up in the office that I couldn’t be there to wash you both.”

“You could wash us in the shower,” I suggested, wanting Daddy’s hands back on me

again.

“If we ever let you up,” Tristan added, snuggling back in against Daddy’s side and popping his thumb back in his mouth.

“Cheeky gremlin,” Daddy said, giving him a playful swat on the rear. “I’m not in any hurry to move, either. I’ve missed mornings like this. We’ve gone too long without indulging ourselves.”

Daddy sighed, his hand stroking along my side. “You know, Theo never cooks on dinner party days so he can focus on all his prep for the meal. Why don’t you two let go temporarily, and I’ll go make up a tray of things we can nibble on in here. A morning lazing away in bed will do us all a world of good. We can put on Cars in here, or anything else you’d like to watch.”

“Can we save Cars for the playroom and racetracks and finish watching the Royal Rumble with you?” I asked.

“Ohh, yes please, wrestling,” Tristan chimed in.

“I’ll never turn down the opportunity to catch up on wrestling with my favorite imps,” Daddy said.

“We’re you’re only imps, Daddy,” Tristan reminded him.

“Yes, my only and my favorite,” Daddy replied, shifting just enough that we got the hint that it was time to turn him loose.

The moment he moved out from between us we wiggled like inch worms beneath the blankets, reaching for one another until we were clinging and getting comfy as Daddy turned the TV on.

“There now, the introduction will have all the clips from the pre-show. You two watch that while I pull something together for us.”

Pull something together for us had come to have a bunch of different meanings since living here, but the one thing it always meant was treats. We settled in to listen to who the announcers felt were the favorites to win that year’s Rumble, each of us with our own thoughts on who was going to win and who was going to be the surprise entrant.

“If it’s Mox he’s gonna wreck everyone,” Tristan declared.

“Huh-uh, no way would he wreck Jeff, or Undertaker.”

“Undertaker’s retired, what would he wanna come back for the rumble for?”

“A title shot?”

“He doesn’t need one, he’s done everything.”

“So has Mox,” I reminded him.

“So has Jeff.”

“I know but it’s so cool to see him do the Swanton off everything,” I replied. “He always does something super extra at pay-per-views.”

“Yeah, but he got hurt lots ‘cause of it, too, just like Moxley.”

“True.”

“Surprise entrants rarely win anyway,” I said, sighing because it was always hard to

pick, even when I'd been watching wrestling for years. I hadn't been able to catch up for a while, though, and was hopelessly behind when it came to knowing who was on the main roster and who was out with an injury. People moved up from NXT all the time, too, and I hadn't caught one of those shows in almost a year. Paulie hadn't been a big wrestling fan, but sometimes he'd watch it with me when he got bored.

"What about Dirty Dom?" Tristan suggested.

"He's awesome, but he's kinda small to win a rumble."

"He's bigger than his dad and his dad won one."

"Ohh, you're right. I'd forgotten about that. I still think it's gonna be one of the bigger guys, though. Braun Strowman maybe, or Roman again, or one of the Usos."

"Please not Roman again. He's awesome, but he's already won everything, too."

"I'm gonna cheer for the Usos then," I told him.

"You can't cheer for both."

"Yeah I can. I'll just cheer loudest for whichever one makes it to the end."

"And if they both do?"

"Then I'll just be cheering loudly," I declared, while he grinned and shook his head at me.

Giggling, we found that we could both see the television better if we wiggled around to lay sidewise like two little spoons waiting for our big spoon to come back. Daddy did, a few minutes later, with three strawberry smoothies on a tray filled with cut up

melon pieces, pastries, and a bowl of sliced andouille sausage sauteed in maple syrup. The scent hit me before I registered that it was there, but Daddy saw my eyes dart to it and plucked a piece from the bowl that he held to my lips and let me eat from his fingers.

“You two will have to sit up to eat,” Daddy said. “As comfy as you look, I won’t have you guys choking trying to eat that way.”

Obediently we sat up, and he passed us each a smoothie. I loved that Theo had started freezing juice in the ice cube trays to make our smoothies with, so they wouldn’t taste watered down. Instead, they were packed with flavor.

“Ohhh yum, so cold and nummy,” Tristan declared after he’d bitten into a chilled piece of honeydew.

He pressed the rest to my lips so I could taste, too.

While I was perfectly content with my smoothie after nursing from Daddy, I happily ate all the fruit and sausage pieces they offered me, since they never offered too much. I loved that I didn’t have to be afraid of food here. No one ever told me that I shouldn’t eat something because it would make me gain weight, but they also never made me feel bad for nibbling or taking half and quarter portions. It felt good not having eyes on me judging what I was doing when I wasn’t intentionally trying to stand out or be picky.

“Ohh nice, looks like they’re kicking things off with the women’s rumble,” Daddy said, rubbing his hands together as he stared at the screen.

“If I could have found a wrestling school, I’d have loved to do what they do,” I said. “Especially the ladies and the luchadores. The way they combine acrobatics and wrestling techniques is awesome.”

“Really, is that something you truly wanted to do?” Daddy asked, eyes on me now instead of the screen.

“Uh-huh, but the nearest school was really far away from where I lived, and I’d have had to save up money for bus fare to get there, as well as for the school and a place to live. On top of that I’d have had to get a job and I don’t know how that would have worked with training. The only way I might have been able to make it happen was if I saved up enough for a whole year’s rent and utilities, so I could afford to work something part-time that fit around my training schedule. That’s what I was trying to do with the troupe and I was close, before they decided they hated each other.”

Daddy stroked his neatly-trimmed beard and studied me for a moment. “If it’s still something you’re interested in, then we’ll have to see if there is anything available nearby. I can’t promise there’ll be something, but there is an area wrestling promotion that puts on local shows. I attend as frequently as I’m able. Someone there might know of a school, or we might find someone willing to work with you and teach you a few things to get you started.”

“Oh my gosh, seriously?!” I squealed, bouncing on my bottom. “That would be awesome!”

“It wouldn’t be on that level,” Daddy said as he gestured toward one of the women flipping another off the top rope and sending her halfway across the ring, before she proceeded to springboard off the ropes and squash her fallen opponent. “But I can see where it would enhance the skillset you already have. You never know, you might find you like it enough to keep learning and take part in the local events.”

I froze, fingers gripping the pillow beneath me. “Would that really be okay?”

“Oh, sweet boy, seeing you do something that would make your face light up with joy is always going to be okay in my book,” Daddy said. “I don’t see how there are

any more risks to what they're doing than what you already do, and I've never believed in clipping my boys' wings. You were born to fly. I could tell that from the moment you performed for us in the courtyard. I'd be proud to help you find a way to make that dream come true."

Tears pricked my eyes, and I slapped a hand over my mouth to muffle the sob of joy working its way up the back of my throat. Before I'd fully registered that the tears had started falling, Daddy and Tristan had squashed me between them and were hugging me tight. No one had ever offered to help me that way. The one and only time I'd mentioned wanting to learn to wrestle, the news had been met with ridicule, which was why I'd never, ever, ever mentioned it again.

Today had felt right, though. I'd felt safe opening up and revealing that hidden part of myself. Maybe it was because they were both huge fans of the sport and a part of me figured that every fan had thought about what it would be like, at least once. Or maybe it was because I'd finally found my crew. The people who would believe in me, love me, cherish and support me, even if my dream was an unconventional one. That wasn't something I'd ever even dreamed of when I'd tacked that message to The Lactin Brotherhood's corkboard about looking for work, but man was I glad now that I'd taken the chance and posted it.



*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:26 am*

I never fretted this badly over the placement of the blankets and pillows on the ledge, but this was the first time my kitten would be up there on display, and I wanted him to be as comfortable as possible.

When I glanced over to where Daddy sat in his chair with Zephyr curled in his lap, contently suckling away on a nipple, he held out his hand and tugged me close when I took it.

“Everything is perfect, I even added an extra layer of padding,” Daddy murmured as I leaned in and pressed our foreheads together. “Everything is ready and in a moment, I’ll turn Zephyr over to you and return to our guests while you get him ready. Now breathe and relax, you’ve got this.”

Even Zephyr gave me a thumbs up, punctuated with a little grunt and a happy growl in between slurps. His legs dangled over Daddy’s thighs, and I giggled when I spotted him gleefully tapping out a tune with them while he fed. I knew what I’d see when he finally let go and opened his eyes, and sure enough, he looked milk drunk and sated when he sat up and held out his hand to me.

I took it gently and guided him out of Daddy’s lap, then waited for Daddy to lift him and place him on the ledge. We hadn’t brought in the stairs that we usually used, since Daddy hadn’t wanted Zephyr to have to climb them. He scooped Zephyr up and pressed a kiss to his forehead before laying him on blue velvet cloth the color of the ocean.

“Let’s just get these out of the way, shall we?” Daddy said, removing the black boy shorts Zephyr had worn to the room.

Beneath it was the plum purple thong he'd chosen after Daddy and I had explained that while he was going to be a living display piece, we had no interest at all in having him display what was strictly ours. Other models and performance artists who played the part of my muse on nights like tonight had always been given the choice of if they went naked or if they covered up, and how much covering they wanted to do. Zephyr had been perfectly fine with being naked, hell, he ran around the place naked or nearly so most of the time now. Zipping in and out of the pool whenever he wasn't with one of us had become as much a part of his routine as mealtimes and I loved how he was always just so content, even when there were fourteen people on the other side of the door waiting to admire him. We'd given them the customary glimpse and introduction when we'd brought him down, then we'd whisked him in here to finish getting him ready.

"Now, what are you to do when you need something?" Daddy asked him as he stepped back, holding Zephyr's shorts.

"Ask you," Zephyr replied softly, already snuggling against the velvet. It had been the perfect choice for him, and I was glad we'd made the last-minute decision to run to the fabric store yesterday.

"That's right."

"Daddy has the emergency scissors, and I have a spare pair," I explained. "Now what are our hand signals?"

"I give you an okay sign when everything feels nice, I open my hand and rock it back and forth when things are just so-so, and I stick my tongue out at you if something feels yucky."

"Perfect," I told him as I ran my fingers along his arms and legs, just petting to keep him relaxed and remind him of what my touch felt like. "Daddy will be able to hear you but not see you unless he looks over at you, but I will be able to see you at all

times, and I'll look often, so you don't have to worry about a signal being missed."

"I'm not worried. I trust you both. We're gonna do fine. Are you ready for me to get into the first position now?"

"Yes, please," I told him as I lined our ropes up on the edge of the ledge. Each bundle of blue, green, teal and white had been carefully checked and labeled, to make each transition easier for us.

As gracefully as when he sprawled across our bed, he laid his upper body flat, then twisted, so his knees were to the side, with one leg kicked back, where I'd eventually connect it with the bindings on his arm. I didn't do anything as simple or basic as a hog tie. Using the ropes, I crafted a pair of fishnet stockings for him, forming several waves at the spots where the ropes met. It was intricate work, but my fingers never had to think about it, especially when my subject was as still and malleable as Zephyr was.

I'd told the smart speaker to play The Counting Crows for me. Something about their music, especially songs like Round Here , Omaha , and Rain King , just did good things to my brain. Each time I looked at Zephyr's face, he looked like a fallen angel smiling up at me.

"Thank you for this," I murmured as I tied him up. "And for coming into our lives the way you did."

"I love it here," Zephyr whispered before sipping from the straw I held for him. "I love being with you and Daddy."

"And we love you," I told him, not caring that it had only been two weeks since we'd met him. I knew what I felt, and I knew Daddy; he looked at Zephyr the same way he looked at me. With pride and a burning desire to protect and nurture. Screw those people who tried to say you couldn't love someone until you'd known them for years.

We weren't even promised minutes. We weren't promised anything in this world so when I felt something for somebody, I told them. No holding back. I didn't want to miss an opportunity I might never get back.

He beamed up at me, those azure eyes as bright as the sky had been the day we'd met. Trusting, open, and utterly beguiling, even when I had him at my mercy like this. It just sucked that there wasn't time to play once I finished trussing him up.

Two raps on the door meant five-minute warning.

I ran my fingers along his cheek, cupped it and kissed him. "I've got to take my seat now, would you like a few sips more from your smoothie first?"

"Yes, please."

I held it for him again and stroked his hair while he took a few sips, the softness of it like the velvet beneath him. He truly looked decadent and debauched, like the sea nymphs I'd portrayed him as in my sculptures. We'd already picked out mermaid tails from a catalogue and I couldn't wait to see him in one, splashing in the shallow end of the pool, where we'd already planned to hold a photoshoot.

One knock.

Two-minute warning.

I kissed him again, then went to sit at the far end of the table, in front of the stand on which my covered sculptures sat waiting to be unveiled.

Our eyes met over the table, and he winked and blew me a kiss, which made the last little knot in my gut loosen, allowing me to finally relax and get comfortable in my chair.

“Ohhh, Rowan, you have all outdone yourselves this time,” Brenner said as he led the way into the room. “And oh my goddess, Zephyr, honey, you look positively outstanding.”

We’d asked if Zephyr would feel uncomfortable in any way about having them attend, only to discover that he was thrilled at the prospect. Learning that they’d been instrumental in helping him feel comfortable about accepting the audition just made me cherish their friendship even more. It proved that you didn’t need the whole world to know who you were, you just needed a few special people to be in your corner, and you’d still be able to live your dreams.

Zephyr had closed his eyes at the sound of the door opening, but his lips were curved upward in a tiny smile, and I could tell that he was listening and heard every word of praise that was issued his way.

“Tristan!”

Hamish’s squeal drowned out everything else, and I barely had time to turn before he barreled into me. He’d have sent us both tumbling into the chair and likely overturned it, too, if his husband Brecker hadn’t grabbed our sleeves to steady us.”

“What have I told you about behaving like an out-of-control ping-pong ball?” Brecker grumble-whispered.

“Not to unless it’s in a designated space,” Hamish contritely whispered back.

“Then kindly hug your friend properly.”

“Yes, sir,” Hamish replied and hugged me properly this time.

“It’s good to see you again,” Brecker said, ruffling my hair while Hamish squeezed the stuffing out of me.

“It looks like you’ve captured a merman,” Stavros remarked, his booming voice likely the only reason Hamish let go.

I took a moment to straighten my clothes, and suck in some much-needed air as Stavros continued speaking.

“The question now is what you intend to do with him.”

Like Daddy, he was a patron of the arts and an avid collector of all things kink. He had a collection of implements that never failed to inspire Daddy to design a new, more sinisterly wicked toy, which I always appreciated.

“Keep him,” Daddy declared, and danced possessive fingers over Zephyr’s arm, careful to touch only skin.

Stavros chuckled and patted him on the shoulder. “Good plan.”

I’d been to events where things turned lewd and the people in attendance said all sorts of filthy things about the models and subs on display, speaking openly about what they would do to them if they were theirs and generally being leches. Daddy never allowed those kinds of people into our homes or at one of our events.

Zephyr and the ropes that formed fishnet and waves all over his body were meant to be appreciated as the artwork that they were, and I knew that everyone here tonight would treat them that way.

“So, tell me, what inspired tonight?” Bruce encouraged as he took one of the seats nearest to me. “This is the first time I’ve ever seen the curtains fully opened for one of your reveals and one of the first where everything wasn’t bathed in candlelight.”

“We went to the beach in Blackpool,” I explained as more people began to take their seats.

I knew from experience that some would take longer than others, studying the knots, trying to work out how I'd formed the wave pattern up his thigh, formulating questions to ask during the demonstration later, where I'd show them while I was changing Zephyr's position. From the admiration I already saw on several faces as they studied him, I knew that the next Shibari workshop I held would be full and might even have a waitlist. That would just make it easier to plan a follow-up one, which I was always open to doing. I loved teaching people how to work with ropes almost as much as I love trussing someone up with them.

"Blackpool, huh? I bet that was an adventure," Bruce said.

"It really was. We spent all day at the amusement park, then we decided to walk from south pier to north pier so we could see all the sites and the ocean along the way," I explained. "Zephyr loves the water, and we were already in board shorts, so he started playing in the surf and before I joined him, I took a bunch of pictures of him flipping and walking on his hands in the surf. The idea of a captured sea nymph started taking shape once I had time to look at the pictures, though we're already planning to do a shoot using mermaid tails, because we're curious to see what might take shape."

"Good for you both," he declared. "You have me curious now as well."

"I went from not having any ideas I liked, to having a bunch to sort through," I explained. "We've even found a way to incorporate the moon into poses and even action shots. I just ordered a bunch of Styrofoam blocks to start carving tombstones out of, too. I can't wait to get started on those. I'll have to put together a slide show of all the pictures I took for inspiration when it's finally time for an unveiling."

"Ohh, that would be nice, it's been awhile since you shared that part of the process with us," Bruce chided gently.

He had me there.

“I know, right? I keep forgetting to take pictures of the actual process of creating each sculpture, too,” I explained.

“Well now, that’s to be expected,” Bruce said. “Once you’re in the zone, I imagine it would be difficult to pull out of, and would probably mess things up for you, too.”

“Yeah, I tend to get lost in the pieces and then the whole day slips past. When I go to look for my phone because some alarm is going off, I’m not even sure what it’s for because I don’t know what time it is. It’s always jarring and I’m not always ready to step away when it happens.”

“Oh, I know what that feels like. Whenever I decide to rearrange one of the spaces at the bed and breakfast, it’s never the fast flip around that I try to convince Brenner it will be. He’s a good man, that one and never gives me an ounce of crap when it takes all day. He’s always as sweet as pie about it, even when we wind up with heating pads on our backs and our feet in Epsom salts after we’ve spent all day moving every piece a half dozen times before I’m satisfied.”

“And I never will,” Brenner said as he took the seat across the table from Bruce.

While some couples preferred sitting side by side, we’d learned at the very first dinner party that they’d attended that they preferred to sit across from one another and flirt all night long like they were two strangers meeting for the very first time. They weren’t the only couple that roleplayed when in attendance. Our events were a haven for those who enjoyed a night out where they didn’t have to hide who they were or the things they liked.

“Even exhausted, that time with you at the end of the day, while we’re sipping our tea and bemoaning the state of our aching backs, is one I always cherish,” Brenner said as he gave his husband a wink. “Along with the killer massages you always deliver.”

“Oh, you.”



Bruce blushed and it was the sweetest thing, just listening to them and seeing the way they still were with one another even after all the years they'd been together. It gave me hope that Daddy, Zephyr and I would be like that someday. Growing up, I'd never believed that couples could be so loving or devoted to one another. While I'd lived in a two-parent household, my folks had never been very affectionate, not with me or each other. It was more like a roommate situation. They greeted one another in passing, inquired about one another's day if they weren't busy or preoccupied with something, and generally tolerated sharing community spaces with each other by being on their phones when they were in the same room, even with the TV playing. What I saw on Bruce's face when he looked across the table at Brenner was pure love, and I saw the same thing on Brenner's face as he gazed back at his husband.

Hashtag relationship goals.

In a room full of conversation and a bunch of other people, they only had eyes for one another. Then I looked up to see two sets of eyes peering down the table at me. Zephyr had cracked his open, just enough to meet mine for a moment as he flashed me the okay sign. Daddy's were bright with affection and shimmering with pride as he played host. In an instant, it dawned on me that I didn't have to hope to have that kind of love in my life someday. I had it, and holy crap, it was the best feeling in the whole wide world.