



# Daddy's Little Christmas Tree (Secret santa daddy season four)

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Forrest lost his Secret Santa gift and found his new daddy.

Moving to a new state for a new job right before Christmas wasn't my best decision. I no longer have my local little friends to play with and daddies to do scenes with during my favorite time of year. My plans for Christmas decorating parties, sleigh rides, crafts with lots and lots of stickers, visits with Santa, and adorable seasonal onesies? They'll all have to wait until next year.

When a coworker asks me to be their elf and deliver all their Secret Santa presents for them, I giddily accept. It's not the same as having little fun, but it gets me into the Christmas spirit...that is until I lose my first delivery, and my boss is the one who finds it—my boss whom I have a crush the size of my entire apartment building, on.

Daddy's Little Christmas Tree is a sweet with heat Secret Santa Daddy MM romance set in the world of Found by Daddy. It features a little beginning a new life in a new city, a daddy who knows he shouldn't be looking at his new hire the way he does, but he can't help it, Forrest who is too adorable and too in need of a daddy, a delivery gone wrong, holiday cheer, cookies galore, more glitter than any vacuum can handle, Chained's twist on a holiday shindig, all the magic of Christmas, and a happily ever after. If you enjoy your romance filled with true love, a sweet and caring daddy, and an adorable boy who's ready to let his daddy know exactly what he needs, download Daddy's Little Christmas Tree today.

**Total Pages (Source):** 18

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Forrest

I grabbed the box labeled Fun from the top shelf in my closet and plopped it on the bed. I still had boxes everywhere in my apartment. When my new company offered to give me two weeks' paid time for my move, I told them I only needed one, excited to get right into the job. I'd also been foolish. Between setting up utilities, buying necessities such as groceries, and cleaning, I'd accomplished nowhere near as much as I'd planned to in that time. One week was not enough to finish all my unpacking.

Adjusting to the new job in an unfamiliar city took more out of me than I'd expected. Work was taking up all my time. It wouldn't always be that way. I needed to push through it and then things would smooth out.

A brand-new position, doing what I had always done but for twice the salary, in the city I'd always wanted to live in. Taking the job seemed like an amazing idea at the time. And it had been. Grumpiness never made anything better.

I tore the tape off my little box and pulled out the contents. My everyday little clothes, my pajamas that I slept in if I had a really rough day, or the onesies I liked to wear while watching cartoons on a Saturday, just chilling were among the first things I unpacked, followed by my fancier things, for special occasions or club visits. Chained was the local club, and I hadn't explored it yet, but I heard it was amazing. A sister to my old club, Collared, they did not require much paperwork. But going in to transfer my membership was something I'd put off until I "had time." As I was learning quickly, I wasn't ever going to have time until I made it.

I laid the contents out in a somewhat organized manner—the onesies in one pile, the

shorts in another, the knee-high socks in another. My hats, because I just loved little hats, required two piles. On and on and on I went. Then I came to the bottom of the box where my Christmas outfits lived, and I wondered, not for the first time, if maybe, just maybe, I made a bad decision moving so close to the holidays.

Christmas had always been my favorite time of year, both being big and, especially when little. Collared had special parties just for people like me. We would make ornaments and visit Santa, and they had a retreat for those fully into the season. It was me, their target on that one, and the event was wonderful.

But it wasn't just club time that was fun. My friend Allen always did a decorating party at his house, which was less of a house and more of a mansion. We'd all go and decorate the trees he set up in practically every room. We'd hang garland and wreaths and lights, both inside and out. The past few years, we'd included some inflatables to create entire stories on his front lawn.

The first year he invited me, I thought he was looking for free labor, but I didn't care. Decorating was the most fun. I soon realized, that, for Allen, it was about togetherness and Christmas cheer. I was going to miss it a lot this year and considered taking off to go and help, but, of course, the dates conflicted with a huge work event, one I got the impression wasn't optional.

Maybe next year.

Every yuletide, I decorated my apartment, too, but apartments weren't the same. You didn't have the ability to create a winter wonderland people could step into from the sidewalk. I always had a small tree and wrapped my pictures on the wall like presents and strung lights around the windows. If I could get everything unpacked, I was going to do the same this year.

No. I needed to make it a priority. Same with visiting Chained.

I glanced down at the Santa hat and remembered the festival where I got it. There had been sleigh rides, hot cocoa, and a cookie walk. It even snowed that day. So many memories with that silly hat. I shoved it on the bottom of the pile, not wanting to dwell on my grumpiness.

There was nothing I didn't love about Christmas, and here I was putting a shadow over this year. I needed to stop. Sure, Christmas Day wasn't always the ideal holiday—because that's not how holidays work—but the magic of Christmas, the seasonal joy, was standard. And I freaking loved it.

The last thing in the box was a little treasure chest where I stored small things that were important to me, sort of like a scrapbook without the book. Invitations to parties, including my very first little party. Some crafts I'd done over the years, those small enough to keep. As I lifted one out, a shower of glitter from those crafts fell into the chest. Stickers, ribbon, and even a couple of gift tags that were on presents that had mattered to me—most with sparkly glitter. I set the box on my bookshelf.

Not one to hide who I was, I didn't keep all my little stuff hidden away, like some did. If I didn't trust you enough with that side of me, you just weren't invited over. I learned a long time ago that hiding any part of myself like that tainted it. It made it somehow dirty, and I didn't want that. I was proud of who I was in all areas, from work to when I had little rattles on my socks. All of that made me who I was.

The next ten minutes were spent bringing everything over to my dresser and putting them in the drawer designated for my little clothes.

I left out a onesie that a mommy I used to do scenes with had given me. It had an embroidered sweater on it. I didn't know why I loved it so much—it was one of the least “little” designs on my onesies—but it reminded me we were deep into fall, and Christmas was coming.

After a quick shower, I put it on with a pair of sweatpants. Not really wanting to be too little, but more snugly and warm, just like the sweater on it. I ordered food delivery from my favorite fast-food place, getting not one but two kids' meals for dinner, along with a salad for tomorrow. They were featuring toys from one of my favorite shows, and I wanted to collect as many of them as I could. It used to be that when you ordered them, all of the people got the same ones the same day, but now everything was in blind bags, so I never did know for sure. I might get two of the same, but I could get two different. Wouldn't that be fun?

Placing the order already had me letting go some of my grumpiness. I needed to do better about giving myself some time to simply be, so I didn't get so overworked and stressed. Not having a daddy or mommy meant that was on me.

I made a plan to finish unpacking this weekend. I'd been delaying it long enough. And then maybe I'd check out Chained. I wasn't sure if I was ready to go by myself yet. How silly. Nothing would happen to me. I liked Collared was because they worked hard to make it as safe a place as possible. There was no reason to believe Chained wouldn't be the same.

But I had been through so many changes. My fear wasn't that mommies or daddies were gonna be awful, or that I'd be pressured to do things I didn't want to, or that there would be a lot of drinking or abuse—none of the stereotypical negatives people pulled out of their ass when it came to clubs. No. I was afraid that I might not like it. And I wasn't sure what I'd do in that case because I needed to find my community.

Being little by myself was fine, for a while. But a while was almost up.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Cliff

Our building was a hive of activity at all times of year, and with the holidays quickly followed by year-end approaching, the buzz rose to approach deafening. Employees at all levels wished for time off to spend with family and friends, departments were planning various festivities, clients were in and out with gifts and extra needs, and, to top it off, our year-end reporting loomed. In my previous company, similar events had led to a seriously Scrooge-like atmosphere from upper management, but in the two years I'd been here, I'd been delighted to see an entirely different way of being.

In my position, upper-middle management I supposed, my job was to inform and enforce the company culture. That was what had driven me away from that other company. It seemed that the overseas owners, who never visited the premises once during my five-year tenure, preferred not to acknowledge that the employees were people with needs, wants, and desires. And plans.

So, for every special occasion or holiday, I had to fight for the slightest bit of celebration. I was paid well, but I felt more like a tyrant than a supervisor. My salary here was 10 percent less, my stress level down 80 percent. Worth it. It was also nice that I hadn't had to job hunt, being contacted by a headhunter who convinced me in one phone call, after one question, to let her present me to the company.

The question? "What do they do for Christmas?"

She had to go find out, which she wasn't super crazy about doing, warning me that it could make the company hesitant to hire someone who wanted random information. "Is this a religion thing? Because of course you'd have off for any religious

observances.”

“That’s not why.” And not a topic I would discuss with her. “It’s about how they treat their employees. If you want me to consider this position, that’s my deal-breaker.”

I know she thought I was probably crazy, but it didn’t matter. So, she called HR and asked then came back with a ton of information. This company, whose ownership actually worked on the top floor, believed that celebrations raised morale. They walked the entire building a couple of times a week because they wanted their employees to feel free to approach them with any concerns. That beat an open-door policy, hands down.

And my question triggered a job offer that required only one interview before I was hired. Of course, they’d seen my resume already and knew my qualifications, but on my first day, the CEO shook my hand and welcomed me aboard. Told me they knew they had the right person for the job and expected great things from me.

Which was awesome, but just a bit nerve-racking. I didn’t want to let them down. I came in early and left a little late, made sure those on my floor knew that I was also available to them to air any concerns, and welcomed suggestions for improvement. The first suggestion was for a suggestion box in my office. It rarely had anything in it because I usually headed off the folded scrap of paper and had a discussion with the person. We were productive and, most days, a cheerful crew. Sure, everyone had deadlines and things that went wrong, but most problems were handleable if addressed right away.

Now...who was going to address my problem? I’d seen Mr. Shorr, the CEO, just that morning, and he always encouraged us to come to him, but if I did, what could he say? Company policy precludes ogling staff under your direct supervision?

Because it did, and with good reason. I agreed 100 percent with that policy. Or, I had,

until a certain new hire crossed my path. I did not hire him, although I approved the decision. Well-qualified, I agreed Forrest would be a good addition to our team. And that was it, and all was fine at first because we were all so busy I never saw him. But the first meeting he sat in on, I completely lost my train of thought while going over a series of financials on a large screen.

Embarrassing?

Yes, but the reason was a real problem.

Forrest was adorable, with a winsome smile and twinkling eyes. He was smart and well-spoken in the meeting, unlike me, and all I wanted to do was chase out everyone else and sit him down for a conversation. If I'd ever seen anyone who needed a daddy, it was him. Not something I could specifically spell out, more instinct, but my brain and body were all in.

I could never act on these thoughts, could not even have them in my brain because it was unfair to the employee. Either I'd end up showing favoritism or trying to avoid doing that and be too hard on him. Why did he have to be so adorable?

After the meeting, I'd promised myself I would forget about that momentary lapse in professionalism. Which would have worked very well if I didn't run into him every day. That had not been the case while he was training, but now...

Fortunately the holidays and all the rest did have us busy, and I was able to at least maintain a facade. Perhaps the problem wasn't Forrest. Oh, he was cute as a button, but if I hadn't been working so much that I hadn't been to the club recently, I might have fewer problems keeping my mind on business.

My club, Chained, had a little room where daddies and mommies and their littles could come to play. Single littles were also welcomed, and people like me, a daddy



without a little in his life, were able to scene with them.

I made a plan right then to go on the first possible night. There were surely some events scheduled as well, with lots of glitter and gingerbread and visits from Santa. I'd have to check the schedule because they drew a nice crowd. I'd certainly find someone to spend a nice evening with and take the edge off this obsession with an employee who was completely off-limits.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Forrest

My morning had been meeting after meeting, so by the time lunch rolled around, I was ready to go somewhere, anywhere, to grab a bite to eat. I'd packed a lunch, but I needed some space, and it was easy enough to have what I brought for dinner. I grabbed my keys and headed to the elevator, going straight down to the lobby and not looking back until I was outside. I didn't want to take a chance that someone was going to waylay me with a question.

I loved this time of year, the crisp air tickling my cheeks. In the city, I didn't have the benefit of as many trees as I liked, but we weren't far from the park along the river. The city had pretty much turned the entire riverfront into public space, which was nice. In so many areas, all waterfronts were predominantly occupied by houses of the wealthy. Here, everyone got to experience the beauty of the water flowing downstream.

Sucking in a deep breath, I let the cool air fill me and then started my walk. I wasn't even sure where I was going, but I needed to stretch my legs. At the corner, the light was red, and I opted to turn right so I didn't have to wait to cross the street. I soon found myself in a neighborhood I'd never explored before, filled with wonderful little mom-and-pop restaurants, all advertising lunch specials. The choices were endless, each sounding better than the one before.

I opted for a gyro from a walk-up window, and while waiting for it to be finished, a shop across the street caught my eye. All the sign had on it was a huge teddy bear, and it intrigued me. So, once I had my sandwich, I crossed the street and went right inside. The entire place was filled with stuffies. And not ones I recognized, either.

They all appeared to be originals rather than licensed designs. I was in love.

According to the in-store poster, they were a local company and everything was handmade using fair labor standards, their employees receiving a living wage. These weren't some random toys from overseas. These were works of art, and I was immediately enamored.

"Is there something in particular you're looking for? A present, perhaps?" An older woman I hadn't noticed came out from behind the counter. "If you don't see something here, chances are we can arrange something for you."

"I'm just looking today, thank you." I'd be back though. My stuffed kitty could use a friend, but it wasn't going to be a matter of randomly picking out a toy. This was a place of magic and treasures, and I'd need an entire afternoon, not a lunch break, to find the perfect one. "I didn't know you were here."

"A lot of people say that. It's because we don't have the name on the sign."

"Yeah, how come?" I asked. "I saw the teddy bear and was intrigued but wasn't sure what to expect." I'd been more than half hoping it would be a little store. There weren't many around, but they existed.

She shrugged. "I don't know. The guy never came back to finish it, I guess."

I looked around, ignoring the sandwich getting cold in my bag, fascinated by everything. Their attention to detail was stunning. And sure, some of them were very basic, but others...wow!

When I realized time was running out, I said goodbye.

"Oh, wait a second," she called out, coming over with a piece of paper. "This

explains our process, if you ever need a specialty stuffed animal made.”

Taking it from her, I thanked her and put it in my pocket. It wasn’t until much later that night that I was able to read it and see what she meant by “special.” They would take your old clothes—or those of a loved one—and turn them into memory stuffies. Old baby clothes or maybe those of someone who passed on were repurposed into huggable treasures. It really was a magical shop.

I raced back to the office and barely got off the elevator when Evelyn stopped me. “Hey, you weren’t here for Secret Santa.”

Okay, I didn’t get the announcement because Secret Santa was pretty awesome and had I known, I wouldn’t have missed it. “Sorry.” I wasn’t sure what she was looking for by way of response, but it felt pretty universal.

“No, don’t be sorry. It’s perfect!” How my missing out could turn her giddy made no sense, but it was better than her being mad, so I’d take it.

She was technically on my level only in a different position, but because I was new, she tended to act more like a boss. I didn’t mind. She was a sweet woman, if a little high strung.

“Come with me.” She wasn’t asking, and that was fine. My sandwich wouldn’t get any hotter if I rushed to my desk to eat it.

I followed her to her desk, unsure what she was planning.

“I have Frank for my person.” She held up a piece of red paper not much bigger than an index card.

“Okay.”

“Frank will know it’s from me on day one. He’s really clever.” If she thought she was explaining what she needed, she wasn’t.

“Okay.” I still didn’t see where this was going. Secret Santas never really stayed a secret. I didn’t know why anyone pretended. It was all about giving and Christmas joy and stuff.

“Yeah, so I was thinking you could be my elf. If he catches you delivering it, he still won’t know it was from me. And since you’re not in Secret Santa, you could still play. Win-win.”

While she probably thought she was asking me for a favor, I was excited about the chance. I got to participate in the fun part of Secret Santa without having to worry about whether I knew the person, finding the time to get the perfect gifts, or filling out forms so people could learn enough about me not to give me coffee with extra sugar when I like it black—that kind of thing. She was right. It was a win-win.

The idea of being an elf upped my Christmas spirit. Maybe I was going to be the big winner after all.

She told me she would leave the gifts on my chair for me to find in the mornings. From there, all I had to do was deliver them without Frank seeing me. Easy peasy.

Only it was far from easy or peasy.

I got to work early the next morning, ready to deliver it before he came in. I carried the small gift bag, careful to make sure Frank didn’t see me if he happened to be here early.

Who picked then to decide to come off the elevator just as I was turning the corner? Frank.

I tossed the bag behind me, crossing my fingers it wasn't fragile.

"You're here early." My conversation starter was beyond awkward. If I were to guess, my face was shouting my guilt. The only saving grace was that he'd have no idea what that guilt was from.

"You can't let them do that to you." He tsked.

"Do what?" Not for the first time since this whole Secret Santa thing began, I was confused.

"Make you think you need to come in early and stay late all the time."

"You're here early, too," I pointed out.

"Yeah, but I don't stick around much after lunch. You are here late every day. Don't pretend you aren't."

I shrugged. It was accurate.

"Gotta make sure not to burn yourself out."

"Okay, thanks," I said, crossing my fingers and toes that he didn't see where I dropped the bag. Fine, where I threw it.

"Come with me. I need to give you some paperwork." What was it about people here telling me what to do? And they were never dicks about it, so I always went along.

I followed him, and when he said "paperwork," what he really meant was that he wanted to show me how he set up his schedule. While I appreciated it, I needed to get back to the gift. It didn't have a name on it because she didn't want him to know her

handwriting—or at least I guessed that was the reason; she didn’t really say. But I needed to get to it before someone else found it.

Only, when I arrived, it was gone.

Crap.

I looked all around, even crawled on the floor to see if it fell behind the planters. I backed up, bumping into a person. Could the day get any worse? It wasn’t even my official start time yet.

When I looked up, I saw my boss, Cliff, staring down at me, holding the gift bag.

“Looking for this?”

“Um, yes, sir.” Why did he have to be so freaking hot? It was making me sound even less put together than I was, which wasn’t much.

Also, it felt so wrong calling the man I had the biggest crush on “sir” while on my knees in front of him. It came out with a little squeak.

“Not ‘sir.’” He held out his hand and helped me up. “Cliff. People call me lots of things, but not ‘sir.’”

I didn’t want to think too hard on what he meant by lots of things. It wasn’t the first time I pictured him as a daddy, and I refused to imagine myself calling him that. It would only lead to trouble.

“Did Evelyn talk you into being her delivery service this year?”

“How did you...”

“Don’t you know?” he chuckled. “Evelyn always wants to win.”

“Win?” Wasn’t everyone a winner in Secret Santa?

“There’s a pool we bosses aren’t supposed to know about as to who can go the longest before getting caught. Evelyn lost last year, barely. She’s in it to win it this time.”

“She should’ve gotten a better elf.” I chuckled.

“Pretty sure you’re the perfect elf,” he said, and heaven help me if my cheeks didn’t burn with heat.



## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Cliff

I was standing at the reception desk for the floor when I observed an interesting encounter. Interesting because it involved Forrest, who I was not doing a great job of ignoring, and Frank, another employee at his level who had the unfortunate tendency to act as if he was a level higher than he occupied. Most of the staff ignored him, but Forrest hadn't been there long and was too good-natured. Probably it wasn't hurting anything because Frank was harmless and generally meant well. He was well qualified to help Forrest pick up anything he hadn't so far, and he for sure wouldn't steer him wrong.

"Cliff?" Belinda the receptionist asked, returning my attention to our conversation. "I was able to get coverage for the last week of the year, and HR approved my time off."

"That's fine." I wasn't sure why she had to tell me any of this. Everyone had an allotted number of days off, although she was a great face for the company. So, that made the quiet week between holidays a perfect time. "You didn't have to track down someone to cover."

"No, but I know how much you like having a friendly and professional person at this desk."

It was true. Belinda was not the young, minimum-wage worker some companies preferred for the job. She knew our business well and represented it in person or on the phone in a way that reflected positively on our operation. And we paid her appropriately.

“True, but you do enough without taking on more responsibility.” I said this a lot here, where I never had to at other jobs. “But thank you. I hope you have a good vacation.”

She smiled, the fine lines around her eyes crinkling. “My mother asked us all to come for a big holiday get-together. She’s getting older, although she claims we are, and she lives where a white Christmas is almost guaranteed. Everyone is coming! Can you believe it?”

I would not have asked her for details because I never wanted anyone to feel like they had to explain why they chose their time off, but Belinda was chatty and had told me many stories of her large extended family. She’d never married, herself, but had dozens of nieces and nephews and great-nieces and nephews whom she adored. “Can you all fit in the house?” I never had the impression her mother lived in a mansion.

“No, but there are a couple of Airbnbs on her block. Usually she grumbles about it, but now...”

“Now, not so much?” I chuckled. “What a great time you’ll have. I hope you take lots of pictures.” Again, not interfering, but she did love to show off her beloved family.

“You know it. I’ll fill up my phone. I’m going to gain ten pounds just eating all the food Mom and my sisters and brother will prepare, too. You know I don’t cook.”

“So you’ve mentioned.” Many times... “Well, then, I’d better get back to my desk. Hey, who is covering while you’re gone?”

“Sandy. You know him, the VP of operations assistant? His boss will be off, and he could have been, too, but he used his vacation over the summer and well...perfect, right?”

Sandy wore a bow tie and button-down shirt every day and often a vest. He was friendly and would enjoy the front seat here. “Absolutely perfect.”

I bid her goodbye and started down the hall when something glittery caught my eye. Bending down, I saw a ribbon peeking out from behind a potted palm near the elevator. I tugged it out to find a sparkly gift bag. I shook it and something bumped around inside. Not a discard, then. I examined it carefully, but there was no tag and no name written anywhere among the gold-and-silver reindeer and elves.

Maybe Belinda...but she was not at her desk when I turned around. Probably gone to the restroom or to take a delivery to someone’s office. Calls were forwarded whenever she stepped away. When she was at lunch, various assistants filled in, but for a minute or two it didn’t matter. So who lost this present? I was all alone in the elevator lobby at the moment, but maybe someone in one of the nearby offices would know. I was on my way back from finding out nothing when I spotted a certain newish employee crawling around on the floor near the potted plants.

Interesting.

Doing my best not to stare at the way his pants cupped his ass cheeks in this position or let my naughty mind carry me into images that were definitely NSFW. Especially when he backed up, on hands and knees, and banged right into my legs. But anything inappropriate was flushed from my thoughts when he tipped his face up to look at me. His lips were parted with quick breaths, his eyes wide, and his entire posture held a panic that struck right to my daddy heart.

I held out the bag. “Looking for this?”

“Um, yes, sir,” he said, still on his hands and knees. Someone like him calling me daddy in that pose...the naughty vied with the comforting, but the daddy won out.

“Not ‘sir.’” I reached down and took his hand. “Cliff. People call me lots of things, but not ‘sir.’” In all the meetings and times we were together in the past weeks, had we never had a direct conversation? He’d know I only let people call me by my first name if we had spoken. He occupied so much of my thoughts, I’d had imaginary conversations with him. Even though nothing could come of it. I helped him to his feet and managed not to brush imaginary dust off his pant knees. “Here.” I handed him the bag, but he was still not looking together, so I led him over to the chairs in the reception area. “Take a seat a minute and catch your breath.” I sat in the next chair and folded my hands in my lap. “Want some water or something?”

“No. I just...thanks for finding that. I dropped it earlier.”

“No worries.” I did wonder who the gift was for and couldn’t help hoping it wasn’t for someone who was already his daddy. But wasn’t that selfish? When I couldn’t fill that role. I should hope he was happy and had someone to love and comfort him. “Just relax a few then you can head back to work.”

He hopped up without another moment passing. “No. I’m good. I just am very relieved this wasn’t lost. It’s not mine.”

After he left, I had to sit until things settled with me, though, leaving just as Belinda returned. She looked surprised to see me there but didn’t ask, and I didn’t offer any explanation either.

A couple of hours later, there came a tap on my doorframe. “Come in,” I called without looking up from the spreadsheet I’d been studying. “Sit and give me just a minute.”

“Okay.”

Forrest.

My interest in numbers plummeted. “Hey, what’s up?”

“I didn’t want to interrupt you,” he said. “I just wanted to bring you something to thank you for earlier.” He placed a king-sized chocolate bar on my desk, the one with fruits and nuts I adored and only allowed myself as a rare treat. “Your PA said you like this.”

“I love this, but it wasn’t necessary. I found the package is all.”

“It’s not that. You made me feel better. Bumping into you while crawling around on the floor. Most people would not have taken it like that.”

I shrugged. “You were looking for something you lost and I happened to find. Just doing my job, making sure you were all right.”

He swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing. “Yeah, um well, sometimes you don’t feel like my boss.”

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Forrest

After getting an email from Collared about their upcoming Day Out with Santa, I decided it was time to suck it up and head over to Chained. The email would be the first of many, and each one was going to make me feel worse about hiding from Chained. If the club sucked and I didn't like it, so be it, but waiting at my apartment until I felt brave enough to try it wasn't going to change that.

I'd spent my Saturday finishing the last of the unpacking, doing laundry, and grocery shopping—all the unfun things that came with living on your own. By the evening, when it was time for me to get ready for my tour, I'd nearly decided to call and cancel and go to bed. But then I would be right back in the same place I was that morning—the one I swore I was going to get myself out of.

Instead, I rallied and took a quick shower, threw on a onesie, knee-highs, and short-shorts under my jeans and sweatshirt, and drove to the club.

They had dressing rooms—of course they did—all clubs had them, but I wasn't sure what they would be like or if I'd feel comfortable using them. This was the safe way to go without that worry hanging over my head. I secretly hoped they had rooms like Collared did, where each one had different themes and were designed to be used with your partner. Not that I had a partner right now, but there was something magical about putting on your little gear in a little room.

Last year, I'd told Miss Camille that she should decorate one of them for Christmas. She told me I was a smart boy and that it was a great idea and gave me a Christmas tree sticker. I'd been in the little room, so being a smart boy and getting a sticker was

kind of expected, but it still felt great. Maybe Chained have one. How great that would be.

I wasn't sure when they called each other sister clubs if that meant it was like a franchise where they were both very much the same, or if it just meant they were owned by the same people. Either way, I was going to find out soon enough.

The traffic was light, and I soon found myself there. I parked the car and saw just how different the two clubs were from the outside. This place was stunning. Back in the day, it had been a huge estate. Now, it was a place where people went for fun, to get away from everything, to relax, and to get off—all the good things.

Ms. Lily met me in the lobby. I had specifically asked if I could have my tour with somebody who worked in the little room, and when they said Ms. Lily, the person who actually ran the room, could do it, I was excited. Even at Collared, everybody was wonderful, but meeting with the people who understood littles made a difference.

There were lots of kinks and preferences in clubs like these—everything from people who were pups, to those who were doms or dommes, to daddies, to exhibitionists, to masochists. They were all there, and each one was different enough that it was nice to have someone like Miss Camille or Ms. Lily who understood you.

“Let's get you signed in, and we'll lock your phone up,” she said.

I gave her my wallet as well, not wanting to deal with any of that. She put them in a lockbox. I signed the paperwork, and off we went.

“I figure we'll tour the whole place and end in the little room,” she suggested.

“Sounds good.” If the little room was first, the odds were good I'd either want to skip the rest or be too nervous to go back alone. This was a good plan.

There were multiple places to eat, a bar, and different sections where people could relax and chat, including some with couches. There were communal dressing rooms and themed ones, just like Collared. Things might look different here, but all the main elements of the other club were definitely present.

“Why don’t you get changed, and I’ll bring you to the little room, unless you want to check it out first?” We ended near where we started, in front of the dressing rooms.

“No. I want to play now when we get there.”

“I thought so.” She smiled. “You’ve been bouncing on the balls of your feet.”

“I do that when I’m excited.” It was a habit of mine that fit well in the little room, less so at work.

I ran inside and quickly got dressed, since all I was really doing was taking off my outer shell and putting it in a locker. I was back in a couple of minutes to find her waiting for me, just like she promised.

“You look adorable.” Her genuine smile had me believing it was not simply platitudes.

“Thank you.” I couldn’t help preening at her compliment. It had been too long since I’d been little around anyone.

My onesie said I love blocks with an appliqué of the blocks that came with little letters and numbers on them. In real life, I wasn’t too picky on what kinds of blocks I played with. I liked playing with Legos, Bristle Blocks, or the animal ones that made noises when you turned them over. If you could build with it, I was there for it.

“You’ll see that we modeled a lot of our room after the one in Collared,” Ms. Lily



explained. “Ms. Marian said little rooms were one of the things missing in a lot of clubs, and we wanted to stand above that.”

She leaned in and whispered, “I was glad because it’s my favorite.”

“Mine too.” I giggled.

She was absolutely perfect for her role.

The room was much larger than I thought it would be. I didn’t know why. The entire building was huge, but the way it was described in their information of the website, I assumed it was the size of a classroom. It wasn’t. It was much bigger, and yet the spaces were carved out so that they each felt like a small private area. In that way, it was even better than the one at Collared.

“Let’s go on a tour and then I’ll set you up with some blocks. Is that what you want to do today?”

It was an easy guess, given my attire. I nodded like a little bobble doll.

She showed me where they had snacks and what snacks were available. The rule was that littles who played alone were allowed to get their own, but if you came with a mommy, daddy, or babysitter, then they were in charge. It was a good rule.

There was also a craft corner, one where apparently glitter was only for special occasions—bummer. There was a dollhouse, a puppet theater, race cars, a reading area—anything and everything a little could want, including the final section she brought me to: the blocks.

“The only rule with the blocks is the architectural blocks don’t get knocked over.” She pointed to huge wooden blocks in all sorts of shapes. “We don’t want anybody

getting hurt.”

“Okay, I won’t.” It was an easy promise. I wasn’t going to play with those. There was no point in building a block tower if you couldn’t knock it down.

I grabbed a basket of sensory blocks. Some had different textures, some different things you could move, and some made noise, but they were all exactly the same size, and they were perfect. I put one block on top of another, on top of another, on top of another, until it started to get wobbly, and then I knocked it down, laughed, and did it all over again.

It didn’t take long before I was fully in my little space. I was going to like it here.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Cliff

He's little.

And he's at Chained.

More than that...in the little room. I had left my friends behind in the conversation area to pop in and see what was going on. Or, rather, to do what I had promised myself. Find a little to scene with so I could take the edge off and stop focusing on a certain employee I had no business wanting.

Forrest could never know how I felt, even though he'd made that one comment about forgetting I was his boss. He probably just referred to my request that he call me by my first name. Nothing more had been said since then, and so far as I know, he had no more interest in me than I should have in him. Chained had a nice little room where I could find one of the single littles I'd scened with before or maybe someone new.

There were always, well almost always, some littles who wanted to scene with a daddy they were not fully bonded to. Some didn't want that kind of a relationship at all, happy to just meet up for a few hours and enjoy that side of themselves before returning to their day-to-day life.

And, of course, others were open to a long-term relationship but hadn't met the right daddy or mommy. Just like anywhere else in the world, in all kinds of kink and non-kink arrangements, people had to come to terms with what made their lives work.

Things could be a little more complicated around here. For example, some littles wanted their caregivers and partners for when they were big to be different people. Some preferred a single partner in all things. And of course, there were many more permutations, and daddies like me also had their needs and desires they came to Chained to fill.

Tonight, I was looking for nothing more than some time with a little who wanted the same. So, with that in mind, I made my way to the little room. As I drew close and stepped inside, my mood lifted some. The intensity of much of the club did not extend to the little room from which laughter spilled. It was a happy place, for the most part, just the ticket for the mood I'd been wearing like a dark cloak. Don't look at Forrest —my mantra. And a difficult one to act on since I saw him multiple times a day now. My boss-ethic was strained to the breaking point.

Absolutely, tonight was the perfect antidote for what ailed me. An evening playing with blocks or reading a story to an adorable little in knee socks had never failed to raise my spirits. I took a deep breath and let it out along with as much of the day's tension as possible, but before the last of the air left my lips, it halted because the first thing I saw in the brightly lit little room was a tall pile of colorful blocks, and as they came tumbling down, they revealed their builder.

Forrest.

No wonder he'd been so responsive when I comforted him over the lost gift. Other times in the office came immediately to mind. When he brought me the candy, definitely a little move. Yes, it was my favorite, and he'd gone to the trouble to find that out, but the sweetness of the gift and his expression as he laid it on my desk reflected a little mindset.

I should have recognized that for what it was at the time. He brought all my daddy instincts to the fore, and all my intelligence and sense of self-preservation told me

then and now to ignore the attraction.

I had to leave. It had been a few weeks since I'd been here, and Forrest was relatively new to the city, but for all I knew, he'd been here every night since he arrived. Was he a member? What would I do?

I felt like a cartoon character, backward tiptoeing out of the room and trying not to be noticed. But just then, Ms. Lily stopped beside Forrest and bent to speak to him...then looked up and spotted me. She lifted a hand in greeting, and I froze like a deer in headlights. Just for a second before waving back and turning to leave. But had the damage been done? How uncomfortable might he feel to have his boss see him here without warning.

Not that I was ashamed to be a daddy, and presumably he was not ashamed of being little, but it would be a shock. Sometimes seeing people out of context made them not look familiar. I'd been approached at the grocery store, for example, by people I hadn't even noticed because I didn't expect to see them there.

Forrest looked so different in his little outfit. His onesie said I love blocks and made me think this was probably one of his favorite activities. I'd also seen his adorable short shorts and knee-high socks, classic for the littles of Chained but twice as cute on him.

I, on the other hand, wore my more casual club clothes. Button-down black shirt, black jeans, and low boots. That was different from work. Maybe he hadn't known it was me.

But I needed to forget this because the memory would make it hard to work together. Which was the only relationship we could or should have. The hallway from the little room to the main area felt miles long, and my steps dragged. I was going back to the conversation area, saying good night to my friends, and heading for home. I wasn't

even going to say anything to them, although I knew they'd understand. But at this point, I was just trying to figure it all out in my own head before I was ready to talk to anyone else. Then, I'd probably seek some advice because daddies were good at helping one another. And if I couldn't achieve clarity, they'd be there for me.

“Wait, Cliff!”

I froze. It never occurred to me he'd follow me out. I had been hoping he hadn't recognized me, but that seemed obtuse now. He'd been facing me when the blocks tumbled down, and Ms. Lily's wave would have drawn his attention to me as well. And by not going in and up to him, I'd given him the opportunity to pretend he didn't see me if he chose. An opportunity he obviously chose not to take advantage of.

Despite my concern, I was glad he approached me. At least we'd be able to clear the air, and since I was the boss in our other life, his choice here made it better. Maybe. Yes, it was.

I turned around and offered a friendly smile. “Hi, Forrest. Are you having a nice evening?”

“Is it weird that I saw you here? I don't want it to be weird. Did you need me to transfer to a different department? I promise not to tell—but I don't want to not come here to avoid you—”

My heart ached for the yearning I heard in that spill of words. And I had to reassure him, to try to ease him. “Littles need a safe space to be themselves, and Chained is that for sure. I would never take that from you.”

“It's my first time here, and I like it. But what about work?”

“I wouldn't take your job either. You're safe both places. But I am your boss, and

there are concerns. For good reason. Nobody should ever feel like their personal life endangers their job or that you should have to change departments.”

“But I want to play with you. Isn’t that off the table if I work under you?”

“We’ll cross that bridge if it happens.”

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Forrest

“Oh, Cliff,” someone called from behind me, distracting me momentarily and then ramping my nerves up to a bazillion. He wasn’t here alone, or if he was, he knew people here. This was not good. It was very not good.

“I thought...never mind.” Finishing my sentence wasn’t going to happen, not with a second voice saying Cliff’s name, this time a lot closer.

I rushed away, keeping my head down in case the people calling for Cliff were from work. There were so many people in the building, and the odds were good that they were. The very last thing I needed was them seeing me, or me seeing them, for that matter. It was bad enough I was going to have to face my boss at work after being seen in a onesie at a club that he was probably a member of. I didn’t need to add more people to that list.

What a mess. And on top of that, I allowed myself, for a second there, to think that Cliff, the daddy, was interested in me.

But no, we will “cross that bridge if it happens.” If that wasn’t a nice way to let someone down, I didn’t know what was. At least he hadn’t been a dick about it. Not that he seemed the type of guy who would be, but still...

I all but ran to the dressing room, threw my clothes on, and was out the dressing room door as quickly as I possibly could manage.

How could I have possibly thought he was interested in me? How? Look at him... He



was gorgeous, really high up in the company, and could have anybody he wanted. And that was another thing. Maybe he wanted girls. Maybe I wasn't even his type.

It was just like me to assume that because he was a daddy, that he might like me. There were lots of daddies in this world; of course I wouldn't be all of their types. Statistics alone told me that.

The thing was, it was less me assuming than it was me wishing. Daydreaming I could have someone like him, that somehow I could be their everything. But I couldn't let myself feel that way, not even for a second. That was the stuff of rom cons, not reality. It would only lead to disappointment and possibly losing my job. I refused to do that after I gave up everything to be here.

I grabbed my wallet and phone out of the lockbox and ran straight to the car. I wasn't ready to go home yet, but also, where would I go? I took a detour past that toy store, thinking maybe they might be open. I didn't know for what reason they would be. It was late on a Saturday night, hardly the time people would be out shopping for gifts.

And, of course, they were closed. It was for the best. Grabbing an animal now, on a day when I was feeling so horrible, probably wasn't the best idea—not when they made forever kind-of friends. It was a choice to be made when I could take my time and find the perfect one.

I drove around, trying to think of something, anything, to do, and ended up back at my apartment parking lot, no less frazzled than when I ran off from Cliff after making a fool of myself.

Why did he have to be there? Because there wasn't another club in town, and it was the only place to go if you were going to be a member of a kink club. I made the assumption he was a daddy because I was in my own little fairy tale, but for all I knew, he was there to watch a dom at work or to do one of a thousand other activities

they offered.

My choice was to continue going to Chained and be mortified every time I saw Cliff, or not go there ever again and being miserable at home. I'd still need to face him, the location of me being mortified would move to work where I'd see him multiple times pretty much every day.

How had I managed to mess things up so completely in such a short period of time?

Once I was in my apartment, I took off my outer clothes and stayed in my little ones, grabbed a blanket, my stuffed dinosaur, and climbed on my couch, snuggling in as I turned on a movie. Maybe if I could get into little space, I could shut off all the noise in my head—all the what-ifs, all the maybes, all the ways I could have done things differently.

It didn't work. The movie ended, and I had no idea what had happened. It just kind of flickered through as static noise in the background while my brain shouted at me.

I replayed the conversation over and over and over again. Nothing seemed as bad this time around. It wasn't good but not as horrible. Like, I wasn't going to get fired, at least. He promised to keep me safe from discovery. He'd been kind. The only one who did anything wrong was me, and that was jumping to the conclusion that he wanted me.

My phone dinged on the side table next to me. When I picked it up, it was an email—from Chained. I opened it, half expecting it to be something about me leaving something there or forgetting to sign out properly. Instead, it was a list of all their upcoming little events.

They, too, had a Day Out with Santa. They also had a train ride, a retreat, a make-and-take craft day, a Christmas party, a fundraiser that was designed for everybody,

but that included little fun. There were Daddy and Me and Mommy and Me events as well as little-only events. They had it all.

Chained's Christmas schedule made Collared's look boring and without options. Things might be rough at work for a while, seeing Cliff in the beginning, especially. Over time, I'd get over it. What was a little embarrassment, really, when you really boiled it down?

If he brought a little into the little room, yeah, that would be weird, and I'd be somewhat hurt, but also it wouldn't be the first time I felt either of those. I could...no, I would get over it. What I refused to do was give up all the opportunities Chained was offering me.

I starred the email for later. I'd need to check on dates, knowing that there were some nonnegotiable work things I needed to attend. But I was sure going to some of them. And I'd go alone. And I'd be proud. And who knew—maybe at the little-only events, I might make a friend or two.

Ultimately, that's what I needed right now—a friend. Jumping into play with a random person, especially one who controlled my quarterly evaluations, wasn't a good idea on the best of days, and today surely wasn't one of those.

I set my phone down, got up long enough to pour a sippy cup of milk, and climbed back onto the couch. This time, when I put the movie on, I was able to watch it intently, laughing at the right spots, flinching at the right spots, and sinking far down into little space.

Reality would wait for me in the morning, and it would sure hit me in the face on Monday. But, for now, this was exactly what I needed.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Cliff

The club couldn't have gone much worse. Forrest ran up looking so panicked, and it wasn't the same as seeing someone big do that. Although how deep he was in little space once we began to talk, I couldn't say for sure. Not very, I'd suspect. He was speaking in an adult way, sort of. His words were running over one another, and he was upset and trying to explain the awkwardness that I already understood. It was why I attempted to leave before he saw me. The hurt in his eyes when I said "if it happens." He couldn't know how much I wanted to make that happen.

I'd never wanted to strip someone down and worship them with my mouth more. He was so winsome, so adorable, but at the same time so upset. Of course he would be. He just ran into his boss while in the little room without any kind of warning at all, and then when he nearly flat-out asked me if we could play together, I did the equivalent of brushing him aside.

It wasn't what I wanted to do. No, every fiber in my body demanded I take his hand and lead him back into the little room. We could build blocks together and then he could knock them down as he'd been doing when I saw him in there. Maybe color or have a snack... I would love to gather him on my lap and snuggle him close while I read him a story. But no...I went another way. I didn't know what to do, so I did nothing, and now Forrest was avoiding me at every opportunity.

It was remarkable how an employee whom I'd seen multiple times a day managed to be so invisible. The only times I saw him at all were at meetings where he had to be there. It was wearing on me and made me really wonder about how long we could go on like this. I was trying to do the right thing and keep it professional, but I was

miserable and, from the little I saw him, I believed he was the same. No longer smiling and generally lifting everyone's spirits, he sat at the conference table, quiet, only speaking to answer direct questions. Even when I didn't see him, I could tell from the general feeling in the office that his mood was spreading.

Fuck it. Rules or not, for the good of the whole floor—and me—I was going to fix this. I liked him, and I believed he felt the same. Finally, after ending up on the same elevator car going down at the end of the day, the tension between us making a poor PA unlucky enough to ride along squirm, I called Bridger, one of my friends at Chained, and asked him if he had an hour to meet me for a drink.

I needed his advice.

We met up at a wine bar near his home and settled at a table with a carafe of local red. "Let's get some tapas to go along with it," he suggested. "They have tiny tacos that are so good!"

I'd heard of these at a fast-food location, which made me wonder, but I agreed and soon the server brought our wine and food. "Now, Cliff, spill it. Does this have anything to do with that cute little I saw you talking to last week?"

"How did you guess?" I poured wine in both our glasses and lifted mine to taste. "This is nice."

"I tried it last week with Hudson, and we bought a bottle to take home." He drank as well. "So, can I guess the issue?"

I leaned back in my seat. "Go for it."

"He works with you and probably under you?"

“You’re good.” I reached for the wine again. “So, right now, at the office, he is giving me the cold shoulder, and everyone is uncomfortable.”

“How are you feeling about all this?” He didn’t say a judgmental thing, just asked me in a calm, everyday tone.

“Bad. I like him a lot, but even if we got past the company rules, it isn’t a great idea to go out with people we work with. It could make things very uncomfortable at work.”

“As opposed to now when it sounds like that’s a perfect description of the situation?” He picked up one of the little tacos. “Try these.”

“All right.” They still didn’t sound that good, but they looked kind of golden and crispy. I followed his example and chomped down on one. “Oh wow. These are incredible.”

“Right? Hudson is crazy about them.” We cleared the platter before going on with our conversation. But after he dabbed his lips with a paper napkin, he fixed me with a steady glare. “I know companies prefer their employees don’t date, sometimes, but if you really like this guy, you’re going to have to figure out a work-around. Maybe he needs to be in another department.”

“He did suggest that,” I grumbled. “But he’s so good for ours, usually.”

“Mm-hmm.” Bridger finished his glass of wine and stood up. “Maybe just get to know each other before taking any huge stands or making big changes?”

After he left, I sat for a while mulling over his words. Then I went home, and the next day at lunchtime, I visited a certain shop that specialized in high-quality stuffies and looked for just the right one.

They had a variety of different animals that I thought were adorable. I'd happened on this place one day when I was walking around on my lunch break. It was a truly special store, one that made me wish I had a little to buy gifts for. I strolled around, picking up this stuffie and that, rejecting each as not quite right, and then I found the perfect one.

"Do you deliver?"

"Of course." The girl behind the counter accepted the stuffed Christmas tree from my hands. "Is it a local address?"

"Yes. And would it be all right if I included a note?"

"We have cards you can write in if you like." She handed me one and a pen. "This is one of my favorites. I love all the stuffies we do here, but this holiday season, I kind of like the idea of a stuffed tree."

I thought of Forrest who'd moved to a whole new town not long before the holiday season. It must be hard not to be near familiar places and faces. Yes, the stuffed tree was perfect. I wrote a short note to Forrest.

Dear Forrest,

I hope you like this little stuffed tree and it makes it easier being far from home at Christmas. Maybe we could go to dinner sometime?

Take care,

Cliff

I actually signed the first card, sincerely , but asked for another. Now the ball was

back in his court, and I hoped he'd agree to go out for a meal with me. Then we'd see what happened from there.



## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Forrest

I had many skills. I was good at multitasking, I could run a meeting like a boss, and my lasagna was turned down by none. But, this week, I discovered a brand-new skill set I never realized I had: avoiding my boss. If it was an Olympic sport, I was going to be the gold medalist. I managed to avoid Cliff every step of the way for an entire week. I felt bad about it. Intentionally avoiding someone was rude, but also, I was in fight-or-flight mode, and I didn't know where to fly. This was where I belonged; it was figuring out what that was going to look like that was the tricky part.

Work was getting to be unbearable, if I continued this route. Soon enough, I was going to have to put on my big-boy pants and just be normal at work. But today was not that day. Monday might not be either. Thank goodness I had Saturday and Sunday to figure it out.

On my way home, I stopped at the animal shelter. I'd signed up for their mailing list when I arrived, knowing that I wanted a pet eventually and wanting to stay up to date. A litter of kittens had been brought in, and I had half a mind to adopt one of them. It was a weird time of year for kittens, and I wouldn't have been surprised if they were gone by the time I even opened the email.

Yes, I was fully aware that animals were not solutions to problems, but I had always wanted a pet. The timing might be weird with me being in a funk, but I wasn't making my decision based on that. My last place wouldn't allow any pets, not even a goldfish. This building did, as long as it was under 100 pounds. Why 100 pounds? I had no idea, but even a Maine coon cat didn't reach that, so my pet of choice was saved.

They were having an open house, so I figured it was worth a look, even if the kittens were long gone. Plus, it gave me something to look forward to all week, and I really had needed that.

When I arrived, it was packed. They had a Christmas tree filled with ornaments of wish list items for the shelter. I grabbed a few. If nothing else, I could help them give these animals a better life.

I wasn't a dog kind of guy, so I went straight to the cat room. The kittens were long gone, as I pretty much knew they would be, but that was okay. They were more my excuse to come than my reason to be there. I opted to stay and play with a few of the cats.

Cats always fascinated me—they picked their people, not the other way around. I was squatting down, petting an adorable gray cat when one came out of the corner and whacked the cat I was petting, on the head, and, when the first cat left, he used my hand to pet him. I wanted to tell him, “Now that was rude. We don't do that.” But then he looked up at me with his big green eyes and purred, and I melted. In that moment, he owned me.

And that's when I became the proud parent of a seven-year-old stray cat called Nick that was sassy, cuddly, and bossy, according to his card. I'd already witnessed just how true all three of those descriptors were.

I was able to pick up the supplies I needed in their attached shop. I'd obviously have to go out and get more, but I had a box, litter, food, and the basic necessities for the night. It was a remarkably easy process, and we were on our way home much earlier than I thought.

As we reached my front door, carrier in one hand, bag of cat supplies in the other, I nearly tripped on a box sitting there. I pushed it out of the way with my foot and went

inside, set up the litter, a couple of dishes—one of water and the other with some kibble—before opening the carrier and letting the cat out, allowing him to ease his way into the apartment.

It wasn't until I brought the cat carrier to the trash chute—it was pretty gross inside, thanks to his drool—that I remembered the parcel. I picked it up and brought it back inside, trying to remember if I had ordered anything. I hadn't.

When I looked at the label, I recognized the logo immediately. It was from the store I had stopped at—the one with the teddy bear on the sign and all the stuffies. But who would be sending me something from there? It wasn't like I filled anything out to let them know who I was or where I lived. I had just stopped by on a whim.

I opened the box, pulled back the tissue paper, and found the most adorable Christmas tree I'd ever seen, looking up at me. Yes, it had eyes, which normally might be creepy, but also it was kawaii to the core. I loved it. Picking it up, I snuggled it close.

When I looked deeper in the box, I found a card. The tree was from Cliff and came with a dinner invitation. My initial instinct was to accept, but I needed to think on it. I'd already made a mess of things once. I didn't need to do it again.

I set it aside for later and got ready for a little night at home with my new cat. I found my red footie jams and snuggled on the couch with my blankie and new stuffie. Rudolph was my show of choice because, well, it was Rudolph. I watched it a couple of times all the way through.

My sweet new fur baby ended up sitting next to me on the couch, but he was exhausted and slept pretty much the entire time. I kept looking at the Christmas tree. It was such a sweet gesture. That wasn't something you just randomly found when you were out and about. He had to intentionally have done that. And as much as I

hated to admit it, it would be better if Cliff were here to enjoy this time with me. It would be complicated and messy, and I'd probably regret it, but I'd also regret not even trying.

I used the phone number he left on the card, and, instead of texting him, I called. He answered on the first ring with a question to his hello

“Hi, this is Forrest. I got the box.”

“I hope you liked it.” His tone was tentative, and I wondered if this was as complicated for him as it was for me. It had to be, right?

“I did. A lot. I found that store the other day, and I really liked it, and he's cuddly, and he's Christmas, and...I'm sorry I made things weird at the club.” I babbled away, not overthinking my words.

“Oh, sweet boy. There's no way to make something like that not be weird. Seeing each other as our true selves when you've only known each other in a work context is always going to be a little awkward, at best. I was afraid when you didn't call that maybe I misread and that maybe you weren't interested.” His honesty comforted me. It was like he was giving me permission to let go of all the stress.

“I thought that at the club... Never mind.”

Silence filled the space between us. He was waiting for me to continue without pressuring me to do so.

“I was avoiding you because I thought you weren't interested, and I didn't want to make you uncomfortable.”

“Maybe we should try talking next time.” He was right, of course.

“Agreed. I got a cat today.” It had been hard enough not leading with that. “His name is Nick.”

“You did? Was that in your plans?” Such a daddy thing to say.

“Sort of. I knew I wanted a pet, and they were having an event at the shelter. They said they had kittens, so I thought I might go look at them. But then St. Nicholas over here decided that I was his person.”

“Cats do have a way of doing that. Did he keep rubbing against your leg?”

“Yes, but that was after he whacked the cat I was petting on the head and made sure he left.” I barely contained my laughter as I told my story.

“Oh, he really did pick his person. How’s he adjusting?”

I took a picture of Nick and sent it to him. “That’s him.”

“He looks pretty tuckered out.”

“He is. We’re having a night in.” And then the words wouldn’t stop coming as I told him everything—about the cartoon and how my favorite part was when Rudolph kept trying to fly, even when it was hard. I mentioned that I was in my jammies and snuggling my new tree. All of it.

Then he asked, “Have you been without a daddy for long?”

It caught me off guard but was also a necessary conversation. One I knew had to come sooner rather than later, but I was still nervous about it. Whether Cliff was my boss or just some random person I’d met, this was important.

“It’s been a long time since I had a daddy, and quite a while since I had a mommy.” I had been dumped for being bisexual before and had others consider it a nonstarter. It was best to get it out there before we went any further.

“I see,” Cliff said, and I wasn’t sure what to make of it. So, I just ripped off the Band-Aid.

“I’m bi. I always have been. I’ve dated men and I’ve dated women. And I know that’s a deal-breaker for a lot of people, and I understand if it is for you, but I thought you should know. I...”

Cliff interrupted softly, “I’m really sorry someone made you feel like that was a deal-breaker before. It won’t be for me.”

“Are you sure you won’t... I don’t know, always wonder, if—”

“Wonder about what? If I’m lucky enough to have an adorable little agree to have dinner with me? No, I don’t need to wonder about that. He already said yes.”

Cliff

Date night.

I wasn't sure he'd accept when I asked, and I couldn't push the issue. Not under the circumstances. But hearing his voice on the phone when he called to thank me for the stuffie, I sure hoped he would. Work was going to be a challenge to deal with, but there were many facets to life, and when someone came along who was so special, it was hard not to go for it. Not to say, I want to get to know you better. I think we might be right for each other .

He said so much in that call. More than I think he intended to, but I was grateful for it. And angry at others who had treated him so badly for things like being bi. I never understood the prejudice against that. Didn't everyone hope that they could be accepted for their true selves? Especially by those they came to care for. So he'd had mommies in the past, so he could be in relationships with both men and women. Why was that bad? What I saw was someone with a big heart, someone who was kind to coworkers every day. A hard worker whose very presence on the floor had people smiling. When he led a meeting, the attendees left ready to accomplish great things.

And he was willing to have dinner with me? I couldn't wait.

But I had to, and I used the time to plan our date. Where would he like to have dinner? Forrest was relatively new in town and had confided that the only places he'd been to eat were a few near the office at lunchtime and takeout or delivery at home. But he was very enthusiastic about our city and interested in learning all about it. So...where to take him? There were many excellent choices, but what was the perfect

one for Forrest to experience the best of our city and also be a place we could relax and talk without feeling rushed.

I finally decided on a family-owned Italian restaurant that had been in business for three generations. I'd been going there for a long time myself and had never had a bad meal. Casual dress, delicious food, a cool vibe with not the fastest service because nobody was in a rush...perfect.

On the night in question, I showed up at Forrest's apartment door wearing slacks, another black button-down, and a big smile. I rang the bell and waited...and waited, starting to wonder whether I had the time wrong when he finally opened the door, wearing only one shoe. "I'm sorry, can you give me a minute? Nick stole my shoe." And he disappeared into the apartment, leaving me to follow. I watched Forrest dart back and forth while the cat sat on the sofa and watched, until finally we were ready to go.

"I would have thought he was old to be up to such shenanigans." I held the car door while Forrest climbed then went around to my side and got in myself. "How old did you say he was?"

"Seven and sometimes he's a big kitten. He didn't hurt the shoe, but I think he wanted to hide it so I'd stay home."

"Sounds like you two are getting along pretty well." I turned on the engine and backed out of the space. "Have you been to Mama Italia?"

"No but people at work have said good things. Is that where we're going?"

"We sure are."

"Yum. I skipped lunch, too." He glanced in my direction, and I knew why. A daddy



would have something to say about missing meals. But I wasn't his daddy yet, and obviously he knew better. "I shouldn't do that."

"I'm glad you recognize that." The restaurant was very close, another reason I'd picked it, and soon we were being seated in a cozy booth under some cliché fake grapevines that had been there for the whole history of the place, from what a server who had been there for a couple of decades told me.

I slid into the booth and halfway across, very pleased when Forrest followed, leaving only a few inches between us. He wore a light, woodsy fragrance or maybe it was his soap, but whatever it was, I breathed it in. "Would you like to order pasta, or maybe we could share a pizza? Or both?"

"Pizza," he asserted, "but maybe with an appetizer?"

"A man after my own heart. They have a platter with a little of everything, app wise." I ordered both and sat back to spend some time with Forrest. The server came back a few minutes later with our platter and two glasses of red wine we hadn't ordered but did enjoy. I wouldn't have more, but by the time we ate our dinner, I would be perfectly fine to drive. "So, tell me about your previous job? You left it for us?"

"Yes, and even before I scoped out a certain daddy boss, I knew I wanted to work for this company. And I'm so glad I did."

"Because you like your work."

"Yes, but even present company excepted, everyone has been so nice to me, and I like my apartment and certainly my cat." Toying with the wineglass, he murmured, "Although I don't want to except present company."

Just then, the server returned with our apps platter, and we dug in. There was fried

zucchini and mozzarella sticks, calamari, and several other things, some of which I wasn't sure of, but all of which tasted delicious. Forrest enthusiastically dipped each and every one in ranch dressing, and I suppressed a grin.

This date was about being big, not little, but ranch transcended all age barriers. When the platter was cleaned, the pizza arrived and Forrest picked up a slice and bit in. "Oh my god," he said through a mouthful. "This is so good and right near my place. How have I missed it?"

"You'd have found it eventually, but I'm glad I was the one to bring you here."

As we ate and talked, I learned a lot about Forrest's background and what was important to him, and by the time I walked him to his door, I wanted to see him again.

He stood fiddling with his keys. "Thanks for a nice evening. I guess I'd better go in."

We'd been so close together the whole night but never touched. I changed that now, leaning in to take the keys and open the door for him. He watched me closely as if not sure what I was going to do, but I had no intention of overstepping tonight. We weren't there yet. Instead, I stroked his cheek and kissed him on the lips, softly, sweetly, and when his lips parted under mine, I deepened the contact, stroking his tongue with mine for a long moment. Then I stepped back and cupped his cheek, tilting his face to kiss him again, wanting so much more but not willing to take it.

Straightening, I sighed. "Night, Forrest."

"Good night, D-Cliff. I'll see you at work."

## Page 11

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Forrest

It was amazing how brave having the best date ever could make me. Just that one night, that one kiss was enough to make me feel like I could say anything to Cliff, and that he'd want to hear it. So, when we were chatting one night over FaceTime—Nick resting his head on my chin, looking so freaking adorable I couldn't stand it—I just asked. I didn't think twice.

I invited Cliff to the little crafting day at Chained the coming Saturday. I'd initially signed up to go alone, but it wouldn't take much to add a person to the invitation. At least, I didn't think it would. It wasn't like he would be making all the crafts. He'd be there as my daddy.

Fine, not as my actual daddy but in that role for the day. It was far too soon for it to be more than that.

When he agreed to come, I was on top of the world. All that was left was to wait until Saturday. I stank at waiting, and each day dragged out longer and longer. At least I wasn't hiding from him at work anymore. That made the days better, even if I usually only saw him in passing.

I had my bag packed and ready to go when he knocked on my door.

I opened the door for him. "Come in!" I skipped the hug I really wanted, instead shutting the door as soon as he stepped inside, not wanting Nick to go wandering down the hall. He hadn't attempted that yet, but I'd heard of other people having that problem in the building, and I didn't want to deal with it, especially not when I was

about to go out with a sexy daddy.

Nick ran right up to Cliff and sat on his foot.

“I think he likes you.” It wasn’t typical behavior, but it wasn’t aggressive, so I assumed it was a form of affection. At least he didn’t bat me away from Cliff or vice versa.

“Well, that works out,” Cliff said, squatting down and giving Nick some pets. “Because I like him too.”

“Did you want to grab something to eat before we leave? We don’t have time for a full sit-down, but it’s probably better to have something in your belly before all the sugar I’m sure Ms. Lily has planned for this afternoon.”

“How did you know I hadn’t eaten?” I hadn’t, but it was late enough in the day, I normally would’ve.

“Because you’re too excited, silly boy. You’re bouncing on the balls of your feet.”

He was right. I was.

“I could make us a sandwich if that’s what you’d prefer,” I offered. We really didn’t have much time, so I made a couple of sandwiches, we ate them, and then we were on our way. I wasn’t sure if Cliff had eaten before we left or not, but he ate the sandwich like it was the most delicious food he’d ever eaten. It wasn’t. It was turkey with mayo and lettuce on sandwich bread, what boring aspired to be.

As we drove there, I kicked myself for not booking a little room for changing, but then realized that might be pushing it for a first date. He wasn’t my daddy, and we had kissed, nothing more. Going from there to helping me get dressed was a huge

jump. If he asked, I'd have been all about it though. There was something about him I connected to so easily.

After we checked in, I ducked into the communal changing room and put on my Nice List onesie with a pair of fuzzy red pajama pants that had a white cuff at the bottom. They were designed to look Santa-esque. I wasn't sure I pulled that off, but paired with my reindeer slippers and Santa hat, I thought I was looking pretty darn cute.

When I stepped outside to find Cliff waiting, there was no mistaking that he thought so too.

"Look at you! So festive. I love the hat." His smile was so genuine I felt even more adorable than I had moments earlier.

"I like hats," I admitted but didn't quite meet his eyes. I didn't know why it was embarrassing. Lots of littles wore hats. Maybe they didn't own as many as I had, but still, hats weren't unusual.

He held out his hand for me, and I took it, happy for his touch. "Let's go see what we can find to make today."

We worked our way around to where they had the crafts set up. It wasn't in the little room, like I had expected. They had turned one of the dining spaces into a huge craft area with multiple stations for making various Christmas-themed projects as well as a hot-cocoa-and-cookie station. And in the corner stood a huge Christmas tree decorated in the funnest decorations I'd ever seen. Each and every one of them related to a cartoon or movie or book a little might like. It was perfect.

Checking in only took a minute, and we were given a North Pole Crafting Elf Passport. Each craft we did would get me a sticker. I had planned to relax and hit up a station or two with Cliff and see where it went from there, but now that there were

stickers to be earned, I was all in.

“We’re getting all the stickers, right, Dad—I mean, Cliff.”

“Daddy is fine and yes, yes we are.”

That was a conversation we’d need to have later, but for now, I was taking him at his word. Using the name Daddy in a club wasn’t the same as having it be his name when we were in private. It was an honorific to many. That wasn’t how I usually saw it, but I was taking his permission as the gift that it was. A little craft day required a daddy.

We started at the table closest to the Christmas tree because it had the fewest people. It was a station to make a little fence for a reindeer pen, complete with a tiny reindeer figurine. It mostly involved gluing, painting, and adding a bit of glitter, but in a lot of ways, it felt like playing with blocks, which made it extra fun for me. My daddy sat back, letting me decide how much help I wanted—or didn’t want—and when I gave him an indication, he jumped right in.

I had to admit, it was pretty cute when it was done. Not a craft I’d normally have picked out for myself, but it got me a Rudolph sticker, and that was the goal.

We went from table to table, making a snow globe at one, Christmas tree ornaments out of old Christmas cards at another, stained glass window decorations at yet another. We moved from station to station until my passport was filled up with everything except for the final delicious stop.

“We did good,” I said, holding up the passport.

“Yes, we did, sweet boy. And you know what that means?”

“We need to get our final sticker!” Which was for the cocoa-and-cookie station.

“Do you like marshmallows in your cocoa?”

“And whipped cream?” And sprinkles, but I’d spring that on him when we were there.

His head tilted as if to say that might not be the wisest combination.

“It’s a special day.” It was not only a really cool event, but it was the first time Daddy and I went to Chained together. It required sprinkles and maybe a candy cane stir stick.

“That it is.” He placed his hand gently on the small of my back, and we walked up to the counter to get our cocoa. Well, Daddy made it, but I told them which sprinkles and marshmallows I liked. They had some shaped like little Christmas trees, so, of course, those were the ones I picked. And last second, I snatched two candy canes. It was a Christmas party, after all.

Daddy carried the cocoa to the table and then went to grab some cookies. They were all sugar cookies with frosting, and the only decision to make was how they were decorated. He grabbed a Christmas tree, a Rudolph, and a snowman and said I could have whichever one I wanted—or if I wanted some of each, that was fine too.

I nibbled slowly on my cookie, not wanting the day to be over.

“Is the cookie not good?”

“No, it’s good...it’s just, this is our last stop.” And then our date was over. I left off that part.

“And what do you think happens when we get our last sticker?” he asked.

“We go home.” I didn’t hide my disappointment.

“We could go home...or we could go hang out in the little room and build some blocks. I know a little boy who really likes blocks.”

“Did you see my tower that day?” I had wondered before, but this had me thinking about it again. He’d been so close to the little room when I saw him that day, it wouldn’t have been a surprise.

“I did, but I didn’t want you to be embarrassed by me seeing you. It has to be hard to come here by yourself as a little in a new city.”

“I used to belong to their sister club, Collared, but...yeah, that was a day. I’m glad you were there that night, even if I made things weird.”

“I wouldn’t call it weird exactly and I’m glad I was there, too.”

I popped the last of my cookie into my mouth and hadn’t even chewed it up when I said, “Let’s build blocks!”

“First, we need our sticker.”

He was such a great daddy. Maybe, one day, he could be mine.



Cliff

Playing with my sweet boy in the little room was everything. I'd scened with many and been daddy to a few for relatively short periods of time, but never had such a great time with anyone. Forrest and I really clicked on both a big and little level, and that was a rare thing in my experience. We'd gone out together on dates and had great talks but never explored the physical side of our big relationship. I didn't want to be pushy if he wasn't ready or maybe didn't even want to go there, but the chemistry between us was through the roof, and if he didn't want to, I had some things to figure out.

After fussing about that for a few days, I caved and called Bridger again, planning to ask his advice. Unfortunately, he and Hudson were busy with their own holiday plans and he didn't have any time to get away for a week or so. I didn't give him any details on the phone, just told him I'd wanted to share my thoughts, maybe brainstorm.

He was quiet for a moment then said, "Cliff, I'm assuming this is about your relationship with Forrest?"

"Isn't everything?" I was wallowing a little, and I'm sure it came through.

"Then why are you talking to me instead of him? Isn't communication the most important element in a kink, or any relationship? Is there some reason you can't speak with him about whatever is on your mind?"

Now I was silent for a beat. Then, the cloud over my head lifted and I burst into

laughter. “No reason whatsoever besides my overthinking. I’m lucky to have a friend who is always clearheaded.”

He chuckled. “Keep thinking that. Even now, with a pretty awesome relationship, I make mistakes or think too much. Hudson is always there, though, to listen, and help me think my way out of whatever I’ve gotten myself into.”

“Even when it’s about the two of you?”

“Especially then.” I heard a voice in the background, and he said, “You good for now, then? My better half is waiting for me to take him out for tacos.”

“Give him a hug from us, and yes, I’m good. I need to call the person I should have phoned first.”

“Good deal. Talk to you soon, then.”

“Where are you going for tacos?”

“Casa Sanchez on Fourth. You should try it sometime.”

“Thanks. I will.” After we disconnected, I called Forrest and asked if he was busy. He was not. “Mind if I stop by for a while?”

“Daddy, why for a while? Can’t you stay over?”

I was there in twenty minutes with an overnight bag and my heart in my throat. Here I was planning a long conversation about whether we should have sex, and Forrest settled it all in four words. Can’t you stay over?

He met me at the door, wearing flannel pajama pants that hung from his hips, his

happy trail disappearing into the waistband. Nothing else. I tossed my bag into the corner and took his hand. We went down the hall to his bedroom and he kicked the door closed. “Nick will follow us in otherwise.”

No argument with that. Forrest was already pulling my shirt over my head while I unbuttoned my jeans and let them slide to the floor. After my thirty-second shower at home, I hadn’t bothered to put on underwear—a pair was in my overnight bag for the morning. We were naked seconds later and fell backward on the bed, kissing and touching and caressing anywhere we could reach.

How could I have doubted the heat between us. Every time we were near each other, our fingers reached out, probably a reason for the company not wanting people working in the same department or under one another to date. What a distraction!

His cock was long and smooth with only a slight curve and it fit in my mouth perfectly. I sucked and licked frantically because the moment I was inside him, I doubted my ability to hold back.

“I’ve fantasized about this so many times,” he gasped. “Masturbated in the shower to...oh, did I say that?”

I released him with a pop. “We should have been doing that together.”

“Yes!” He cupped my head in his palms and I went back to work, deep throating him, sucking harder and squeezing his balls lightly until he cried out and poured hot cum down my throat.

Then it was past time to wait for what I’d been waiting for, for such a long time. Rising up, I froze. Condoms...

“I can’t...we have to be safe.”

“I’m clean. It’s been a long time and I’ve been tested. You?”

“Same. Are you okay bareback, then? Do you have lube?”

He fumbled in the drawer next to the bed and tossed me an unopened tube. “I bought this when I thought we might...”

“Don’t tell me when or I’ll kick myself for waiting.” Hands trembling, I coated my cock and used two fingers to stretch his hole. Then I fitted myself at his opening and drove inside, trying to be careful, trying not to hurt him.

“Do it, now. Don’t hold back. I can’t stand it.”

So I let myself go and drove deeper, thrusting inside him, wallowing in the sensation of his tight, hot channel. His moans had me reaching for his cock to find it hard again. I fumbled to drag his hand down. “Jerk yourself. This time it’s not a fantasy.”

We came together, me filling him and him spurting all over our lower bodies.

It was incredible, if too short. “Let me rest a few, then we’ll do this right.”

He laughed. “If this was wrong, I never want to be right.”

Forrest

Things had been going great with Cliff. After our night together, I felt closer to him. It hadn't been a casual thing. That wasn't how either of us wanted it and I appreciated it. Falling asleep in his arms and then waking up in them the next morning had been everything.

We were getting along so well, the sex was great, and he was not only Daddy when I needed him to be but also a friend and partner at other times. It was almost like we were having a normal relationship. Except, we weren't.

Work was still in our way, and it would remind me of that fact every time I wanted to give him a kiss or go out to lunch with him. He was my boss, and our relationship was a secret. We hadn't explicitly said we couldn't tell anyone at work, but it was a given. He was my superior, and being together would land us both on HR's bad list. One of us would get fired, probably him because he was my superior, and that wasn't something either of us wanted.

I didn't know why things at work still bothered me. But they did. Earlier that day, I walked into the staff room to grab some coffee. Cliff was there with another of the admin team and was asked who he was bringing to the work Christmas party.

"I'm not sure. I haven't talked about it to the person I'm seeing."

He'd been so kind, shutting down any attempts at setting him up by letting it be known he wasn't single. And still, it hurt me so much, I nearly cried.

Instead of talking to him about it like a grown-up, I went home and whined to Nick about it as I made dinner.

“I know I shouldn’t let it bother me,” I muttered as I chopped vegetables.

Nick looked up at me like I’d lost my mind. He was there for dinner, not to be my therapist.

“But how could it not? It’s like I’m something to be ashamed of, and that’s not fair because I know that’s not how he feels, but also...I don’t know what to do.”

Nick meowed at the cupboard where his food lived. He knew exactly what I should be doing, and it wasn’t this. I popped the chicken and potatoes into the oven and got him some kibble. “I hope that covers your fee.”

He was already eating it, and I was considering that a yes.

As I stood there, watching the oven as if that helped the meal cook, I had this idea—what if we could work together, but also not? The handbook mentioned fraternizing with people who work under you. It didn’t say anything about dating within the company being off the table. I should know; I read that darn thing three times.

After checking to make sure the oven was doing its thing, I opened my laptop and went to the company HR message board where they posted job openings. There were quite a few opportunities listed, and I scrolled through them all. Most of them didn’t have anything to do with my expertise, but then I hit one that was basically the same position as mine, just in a different department two floors down. Same salary, same responsibilities, same everything—it was a lateral move.

In theory, if HR wanted to, they could just slide me over. I wasn’t sure they would

want me to, not after me taking this job so recently, but the opening date was around the same as the one I got. My guess was they both opened at once, and maybe it wouldn't impact them much at all. Fine, it was wishful thinking, but I was going to hold onto that notion for life.

I put my name in for it. It was just a solicitation of interest, and if they offered it to me and I decided I didn't want it, fine. I had to try.

After making sure I got the receipt email, I closed the computer and checked on the chicken. It still had a while to go.

I couldn't shake the guilt hanging over me. It didn't make sense. I hadn't done anything wrong...except I made a life decision without asking Daddy. I hadn't even thought of it that way until just then, but it sure hit me that way.

It was near six, and I sent a text..

Are you still working? I wanted to call but not interrupt you.

My phone rang almost immediately. "I'm just on my way home," he said. He'd had a late meeting tonight, and I knew that, which was why I hadn't wanted to bother him. But I couldn't let this hang over me.

"I was wondering if maybe you wanted to come to dinner. I made chicken and potatoes."

"Are you okay? You sound like something's up," he asked, concern in his voice.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I just...I wanted to see you. I need Daddy time."

"Need me to bring anything?"

“Just yourself.”

We hung up, and I set the table and started working on the salad. I had everything ready by the time he arrived, a box from the bakery in his hand.

“I said you didn’t need to bring anything.”

“And I didn’t need to.” He grinned. “But I wanted to.” He opened the box to reveal gingerbread men...dirty gingerbread men. They were the funniest cookies I’d ever seen.

“I feel like there’s something you want to get off your chest.” He pulled me in for a hug.

I sighed, leaning into his embrace. “There is, Daddy.”

“Tell Daddy.”

I sucked in a deep breath and spit it all out. “Okay, so I heard you talking at work about how you weren’t bringing anyone to the Christmas party, and it made me feel bad. And I know that’s not on you—that’s on me. But we can’t be open at work because of our jobs, and it was festering, and Nick wasn’t any help. So...I went on the work message board and applied for a lateral position that would have me working for Riley. And then I felt guilty because I didn’t ask you about it first. And, basically, I’m a mess.”

I was talking a mile a minute, and the fact that he could understand any of it was a miracle. He hugged me tighter and kissed the top of my head, telling me that everything was fine. For the first time since I heard his conversation, I started to relax.



“You were such a good boy, telling me all your big feelings and how you made a well-thought-out decision.” Another kiss on my head. “For the record, I hated not being able to tell Jim that you were going to be my date. There’s not much more I want than to be able to show you off.”

Over dinner, we talked more about everything. We discussed work, the party, Nick being a shitty therapist, events coming up at Chained, and how he wished he could shout from the rooftops that we were together. I admitted that I’d been feeling the same way.

It was a nice conversation—not only because of the words we shared but because we were being so open with each other. We’d been fumbling with communication from the beginning, letting our careers get in the way of our relationship. That was stopping today.

After dinner, I asked him to stay. If I had my way, we’d be together every night. There was something about falling asleep in his arms and waking up in them the next morning. But it was still early in our relationship. That could wait.

“I would love nothing more than to hold you in my arms, all night long, my sweet boy, but first, we have to tackle the dishes.”

Always the daddy, and I loved it.

Cliff

He got the transfer almost immediately. Boom. Easy peasy and, while he told me he missed everyone on our floor, he was pleased to learn Riley ran his department in a similar fashion to me. Casual but a tight ship, with no micromanaging. Lots of faith in the intelligence and work ethic of those under him. And their holiday plans were even bigger than ours, with someone bringing in a treat every day and caroling breaking out at the oddest times. My favorite activity, and one I planned to implement next year, was a service-oriented experience where they picked a worthwhile cause and set out to support it. This holiday season, Riley and his crew were going to a local food kitchen one Saturday as well as assembling kits of necessary items and distributing them along with homemade snacks and holiday goodies that some people might miss out on.

Forrest suggested our team might volunteer at the local shelter where he'd adopted Nick. Even though he was part of Riley's department, he would participate with us, too.

My little's heart was so big, the whole world could not encompass it.

My little had shared how blue he'd been about moving to the city so close to the holidays and leaving all his friends behind. He had plans at the club there as well as with friends who were not littles. As a member of Collared he'd taken part in everything they offered for littles or for the entire club, but he was so excited with the "extra" number of holiday activities at Chained.

Forrest loved everything about the period from Thanksgiving through New Years,

really starting earlier than that with Halloween. I'd never met such an enthusiast, but it was impossible to be around him and not get right into the spirit. Not that I'd ever hated it or anything, but I'd never experienced the full depth of joy before. I wasn't sure if that was because of him showing me the holidays in a new light or just because being with him made me so dang happy. Every time I went over to pick him up, carols ringing out from my Forrest-enhanced playlist, my heart spilled over. I'd begun bringing little toys and treats just because they made him smile.

For example the surprise I had planned for this evening. I'd been passing a pet shop on the way to pick up our dinner when I spotted their holiday display in the window and drifted inside to see if I could find a little something for my little's roommate. The second I entered, I was in a holiday pet-topia. I was drawn to a display heaped with small empty baskets and surrounded by filled bins of cat toys. The sign read: Fill a basket from the bins for only \$20 and make your cat purr . I picked up a basket by the handle and surveyed the amazing number of choices, stunned and frozen in place.

"It's a lot, right?" A college-age sales clerk came to stand next to me. "It's a great deal and a sure way into a kitty's heart."

"Yeah." I chewed on my lip, still looking over everything. "How late are you open tonight?"

"A couple more hours. Did you want to bring your cat to choose?"

"Do you allow that?"

He shrugged. "People bring their well-behaved pets in all the time...mostly the well-behaved ones."

I could imagine the damage a badly behaved one could do and wasn't sure if a certain kitty had been in the picture long enough to risk such an outing. He was really new in

his home. But I'd leave that up to Forrest. "Actually, it's my boyfriend's cat." Boyfriend...one aspect of our relationship, but it was the first time I'd said it out loud. "I think I'll pick him up and bring him back and if he wants to bring Nick, that's up to him."

"Nick, like St. Nick? Cool."

"We'll be back before you close," I promised, pretty sure I'd have no problem making that happen.

I called ahead to tell Forrest we were going on a mystery outing that I would reveal when I arrived. I couldn't think of a way to suggest he could bring Nick along and decided not to mention it. My little loved surprises, so we'd go ahead with that element. When I pulled up, he was waiting on the curb, bouncing on the balls of his feet, and I shook my head as he hopped into the car. "Where are we going?"

"It's a surprise."

"I can't stand it." He leaned over for a kiss then flopped back in the seat. "Are we going caroling?"

"Nope."

"Ice skating at the city rink?" It was an outdoor space that became a winter wonderland every holiday season and I made a mental note to use that for a date night, if he liked it.

"Is that on your wish list?"

"Oh yes."

“Well, not tonight, but whatever other day you’d like, okay? I’m warning you, though, I’m not graceful on skates.”

“I’ll help you, Daddy.” He tapped his cheek, deep in thought, then threw his arms out. “I can’t guess.”

“Want a hint?”

His head bobbed in my peripheral vision. “Yes, please, Daddy.”

“Reach in the back seat.” I had paid ahead for the toys, and so the sales kid let me bring the empty basket with me, marking the receipt with the fact that I had not already filled it in case I didn’t make it back that night or someone else helped me.

“Okay.” He fished around behind him and came up with the basket. “It’s not Easter, so we aren’t going on an egg hunt. Is there some kind of scavenger hunt for jingle bells or candy canes?”

He continued to throw out guesses as I drove, some of which were pretty outrageous like digging for ornaments and picking mistletoe, but when we arrived and I parked the car in front of the store, he pressed his face to the glass, transfixed. “Best pet shop ever!”

“And you haven’t even been inside.” I came around to open his door and took his hand. “Bring the basket.” As if he wouldn’t. The cold air made clouds of our breath as we crossed the sidewalk where the shop kid opened the door for us.

“Welcome,” he said. “I see you didn’t bring Nick.”

Forrest threw me a confused glance.

“I was here earlier, and I learned pets are allowed to visit, but I couldn’t see how to make that happen and still make it a surprise for you. We can bring him another time if you like.”

He hesitated and shook his head. “Nick hasn’t been outside since I brought him home. I was thinking that maybe in the spring, when it’s warmer, I could take him out on a leash or maybe in a stroller? But for now, he’s in a new home and it’s cold. He’s probably best inside.”

“We could bring him to my house, too,” I suggested. “In his carrier, with a blanket, so he’s all cozy.”

“Deal,” he said. “Now, what’s with this basket?”

I was very relieved to have made the right decision about Nick and settled back to watch the kid show Forrest the basket display. His excitement knew no bounds as he considered each ball and catnip stuffie and all the rest as if they were the most important decisions he’d made all day. Maybe they were. He was so considerate of others, pets and people alike. When we were finally back in the car with the sales kid placing a closed sign in the window, he cuddled his basket full of sparkly and jingly toys in his lap. “You’re going to have to keep it at your house until Christmas,” he mused. “Nick will find it if it’s at mine.”

“All right.” I started to press the engine button then stopped. “Forrest, would you like to go to the work party with me?”

“We’re okay now that I’ve moved departments?” We hadn’t been 100 percent because I was still at a supervisory level, even if not over him. “I can tell everyone you’re my...my what?”

“Boyfriend?” I really loved that word today.

“Yes, I think that’s right.” He winked at me and giggled. “Can you imagine that stuffy Andy in my new department if I announced you were my daddy?”

“Think he’d faint?”

“Might be worth doing it just to see that...but no. I would love to go with you, Daddy. Thank you for asking me. I love you so much.”

I inhaled sharply. “And I love you.” We kissed until the lights went out in the pet shop and the sales kid left, locking the door behind him. We had a lot to celebrate. Love.

Forrest

It was date night, and we were attending Chained's annual Christmas fundraiser. Their largest fundraiser of the year and for a good cause, it was a no-brainer for us to attend.

He was my Daddy, of course, but we weren't going in that dynamic. The event was too ginormous for me to be comfortable in little space. At least not for me. Instead, I was wearing jeans and a T-shirt. He, on the other hand, was in slacks and a button-down shirt. Cliff definitely looked better than I did, but I didn't mind. It was him I was looking at, not the mirror.

We walked in and received a program for the evening. There were demonstrations throughout the facility, an auction, and a meal. Best of all, the money raised was going to a local youth shelter for LGBT kids, making sure they had everything they needed for Christmas. The goal this year was to fulfill their Christmas ornament wish lists as well as getting them laptops for school. Based on the crowd already here, I guessed it was doable.

"What demonstrations would you like to see?" Cliff asked, as we stood to the side, looking at the schedule.

"I've always thought shibari is beautiful. It's not something I'd be comfortable doing, but I'm definitely interested in watching it." I could give my complete trust to a caregiver, but once my movements were restricted, I struggled. I had a daddy once who wanted to swaddle me. That lasted exactly one attempt.



He agreed, and we made our way down the hall past the little room to a space I hadn't noticed before where someone was demonstrating basic knots. From there, things progressed until they were showing us how those same knots looked on their submissive. It was fascinating to watch and only confirmed it wasn't my kink, though I wouldn't mind watching again—it was stunning how the knots laid on the submissive's skin.

After his demonstration was done, we went to see a “pup agility course.” Of course, it wasn't just pups. There were kittens, a pony, and even a koala. I'd never seen a koala in a play space before, but apparently, they're quite agile, or at least this one was. They completed the course like a boss.

It was fun getting to see different sides of the club.

“Want to check out the auctions?” Daddy gave my hand a squeeze. Unlike the smaller demonstration areas, the auction display was full-on packed.

“I think so.” It was the most honest answer I could give.

Hand in hand, we wandered through the silent auction. Most of the items were holiday-themed in the first section—local artisans had made decorations and quilts, etc. The next section was a bit fancier and experience based: resort holidays, fine dining, skydiving, those kinds of things. The next section it began to get fun.

From what I'd seen so far, it was the largest area, filled with kink-oriented prizes. Anything and everything a little could want, including custom-designed diapers, some of the most beautiful leatherwork I'd ever seen. A nine tails had me almost wishing I liked impact play, and the custom furniture including beds with hooks for all kinds of fun activities was getting a whole lot of attention. There was a bit of everything, including a year's worth of cookies from the local baker who had prepared the delicious treats for the little craft day. I suppose that wasn't exactly kink

related, but since we enjoyed them here, it was close enough.

Cliff and I separated and put our names and bids down for the items we were interested in then met up again and sat down for the live auction.

This was where the bigger prizes were. I liked a lot of the items up for bid, but my favorite was some beautiful art glass. I did not take it home with me, the final bid more than I paid for my very nice car. Still, I was happy because it meant that not only were those kids going to fill their wish lists and get laptops but probably some winter gear and maybe even some really good headphones as well. Everything was going high. I loved it.

We watched more than we bid and had already opted to skip the meal. Cliff had made reservations at a steak place we'd been talking about, and, after so much time at the crowded club, none of it in the little room, we were ready to leave. I was over peopled and over noised.

We'd made a good decision not planning to play tonight. The little room had been packed, not only with littles and their caretakers but also with people who were just curious. I was glad they got to experience it, but it wasn't the right day for me to be playing there.

"I'll be right back." We had barely reached the locker rooms near the exit when he announced he had something to do. I assumed he was going to the restroom, but when he came back, he had a gift bag with him.

"What's that?" I asked.

"You'll find out later." Which only made me even more curious.

After grabbing our phones and keys, we stepped outside, flurries in the air, adding to

the festive atmosphere of the evening.

“Thanks for understanding why I didn’t want to stay the entire time.” I’d been up front with him about it when we made the plans. I’d been working hard at sharing my feelings with him, instead of holding them inside until I could no longer do so. It took a bit at first, but I was so glad for it.

“No, I get it.” He squeezed my hand. “It’s overwhelming when they have big events like that. And besides, I kind of want you all to myself.”

“I approve this plan.” I stood up on my tiptoes to kiss his cheek. “Let’s go have dinner.”

The steakhouse was next to one of the fanciest hotels in the city, something I hadn’t considered when I chose my wardrobe for the night. As we got out of the car, I started feeling nervous about how underdressed I was. But of course, Cliff had already thought of that and opened the trunk. He had a button-up shirt and jacket for me, as well as a jacket for himself. He was such a good daddy.

“You’re always looking out for me, aren’t you?” I asked, pulling on the shirt and starting to button it.

“Of course I do. That’s my job. That’s what daddies do.”

“It’s not the only thing daddies do,” I teased, playfully smacking his butt. “Maybe, if I’m a good boy at dinner, you’ll show me what else daddies do.”

“Might those things be in bed?”

“Actually, I was hoping they were in that little bag.” I wasn’t sure why it was calling to me so much, but it was. It was going to be a distraction all through dinner, too.

Silly bag.

“It’s driving you bonkers, isn’t it?” He nipped at my bottom lip. “Want Daddy to let you open it now?”

“More than anything.”

I tucked in my shirt and pulled on the jacket, waiting for his response. I still had jeans on, but I looked good—good enough for where we were going.

“It was in the buy me now section, and, well, it called your name.” He handed me the bag.

I hadn’t even noticed that area and, if I hadn’t been so desperate to know what was inside, I’d have asked him where it was. When I pulled out the item from the bag, I realized I hadn’t seen it before, so if I had been there, I was lost in the commotion.

It was the cutest little Christmas tree I’d ever seen, only, unlike my stuffie, it had lights painted on in a way that sparkled as if they were really lit. It was forged out of a combination of metal and glass, and it was the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen.

“I love it!” I said, hugging him tight. “I love it so much.”

“I’m so glad, my sweet boy,” he said, taking the tree from my hands and setting it gently in the trunk. “There’s not much I like more than making you happy.”

“Good thing you’re really good at it.” I kissed him, looking forward to the proper thank-you I had planned for him later.

Cliff

So much work remained to be done at the office, but the holidays barreled toward us at top speed, and we silently agreed to miss not one bit of them. A Secret Santa gift that Forrest tried to keep the recipient from seeing had been the catalyst. Yes, we'd been working together for a while but since he'd been going through some training and working on specific projects we just hadn't really connected.

As to the Secret Santa? Frank was on to his giver from the get-go because his presents had been so perfect for him. But it wasn't my little's fault. He'd gone above and beyond in his attempt to keep the secret, and the only reason I knew about Frank's figuring it out was because he told me in confidence and nobody else. Which I thought was nice of him.

Our work party was a success, held at a hotel ballroom decorated to the nines for Christmas with no fewer than nine trees reaching for the high ceiling, garland strung all around the room, and tables set with holiday china and glassware.

A band performed on a stage bedecked with flashing wreaths and candy canes, the performers all wearing green velvet suits or red velvet dresses and playing the club versions of everyone's Christmas favorites. So much fun and an opportunity to do something I'd been wishing for since the first time I held him in my arms. We sat at our table chatting with coworkers and dining on prime rib roast, ham, and more sides than should have been legal. Our holiday-loving company went all out in this final event before we shut down for a few days over Christmas. We did not close completely between Christmas and New Year's Day—thus the need to cover the reception desk—but we went down to a skeleton staff, so most of us would not see

one another until January, and we were all sharing our plans for the festive days to come.

I'd never been great at fast dancing, but I was willing to give it a try if it meant I got to get on the floor with Forrest. Then, the band took a break and the soft, sweet strains of a slow song began. "That's 'The Christmas Song' by Nat King Cole," Forrest whispered to me, swaying in his seat. "Old but perfect."

"Would you like to dance, my sweet boy?" I whispered back, his smile and nod all the answer I needed. I recognized the tune but couldn't have named it. Leading him out to the middle of the floor, I placed my arms around his waist, and he looped his around my neck, and together, we moved around. No fancy steps at all, but we moved well together, as if we'd done it a thousand times. A lot like our lovemaking, and our daddy/little connection, meant to be. We stayed out there through a couple more slow and a fast because I didn't think either of us noticed the band returning. I didn't for sure, and it wasn't until we bumped into a few people that we returned just in time for the server to wheel up with the baked Alaska for our table. He poured rum and lit the dessert on fire. We all clapped. Work parties could be real drags, but not this one. After dinner there were door prizes and games, and we popped our party crackers and put the silly paper hats on our heads. When he wasn't paying attention, I snapped a photo of my sweet boy, face wreathed with smiles, the picture of holiday joy.

The North Pole Photo Booth pictures were great, and Forrest was planning to frame the one of the two of us, but the candid shot...priceless.

After all the festivities, we went home to Forrest's apartment because Nick was there and we didn't want to leave him alone for so long then went to bed and made slow, sweet, wonderful love. My sweet boy was everything to me, and I couldn't even remember how I'd found the slightest bit of happiness before he was in my life.

Next morning, we slept in a bit, or rather we planned to, but the sun had barely risen

over the horizon when I found myself opening my eyes to find my sweet boy propped up on an elbow, watching me sleep. When I cleared the blur of sleepiness enough, I realized he was wearing a chef's hat with a sprig of holly and an apron that read, I Make the Cutest Cookies . By the time we left the event, we'd gone to a local pub for an after-party then of course had our own private celebration that went on well into the small hours. But today was Cookie Saturday, a holiday I'd agreed to in bed one night when feeling very relaxed. Not that I wouldn't have said yes anyway...but this morning, I wished I'd suggested Cookie Sunday because I was very much in the mood for another two or three hours of sleep. But then...I looked into his eyes, which twinkled below his chef's hat and above the apron and suppressed a sigh.

“You're awake!” He bounced off the bed and onto his feet. “I was afraid we wouldn't have time to bake all the cookies. Tomorrow is Cookie Decoration Day, remember?” Somewhere in there, we had more apartment decorating to do, the tree to finish, and I was fairly certain there was a Christmas event at Chained we'd signed up for tomorrow late afternoon. I was having a wonderful time, but it was all a blur at this point, and while I didn't want to disappoint my sweet boy, we had to be sure to schedule adequate sleep in there...somewhere.

That would not be today.

We had planned to give cookies as gifts, and therefore hadn't shopped beyond ingredients, decorations, and containers in which to deliver/ship our delightful treats. I'd never been a master baker, and I could only hope that Forrest's skill level could carry us both so we weren't sending something inedible to our families and friends.

But, I was willing to give it my best shot and if it was a disaster, I could suggest we order Hickory Farms or maybe cakes from one of those Food Network chefs who sold their treats online.

Please let this work out! My sweet boy would be crushed if my lack of ability caused

us to poison everyone.

With that depressing thought in mind, I trudged into the bathroom to shower and get dressed for the day of baking. I almost skipped the shower, assuming I was going to be covered in flour and butter shortly, but did step under the spray in the interest of hygiene.

When I arrived in the kitchen, I stumbled backward at the sight that met my eyes. Not only was there coffee, toast, and two perfectly fried eggs waiting for me, but Forrest was already rolling out dough in a manner that any of those TV chefs would have no issue with.

“You really know what you’re doing,” I said, sitting at the counter and reaching for the steaming mug.

“Christmas is my jam,” he said modestly. “But I hope I didn’t push you into this if you don’t like baking cookies.”

“Oh, I like it,” I protested. “But most of my experience involves tubes of pasteurized cookie dough...and mostly I just eat it with a spoon.”

“Daddy.” He shook his head slowly. “I’ve finally found something I can help you with. Unless you’d rather just watch?”

“Oh no.” I dunked a buttered whole wheat toast triangle into my egg yolk. “Let me get my energy up with this delicious breakfast, and I am ready to follow your directions.”

If I’d thought the holidays in general were a blur, the weekend was more so. We baked until bedtime—me mostly dealing with scooping drop cookies on the sheets and taking them out of the oven to spatula onto the cooling racks. He had a bunch of



cooling racks. My sweet boy made cutouts and layered slices and even macarons, red and green with a mint or chocolate cream filling. I'd always thought those had to come from a bakery.

Cookie Decorating Sunday was also all day, making us miss the Chained event, but I didn't care. I never knew cookie baking could be so much fun.

## Page 17

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Forrest

We had opted to do a little Christmas Eve and a big Christmas day at my place because of Nick. We didn't want him to spend it alone, and he wasn't a huge fan of cars.

I'd always loved the holidays, but this year was going to be so much better because I got to spend it with the man I loved. I already had his present under the tree and a lasagna ready to go in the oven. All we needed was for him to arrive.

Normally, I'd have taken a shower and been dressed already, but Daddy had promised me a bath, a story, and snuggles before Santa came. I couldn't think of a better present than that.

"What do you think, Nick? Do you think it's gonna be a good Christmas?"

He rubbed his little chin against my hand in response. He loved to pet himself on us, as opposed to us petting him. And he still sat on Cliff's feet a lot. It was weird, but since Cliff didn't mind, I didn't either.

Cliff arrived about a half hour earlier than I had expected, which was good because waiting for him was hard. I was so excited about the holidays and our time together I couldn't sit still. When I opened the door, he was wearing a red coat and hat that matched my Santa hat and had a huge sack slung over his shoulder. Sexiest Santa ever.

"Oh, Santa, you can't be here. I'm waiting for my daddy." I tsked.

“He told me I could come.” He punctuated it with a ho-ho-ho.

I stepped out of the way, and Daddy came inside, set the bag by the tree, and crossed over to pull me into a hug, twirling me around. “Merry Christmas, my sweet boy.”

“Merry Christmas, Daddy.” I kissed him and grabbed his hat, pulled it on my head.

“You have your own hat.” I did, but this one smelled like my daddy.

“Fine, Daddy.” I put it back on him. “Is it tubby time?”

It was safe to say I wasn’t pretending to be patient.

“It is. I’ll go get it set up.”

“And I’ll put dinner in the oven.” That was one of the great things about lasagna—it was easy to make ahead to throw in the oven when it was time. I popped it in, knowing we’d still have plenty of time to play before it was ready, but I set the timer to be safe.

When I got to the bathroom, the tub was already filling, steam floating up. It was going to be a very good bath.

“Let’s get you undressed, and then I have something for you.”

“A prezzie?”

“Maybe. You’ll have to be a good boy and be patient.”

Getting undressed when you’re bouncing on your toes because you’re excited about a surprise your Daddy brought you is not ideal. It was a lot more fumbling than it

should have been, but he helped. Soon enough, he was helping me sink into the warm, soapy water, asking me to promise to be a good boy while he popped into the other room.

I promised I would try because that was the best I could do when I was this excited.

He came back less than a minute later with a plastic sleigh, little reindeer figurines, and a Santa.

“They all float,” he assured me, and, when I put them in the water, they did.

I’d never seen tubby toys that were Christmas-themed, and they were the best things ever. I played with them while Daddy washed my back, my front, and all the other bits. Then the two of us played with them until the water started to get cold.

“It’s time to get out, sweet boy, before you turn into a raisin.”

“I won’t.” Although when I looked at my fingers, I saw that I already was.

He helped me up, dried me off, and when we went to the bedroom to get me dressed, I saw a present on the bed.

“Is that for me?”

“It’s not for Nick.”

I ran over and pulled the tissue paper out of the bag. Inside were red-and-white striped pajamas with a hood and pockets. It was wonderful. “When I put this on, I’m gonna look like a candy cane!”

“That’s the point. And did you see what it says on it?”

I hadn't and when I turned it over so I could, I could barely contain my squeal. "Daddy's Sweet Boy!"

"That's you. You're my sweet boy."

He helped me get dressed then walked me over to the mirror. Sure enough, I looked like a candy cane. It was so stinking adorable I couldn't even stand it.

"You're the best daddy."

"I don't know about that, but I try to be the best daddy for you."

And he was.

We ate the dinner I'd made earlier that day, and it was nice, just the two of us having a meal. It wasn't a little meal, not really, but it was perfect for the occasion.

After we cleaned up, the fun part of the night began. Daddy turned a crackling fireplace scene on the TV and read me Christmas story after Christmas story. I snuggled onto his lap, listening to every word, and enjoying this quiet moment.

Then it was little present time. We were saving our big gifts for the morning, but he had a stocking for me and one for Nick. Next year, I was going to have one for him, too. Next year. It wasn't even a question that this was our first Christmas of many.

Daddy "helped" Nick empty his stocking, which we'd filled with everything from that basket at the pet store and a few other items we'd picked up since. A string with a feather on it that connected to what looked like a fishing pole, some catnip balls, and far too many fancy treats. Among other things. Nick was spoiled, and he loved it that way. Daddy threw one of the balls, and Nick was like a kitten, running around, chasing it all through the apartment.

“Now it’s your turn, my sweet boy.”

The stocking was huge and filled to the brim. One by one, I unwrapped the gifts: a bottle emblazoned with, If Found, Return to the North Pole , a new paci, a onesie that said, Daddy’s Sweet Boy on it, Christmas socks, mittens, a set of blocks that were really small and could be used on the coffee table, a couple of fidgets, and a reusable sticker book with lots of stickers.

“This is the best stocking I’ve ever gotten. Thank you, Santa Daddy! Or is it, Daddy Santa?”

“Just Daddy will do.” He reached up, cupped my cheek, and kissed my lips gently. “Now, Christmas can’t come to little boys who stay up too late.”

“It’s not late,” I protested.

He pointed to the clock. It was late.

We cuddled into bed together, and he gave me milk in my brand-new bottle. I sucked it down and fell asleep in his arms.

When I woke in the morning, it was to the smell of bacon. Daddy’s side of the bed was empty.

I padded into the kitchen to find him. “You weren’t supposed to do this.” I had planned to make him breakfast, not the other way around.

“Maybe not, but I wanted to.”

There were stacks of pancakes, bacon, and he was pouring scrambled eggs into the pan to be cooked. “It’s important to start your day with a good breakfast.”

I didn't argue with him that it was hardly the most nutritious breakfast. It was Christmas—it didn't need to be.

"Merry Christmas, Forrest." He put a plate in front of me.

"Merry Christmas, Cliff."

Nick stood on the floor next to us, his eyes darting back and forth.

"He thinks he deserves a special treat," Daddy said.

"You mean, like bacon?" I picked up a piece.

"We shall see." He took it from me and gave it to Nick, who ran off with it like he had won the best prize ever. And in a way, he had. It was bacon.

After breakfast, it was present time, and I couldn't wait for Cliff to open mine. It was just a watch, and he already had one, so maybe he wouldn't even love it, but it had seemed perfect at the time. Now that it was time to open gifts, I was getting nervous.

"You open mine first," Daddy said, handing me a box.

"That's not fair. I opened presents last night. You open mine first."

He was about to argue but must have seen the resolve in my face because he opened it.

"This is beautiful." He took out the watch.

"Turn it over."

When he did, he saw the inscription I had put there: To the best daddy ever. Love, your sweet boy .

“It’s perfect.” He immediately put it on. “I love it so much. Not as much as I love you, but a close second.”

Nick walked over, as if on cue.

“Fine. A close third.”

Nick jumped up on the couch and sat between us.

“Your turn.”

I opened the box. Inside was a key—a house key.

“I feel like there’s an explanation to go along with my present.”

“Yeah, it’s more a gesture than a present. I know it’s soon, but I want us to live together.”

“Really?” I wasn’t sure why I asked. Daddy didn’t play games. It was probably me processing it more than anything else.

“Yeah, and it doesn’t have to be my place. We can get our own place, or we can live here. All I’m sure about is that I don’t like waking up without you.”

“I don’t like it either.” I set the box to the side and climbed onto his lap, facing him, holding his cheeks in my hands. “How about we don’t do it anymore? How about we wake up in each other’s arms every single morning?”



“Sounds like a good plan to me.”

“Merry Christmas, Daddy.”

“Merry Christmas, my sweet boy.”

I brought my lips down to his for a kiss on this first, but far from our last, Christmas.

Cliff

Nick didn't make it over to my place until it was "our" place. We'd talked about bringing him over at other points for a visit, but somehow he didn't seem like the kind of cat who wanted to travel much. But by the next Christmas, our second together, we were living under one roof, the three of us. And I'd never been happier in my life. We'd been running from event to event for over a month, at Chained, with friends, at work...and I kept expecting to feel burned out.

But I didn't.

"Daddy, are you all dressed?" Forrest stood in the doorway of our bedroom, wearing a black tuxedo with a red rose boutonniere. So handsome, my throat closed with emotion. "Everyone is waiting."

"Just about." I looked in the mirror, making sure my tie was right. I turned to face him again. "Do I look okay?"

A soft smile lifted the corner of his lips. "You look incredible. I can't believe you chose to be my daddy."

"And your husband." I closed the distance between us and hugged him around the waist.

"Husband." He tipped his head to the side. "I like the sound of that too."

Boyfriend had been a great title, but husband? Something about the word implied a

future ahead of us. I'd have wanted to be with him forever no matter what, but when he accepted my proposal, I felt like the luckiest man, luckiest daddy on earth.

"If everyone is waiting, we'd better get down there." I stepped back and smoothed his jacket. Then mine. We were dressed the same except for the color of our ties. His red-and-white striped, mine with a tiny holly pattern. My boutonniere was also a red rose. "How many did we pack into the house again?"

"Only about seventy-five." Forrest grinned. "And there's not a whole lot of room."

We'd had to be careful not to miss anyone who might really want to be invited, but also, we needed them to be able to breathe. Judging from what I saw from the upper landing, we needed to hurry so they could at least spread out through the dining room and family room. Right now, all our loved ones stood facing the fireplace where the officiant stood. Together, we descended, the banisters decked out with more roses and ribbons. I didn't even know how Forrest found so many flowers in the middle of winter, but the scent floated on top of all the perfumes and soaps and shampoos worn by our guests. As one, they all turned to watch us come down then shifted to make an aisle for us to traverse. A narrow one, but that was fine. We tucked in close together and made our way to the officiant who said, "I'd tell you to join hands, but I see you already are. Dearly beloveds, we are gathered here..."

Words spilled over us, some we had to repeat, and then we were kissing and we were married. And it was Christmas. And we were even more in love than last Christmas. Whatever I did in a former life or this one to deserve such joy, it wasn't enough. I didn't even notice, until I attempted to turn around to leave the makeshift altar, that Nick was sitting on my foot. Again. Still.

Our friends and family closed in around us, sharing our happiness. Our first dance as a married couple would be to "The Christmas Song," as was our first dance ever. We were serving cookies and cocoa and eggnog and hot buttered rum. All was well with the world.