



Their Little House Tristan

(Five Little Roommates #2)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: What happens in Little House, stays in Little House.

In theory, I'm graduating this spring, but in theory doesn't pay tuition, and when my scholarship is canceled at the last minute, I have no choice but to put my education on hold. I pack my bags and move back home, where my parents are not what a person could call understanding about my sexuality. I couldn't imagine what they'd think if they found out I was little.

I luck out, getting a great job at Chained, one that includes a membership, but when they find out who's signing my paycheck, my parents give me an ultimatum: quit or move. Thankfully, one of the people at work lets me know about a house share where all the residents are little.

I'm in a place where I can truly be myself for the first time. Sure, things get a tad awkward when one of the other littles kisses me at Chained one night, but the way the hot daddy in the corner is watching us...I think I might need more of his sweet kisses. A whole lot more.

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Tristan

“Are you packing?” My roommate, Pierre, put his arms over my suitcase to prevent me from adding more into it.

“I am—” It was the last thing I wanted to be doing, but it was outside my control.

I reached behind me, grabbed the letter that had just been delivered to me, and handed it to him. As he read it, I continued packing. There was nothing he’d find in the letter that would change the result, and I was on a time crunch—one not of my own making.

“This is bullshit.” He tossed it on the bed. “They can’t just cancel your scholarship after the semester began. They can’t do that!”

“Except they did.” I didn’t think it was possible either, but according to everyone I’d been able to contact in the office, it was not only possible, but it impacted four of us. “I guess the foundation who sponsored it went under or something.”

I hadn’t really been able to focus after I was told it was real, and there was no way to fix the situation that didn’t include me writing a big fat check.

“They said I have till tomorrow to pay or be kicked from classes. And there’s no way I’m going to be able to afford it. Between the dorm and the tuition, we’re looking at over \$20,000.”

His jaw dropped. “But, Tristan, you’re graduating in a few months.”

“No. No, I’m not.” And that was the harsh reality of it—all this hard work, all this time, and now it ended just like that. All because of my stupid scholarship.

I’d already talked to the office and e-filed all the paperwork needed to take a leave of absence. It wasn’t ideal, but they suggested it with the idea that some better financial aid could come through next year, or I somehow might manage to save enough to come back. But for now, I was done with the collegiate life.

And the reality was, I wasn’t sure which was worse: losing three and a half years’ worth of hard work, or being homeless with the only place left to go—my parents’ home. Sadly, I was pretty confident it was the latter.

My parents were not what I would call understanding of who I was, and that was putting it lightly. They were in denial. Full-on denial.

In their mind, I wasn’t attracted to boys. That was a phase I was going to outgrow. I was confused, rebelling, or misunderstanding my own attractions—the excuse depended on the day.

In their mind, after I graduated, I would marry a nice girl from the church—their church, obviously—and we’d have a gaggle of children, go to services twice a week with smiles on, and sit beside them in the pew. They had had my life planned out for me before I was even born. The only part of it that changed over the years was going to college because, for me, that had been nonnegotiable.

It was such a warped little picture of who we should be, formed by their own messed-up views on what made a “man” and not who their son was. And yet, no matter how much I tried to tell them otherwise, that’s how they were determined my life would go.

I’d sworn when I went to college, I’d never go back. But I had no choice, at least not

for now. It was go home or be homeless and as much as they bugged me, they weren't evil. They just didn't understand who I was and had no desire to change that because it messed with their world view.

I could only imagine what they would think if they found out that my favorite thing in the world was to dress up in a onesie and diaper and suck on a paci while some sexy older daddy made me chickie nuggies or cuddled me as cartoons played in the background. I'd be shocked if they even knew littles existed. They lived in their own small world, one I'd come to realize I'd never be a part of.

"You don't have to go today, do you?"

"I do." And had already arranged my ride.

He walked around the bed and hugged me tight. "I wish we had gotten an apartment this year. Then you could stay."

I'd wished that too, but the money didn't work—not when the scholarship included this room. We had crunched numbers, and the hours we would have to work to make it happen weren't doable, not with our course loads and planned internships.

"It'll be fine," I lied. "I'll get a job, save the money, and finish next year."

"And your parents?"

"My parents will just...I have to be—I just need a place to stay while I get a job." Things with my parents were going to be tricky, but it wasn't like I could change that.

"And when they try to set you up with girls, you..."

"Well, obviously, I'll be too busy with my job." Would that work? I doubted it, at

least not completely. But all I had to do was buy some time.

Pierre understood my situation all too well. He'd grown up in a household similar to mine, which was probably why, as freshmen, we clung to each other. His parents hadn't agreed with his choice of career. They wanted him to go into the medical field, specifically to become a doctor, and then ideally come back to their small town, find a nice girl in their church, get married, and live out their ideal dream.

Instead, Pierre went to school for English, or, as, his father said, "to waste your time and money." But, unlike me, my roommate's scholarship was still intact, and he was already accepted into a very prestigious graduate program for the next year. I was happy for him, but I'd be lying if I said I didn't wish I had a similar program waiting for me, or at least had the funds to finish this year.

We chatted as I packed up the rest of my things and went outside to meet my parents. They pulled up less than a half hour later with I told you so looks on their faces. They were not big believers in education, thinking that I could just get a job and already be living my "grown-up life." The scholarship was the only thing that had made me being here possible. My parents refused to so much as pay for SAT fees, much less anything once I was accepted to college.

"Thanks for coming to get me." I slapped on my happy face, the one I was going to have to hold on to for the next few months while I saved up.

"It's about time you came home." My mom hugged me.

My dad slapped me on the shoulder. "And just in time! We invited Sally Beth and her parents over for Sunday dinner."

"Sally Beth?" I had no idea who they were talking about.

“Yes, Sally Beth. The Stansted daughter.”

It took me a few seconds to piece together who they were talking about and, when I did, my stomach roiled. How could they want that for me? “Isn’t she a child?”

“You’ve been gone a long time. She turns eighteen next month.” My mom said it as if that made it less gross.

“Oh.” Because I couldn’t afford to tell them how I really felt. At least, not yet. I’d just need to master the art of pivoting away from their matchmaking. It was gonna be a long couple months if they were already starting with this.

“If I don’t have a job by then, I’ll be happy to join you.” Happy being a bald-faced lie.

“If you’re living in our house, Son, you will not be working on Sundays.” My father didn’t pretend I had any say in it. “Sunday dinners are mandatory.”

“Understood.” I only had to do this for a few months. That was it. Nothing more. I could do anything for a few months, right?

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Bellamy

There are two rooms open.

I finished up my work for the law firm but knew that no matter how much I got done, there would always be more. My daytime job was never-ending and filled to the brim with anxiety, pressure, and overwhelming business. I didn't get as much little time as I wanted.

I gave my paralegal team a to-do list at nearly eight at night, right as I was about to go home. The team consisted of women and men fresh out of law school and some of them still working on their degrees. If I asked it of them, they would work all night, but I knew better. I wasn't like the other lawyers in the firm. That would only make them work slower the next day, and they would grow to resent me.

Their work would suffer. They were my legs on the ground. I needed them just as much as the firm needed me. If they were unhappy, I was unhappy and vice versa.

"Go on home," I said, placing a stack of papers and folders on their shared table. "Get some rest. Tomorrow is a big day and next week, we go to trial."

The group stood up, all smiling, and some of them high-fived each other. I walked with them to the elevator. They were making plans for dinner and drinks, but I didn't expect an invitation, of course. Dinner and drinks were no fun if you invited the boss, which was weird because I was their age. I finished high school at sixteen and law school at twenty-four. I was immediately picked up by a local firm, so the team in the elevator with me, well, most of them were my age or older.

It could've been awkward, but we respected one another. Made it work.

But still, going out with the boss wasn't cool no matter what age I was.

"What are your plans for tonight, Bellamy?" I'd nipped the sir nonsense in the bud the day each one started.

"You all know me." They absolutely didn't. "I'm going home to relax and enjoy my rest."

They laughed but didn't press for any further information. I didn't lie exactly. I was going to go home and enjoy my rent. How I chose to spend my free time was none of their business. My private life was just that.

After picking up a meal from a new restaurant that offered the best kids' meals in town, I drove home but wasn't as happy as I once was, going to what we all called the Little House. Of course, it was a safe space for us, but things had changed of late.

The house seemed lonelier since Colter and Dallas moved out to be with their forever daddy. I was happy for them, but it left the house a bit quiet. Less activity. Movie nights weren't as fun. There were more chores with fewer renters.

I wished some new littles would move in so I could have some new friends. Even the toys in the playroom were getting boring.

Ugh, I really needed to stop complaining so much.

At home, I sat down at the table to eat. Still wound tightly from work, I would have to unwind before I could even enjoy myself.

"Up for a movie later?" Monroe, the owner of the house we all lived in, sat across

from me.

I sighed. “I don’t know. What did you want to watch?”

“The anime cartoon we’ve been following. There’s a new episode.”

“That’s not a movie,” I laughed around a bite of creamy macaroni and cheese. The highlight of the meal was tiny corn dogs, but I’d put down a dozen of those immediately. They had given me a chocolate lava cake with the meal, and it was calling my name.

“Oh, that’s true. But we could watch one after the episode.”

I nodded.

His brow furrowed. “Bell, what’s wrong?” My roommates were the only ones who could call me Bell and get away with it.

“I don’t want to complain.”

“Just tell me how you feel. Is this about Colter and Dallas moving out?”

I polished off my macaroni and cheese and offered Monroe some of my cake. He grabbed a spoon and a couple of juice boxes for us and joined me. “It’s just quieter around here. Not as fun.”

He nodded. “I get that. I’ve placed ads all over the place, but we haven’t gotten many bites. I hope we can find someone soon. Are the chores too much for you? I can pick some of yours up if that’s the problem. You work so many crazy hours. You must be exhausted.”

“It’s not that. I don’t know. Sometimes I feel like I don’t really fit in here.”

Monroe stopped chewing. I thought he might scold me, but he cocked his head to the side. “You don’t? I think you are a great fit. The others really seem to like you.”

I didn’t realize anyone liked me. I thought they were just being nice.

“Still, I hope we get some more roommates soon.”

“Is the rent a problem? You know that I would never raise the rent just because someone moved out. Your rent and everything about your rental agreement stays the same.”

“I know. I’m just tired. I think I’ll go change into my jammies and take you up on that movie offer. When I come back down, I’ll gather the snacks.”

“Sounds good. I’m really glad you’re here. Just so you know.”

“Thanks.”

I ran upstairs and took a quick shower. There was something about the law office and their air-conditioning system that left a film of scent on me. I smelled like office and didn’t like it one bit.

Once I got out, I hung up my suit and prepared another for the next day just in case I fell asleep during the movie and didn’t want to do anything else.

Downstairs, I popped popcorn and drizzled it with caramel then sprinkled salt over that. It was one of Monroe’s favorites, and he had been kind to me, not only today but ever since I moved in. Along with that, I took out a package of mini donuts and a couple of tiny waters. We had enough sugar as it was.

The other thing about having fewer roommates was that more people distracted me from my loneliness. Sure, I was happy for my friends and their new daddy, but I wanted to find my own to take care of me and be my partner in life.

Some days, it seemed like I might never find that person.

What a sad thought.

“Here we are,” I announced to Monroe but, as I came around the corner, I saw everyone had joined in for the fun. More people meant I felt even more out of place. It wasn’t them. They had tried to include me in every facet of living in this place.

I simply never felt good enough.

“Thank you, Bellamy,” they all replied in unison.

“You’re welcome,” I said sheepishly and sat down in a chair while the rest of them sat together on a couch or on the floor. Everyone had their jammies on and were comfortable. This was where we relaxed and let the knots and stress of the day go away.

As soon as the cute, upbeat music of the new episode came on, my spirits immediately lifted. The issues remained, but for now, I was comfortable and happy.

And free to be me.

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James

Things usually slowed down a bit at this time of year with people wanting to get out of the city and have long vacations with their families. Things at the office were much quieter, but I could always find ways to keep busy. In fact, they generally found me. As a single, I was glad to keep things running so my coworkers could enjoy themselves in the countryside or at the beach or somewhere. Lots of people thought holidays were the most important time for families, but when someone came back from a camping trip all tanned and mosquito-bitten and full of great stories about how they and their sons took on the wilds and survived, that was family time to me.

I loved listening to their tales and tried not to be jealous of their fun time with people they cared about. My parents lived across the country, my siblings were busy with their own families, and I hadn't had someone to share my life in quite some time.

"James, you up for lunch?" Mark stuck his head in my office and held up his car keys. "We can take our time and go somewhere good for once."

I looked at the screens open on my three monitors and winced. "I really should get through some of this stuff, but why not?" A disadvantage of not taking time off when everyone else did was that the "skeleton crew" had to double down. "Where do you have in mind?"

"There's a new Vietnamese place near Chained. I found it when my Buddy and I went there last night and we were hungry after. Great banh mi sandwiches and I had an incredible pho."

“That doesn’t sound like a place your little would like,” I pointed out. “But I’m in.”

We took the elevator down to the parking garage. “Buddy was big last night.” He chuckled. “You’ve seen him when he’s little, won’t touch anything that isn’t a chickie nugget or some sort of pasta with cheese.”

“That’s why I asked. But makes sense.” It was nice to have a coworker who was also a member of my club. Chained hosted just about every kink out there in a safe and respectful environment. “My last little was obsessed with things ‘on a stick.’”

We only had to drive about fifteen minutes, and it seemed the restaurant was also in the summer doldrums because we had no trouble getting a table, and the service was speedy. “Speaking of your last little,” Mark said, “it’s been a while.”

“Over a year,” I agreed. “But I still like to go to Chained and play with the littles who want a daddy for a night or a scene.”

“It’s not the same, and you know it.” He picked up the deep spoon and scooped up some of the pho broth. “This is so good.”

“It is.” A well-made pho was an art. “Thanks for suggesting the place.”

“No worries, now, Buddy wanted me to tell you that he wants you to have a little again because he misses our double-date evenings.” We’d gone out often to the club with Mark and Buddy as well as having playdates at one another’s homes. “What should I tell him?”

“Thank him for his input, but tell him I’m not really looking for someone right now, just enjoying being a single daddy.”

Mark’s snort could have been insulting if it hadn’t sent some of the soup through his

nose.

“See what happens when you mock me?” I asked. “What’s wrong with being single? I have King if I get lonely.”

“King is your dog. And who names a goldendoodle King anyway? That dog is anything but regal.”

“He’s loyal and adorable and he was named that by the rescue where I adopted him. I really did try to change his name, but he ignored me if I called him anything else.”

We ate in silence for a few minutes and I hoped Mark was going to drop the subject, but of course he didn’t. People who were coupled up always wanted everyone else to be in the same position. “Buddy has a friend in the little room who might like to meet you.”

“A fix-up? Really?” This was new. Usually he just hinted that I should be more open to others who he saw hit on me. Just because a person was a little didn’t mean they couldn’t show their interest in a particular daddy. In fact, it was encouraged. And it took the pressure off if I liked someone. Of course, it increased it if I didn’t. “Mark, I’m not ready for someone else.”

“I knew that breakup was bad.” He nodded as if he’d solved the problems of the universe. “You need a rebound person.”

I set my spoon down and let out a huff of irritation. “When my last little and I split up, it was because he had a job opportunity two thousand miles away and we didn’t want to bother with a long-distance thing.”

My relationships were usually both big and little, but some people just had one or the other. I knew a couple of guys who were married but had a daddy/little relationship

with someone else with the full blessing of their life partner. Whatever worked for them, but it was more or maybe less than I wanted.

“So you’re not heartbroken?” he asked. “That’s not why you’re still single?”

“I don’t have a little because I haven’t met someone I want in my life at the moment. And, before you ask, I’m not looking.”

“I’ll tell Buddy, but he’ll be disappointed. We just finished his new nursery, and he’s really excited to have playdates.” We had other friends who were daddies, but Mark and Buddy were my closest. They’d been together for over a decade, and they had the kind of relationship I envied. Hot daddy/adorable little and, when Buddy was big, two handsome mature men living their best life.

Best, in fact, of all possible worlds.

After lunch, we returned to the office, but our conversation was much on my mind. Mark would never brag, but when I went over to their house, it was such a place of love. Could I really have everything with one person too? Maybe the fact I was even thinking about it meant I was ready to move on. Or maybe it was just that my best friend had gotten in my head. Could be either.

But it was enough that I decided to go spend an evening at Chained soon. It had been a while since I’d even done one of those daddy-for-a-night deals. I needed to take care of someone who needed to be cared for. And the Chained little room was just the place to find that. As well, it was where my friends hung out in the conversation area, and if I didn’t find a little to play with, or just wanted to relax, I could enjoy an evening of good food and conversation while watching their little play on the floor at their feet, adorable overload.

First, I had the work of six people who were currently at a beach, a mountain lodge,

and I wasn't sure where else to take care of. My needs would have to wait.

By the time I got home, I was too tired to consider going anywhere and ended up sitting on the sofa with a bowl of popcorn beside me and King in my lap binge-watching a 1950s sitcom where they pretended everything was right with the world.

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Tristan

I should've known better than to apply for and then accept a job at Chained while living in my parents' house. It wasn't like I could keep it a secret for long, but that's exactly what I did.

The money was good, it came with a membership to the club, and I was surrounded by people who understood me. It felt like it was worth the risk, but accepting that there was risk was one thing, dealing with the fallout another.

From the beginning, I accepted the fact that I was on borrowed time. My parents would figure out that my "restaurant job" wasn't actually at a restaurant at all. Sure, I was doing dishes and prepping food, but it was at a sex club, something they very much would not understand.

I was honestly surprised I got away with it for as long as I did. I'd been there a couple of months without so much as a hint from them that they didn't believe my lie. But the second I came home from my shift tonight and saw them still awake, I could see in my mom's eyes that they'd figured it out and braced myself for the fallout.

"And where did you say you worked again?" My father sat in his armchair, staring at the fireplace, not meeting my eyes or even looking in my direction yet. That would come. It was all a part of his locus of control.

There wasn't even a fire burning, but it was the position he took whenever he wanted us to know we were in real trouble. I'd received countless groundings with him in this exact pose. I hadn't been a bad kid or anything, simply not the perfect son they

wanted. Still wasn't.

And he didn't save this setup just for me; he did it to my mom as well. This was the authoritarian bullshit of his belief system in action.

"What do you mean?" Feigning innocence wasn't going to work, but it would give me time to brace myself for whatever consequences he was planning.

"You know exactly what I mean. Your mother and I went to the restaurant today, and you know what was there?"

I did know. There was nothing there. The restaurant I claimed to work at? It had closed down, in its place a razed building, soon to be a parking garage.

"You have two seconds to tell us where you're working, or to get your things and go. And don't say, 'I don't have a job, I've just been looking,' because I checked the credit card, and you haven't been charging any gas to it, which means you're getting money from somewhere."

Fuck. I'd been so careful. If I'd thought about it, I would have just kept charging gas to fill the car I'd been borrowing from them instead of trying to be responsible. Of course, that, too, would've had consequences. I'd been in a no-win situation.

"Fine." I walked between him and the fireplace. If we were going to have this conversation, I wasn't going to hide. "I've been working at Chained."

"Excuse me? Chained? Is that...fencing?" My mother was so naive or at least pretended to be. More than one person at Chained had a story about an unexpected club member they encountered from their non-work life, including a little old lady from next door, a kindergarten teacher, and an aunt.

“No, Mom. It’s a club. For adults. Adults who like participating in bedroom activities that are not just for procreation.”

Was I really having this conversation with my mom?

“You mean...a gay club?” she gasped.

“No. I mean—yes, some people there are gay, but some are straight. Some are bisexual. Some are pansexual. Some are even asexual.” I left it at that. I’d already given my mom too much information to process.

“Oh, don’t with your rainbow crap. You’re saying it’s a sex club.” My dad wasn’t one to mince words.

“It is.”

“Well, you have to quit,” Mom said as if she’d solved a big problem for me.

“No, Mom. I don’t have another job. Nothing else has come through yet.” Nor would it because I wasn’t applying for anything. But she didn’t need to know that.

“You’re not working there,” Father insisted. “How are you to find a proper wife if you’re doing that? Have you thought—”

“Maybe, this time, listen to me tell you I don’t want a wife. I’ve told you repeatedly for what? Seven years. No wife for me—proper or not.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” He stood up.

As a kid, that would have scared me. Now, I just braced for whatever wrath he was going to unleash. To my surprise, there wasn’t any.

“You have a week to make your choice. You either need to quit or move out. We will not assist you in this depravity.”

“Working is depravity?”

He held up his hand. “Do not test me.” And out of the room he went, leaving just my mother and me.

“Why do you do this...all this rebelling?” She swished her hand in the air, as if that somehow made her words true. “It’s time to grow out of your teen angst or whatever this is.”

“I’m an adult, Mom. I’m not a teen. This isn’t angst. This isn’t rebellion. This is who I am.”

“Then who you are needs to go someplace else.” And she followed my father, leaving me all alone to figure out what to do next. I didn’t want to quit—but, also, I had nowhere to go.

The next day, when I went in to work, Miss Lily recognized right away that I was stressed and pulled me aside.

“Hey, you’d tell me if any of the members were inappropriate with you, right?”

She thought it was a member, not that I had much interaction with them. I loved how she was always looking out for us.

“No, everyone here has been great. Fabulous, even. It’s just...you know, I came here because I had to leave school.”

She nodded.

“The only place I could stay was my parents’, and I’ve been saving money to move out, but they discovered I am working here, so that timeline’s moved up a little bit.”

She took my hand and dragged me to the little bulletin board.

“Please, I apologize if I’m assuming incorrectly, but you’re a little, right?”

I hadn’t been able to take advantage of the club yet. Goodness, I didn’t even have any little clothes to wear. I’d trashed them all when I moved back in with my parents for fear of being found out.

“Yeah...”

“Here.” She pulled off a tab and handed it to me. “This is a rental. It’s not a full apartment. Everybody has their own room, and everyone there is little. They even have their own playroom. It’s pretty fabulous, from what I hear. And quite a few club members live there. You should check it out.”

“Thanks. I will. I gotta get back—”

She shook her head. “I mean, call now. Even if your parents gave you time to move out, do you really want to chance that they won’t move that timeline up?”

“Thank you, Miss Lily.”

I ducked into one of the dressing rooms that wasn’t booked for the night and made the call.

The next morning, I went and checked out the place, signing on immediately. It was everything I wanted it to be. The bedrooms were nice. The couple of people I met on my tour seemed genuinely happy to see me. And the playroom was...everything.

I dropped my suitcase off and took a trip to a store where I could buy some little clothes. If I was gonna have a playroom, I was gonna dress the part. Thankfully, the rent was low enough that with the money I'd saved, I still had enough to get a couple of pairs of pajamas, some onesies, a paci, and a new stuffie.

I missed my old things. But this was a new beginning—and they were new to signify that.

The first thing I did, even before I unpacked, was to throw on some little clothes and head to the playroom. I'd started to explore the different toys when another little came in—one I didn't recognize.

“Hi, I'm Bellamy, and you are Tristan?”

I nodded.

“Do you want to play?”

“Yes, please.” More than anything. “I'm looking for the cars.”

“Oh, they're over here.” He led me to where the tracks and the Matchbox were, and we made a huge track and raced our cars round and round and round. I couldn't remember having this much fun.

But, soon enough, the day caught up with me and I needed to go to bed.

“Hey, Tristan?” He dropped the last of his Matchbox in the bin. “Have you ever gone to Chained?”

“I work there.”

“That’s so cool. I thought maybe we could go together one day.”

“I’d like that.”

His face bloomed into a smile. And had we not been little and in this room, I’d have thought maybe it was an invitation—one I wanted to take him up on. To press my lips against his, to caress his cheeks, to lean in to his touch.

But he was little. And my roommate. And he was...I wasn’t... Neither of us was a daddy. No point going down that path. Especially not on the day I met him.

“I’d like that a lot.”

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Bellamy

“I like playing blocks. Do you?”

The question stunned me. I loved Chained, but it wasn't often I came with another little. Especially one as handsome as this one. If I did play with the others, I either never saw them again, or they didn't play with me a second time. I tried not to take it personally, but sometimes, I couldn't help it. It felt like I had the plague and there was no cure.

This was different. This one lived with me. That didn't have me worrying about it ending like the rest, though.

Once I thought it was my outfit, so I changed to another pair of soft overalls, but that didn't help. I tried to put myself out there, introducing myself when I arrived, but again, I had to play alone all night.

Playing alone was the pits.

Sure, it was fun to have the daddies watch me play but I wanted friends. Someone to talk to and have a good time with.

“I love blocks.”

He smiled and sat across the pale-blue table from me. “Do you like the big blocks or the little ones?”

I studied both block bins. I knew which one was my favorite but didn't want to make a choice that would alienate me again. I questioned everything when this was the side of me that was supposed to be free and easy.

Then again, I had to be myself. Masking was hard. But he'd been very nice at the Little House, so I could try.

"I like the big blocks. The little ones hurt the tips of my fingers when I try to pry them apart."

Tristan flashed a bright, toothy smile. "Me too. One time, I even pinched my skin in between two. It hurt and made my fingers hurt for a few days."

"Ouch. I've done that too. But the big blocks slide together easier. Plus, I like the colors better."

We decided on building a castle. I worried the whole build about if he was one of those people who liked to destroy a creation with a swat of his hand or if he was more like me and took it apart one piece at a time.

I preferred calm and quiet play. I liked to take my time. My life was hustle and fast-paced and I liked this part of my life to be the opposite.

"That's a great castle," Tristan said and moved around on his knees, looking at our masterpiece from all angles.

"It is. We did a great job."

Instead of going back to the side of the table where he had been, Tristan sat next to me. His thigh and knee were pressed against mine but he didn't seem to mind. I certainly didn't mind.

Tristan was cute. He was kind and smiled at me a few times when we reached for the same piece at the same time or went to put a block in the same spot.

“There are a lot of daddies here tonight.” When I went to look, he grabbed my hand. “Don’t look.” He giggled and blushed. Oh, my. There must’ve been a daddy who got his attention already. That blush was one for the books.

“I have to look. How else will I know?”

He sighed. “Let’s take the castle down and make a great big tower. But I don’t like knocking it down. It’s too much noise.”

“I don’t like knocking things down either.”

We took the castle apart methodically. I pushed away the feelings of stress that tried to creep up inside me. Sometimes when I was playing, things from work would pop up. To-do lists. Cases perplexing me. Research that the team needed to get finished. All the things that went along with being a lawyer and an adult in general.

“Where did you go?” Tristan asked.

“Oh. Nothing. Thinking about life.” Not a lie but not the whole truth.

He nodded. “Sometimes things bother me too. Overthinking is my enemy. Let’s focus on the tower. Piece by piece. It helps.”

He was handsome and brilliant, this one. Maybe this time, I’d found a friend—a real friend.

I wanted him to be more than a friend, but he was a little like me. Things didn’t work like that.

We laughed and built the tower piece by piece. I focused on the feel of the slick plastic in my hands. The colors of the blocks and the sounds they made as we locked each piece in. The sounds of others playing around us, which was a dull hum tonight. The way Tristan's thigh and hands brushed against mine more than once. I was beginning to think he was doing it on purpose.

We both reached for the same block and laughed as our hands touched. I turned my head to the side to see him looking at me instead of the blocks. His gaze met mine and it was over for me. I was instantly struck by his attractiveness. His hair lay over his forehead in a way that made me think he did it on purpose, the perfect dishevel. Tristan's eyes were a pale blue that called me in, and I found my body swaying toward him.

Before I could get hold of myself or remind myself that he probably didn't like me the way I liked him, he closed the distance between us and gently pressed his lips to mine. A thousand fireworks exploded behind my closed eyes as I soaked in the moment.

Tristan was kissing me. Everything in me wanted him.

He pulled away after a few seconds, and I whimpered softly at the loss of touch. His lips tasted like cotton candy. My favorite.

When my eyes fluttered open, Tristan's cheeks were a brighter shade of red than before. He shrugged one shoulder. "Was that okay?"

"It was more than okay. If you hadn't, I would've."

He nodded. We sat there for a moment, both of us caught up in the hazy aftermath. I caught him looking over my shoulder. "I think we have an audience."

“I don’t want to turn around,” I laughed.

“Let’s go back to playing, and you can see what I mean.”

We went back to playing, which was hard since my body was reeling from his touch. My skin tingled. My mind rattled off thoughts about what was and what might be. Tristan might’ve kissed me, but we were both littles and from what I knew, littles didn’t make a couple. Then again, Dallas and Colter had been together and had a shared daddy.

Wait, I was getting ahead of myself. One kiss didn’t equal a future.

While we put away the blocks, I took a chance to look around for the daddy Tristan had been talking about. Sure enough, in one of the chairs along the wall, was a daddy.

One of the hottest men I’d ever seen in my life.

He looked relaxed. His legs were crossed and his arms by his sides but his eyes—that intense stare was on nothing else but Tristan and me.

“That’s the one?” I asked my new friend. “The one with the black shirt on?”

Tristan nodded. “Yes. When we were…” He looked down sheepishly. “When we kissed, he looked at us. I think he liked it.”

“I liked it too.”

He nodded, but eventually we returned to playing. I found myself wishing I had more free time. We could watch movies together and share meals and be the bestest of friends even though I wanted more.

What I really wanted were more of those sweet kisses. More of his time and more time for me to stare into his beautiful eyes.

I imagined us sharing movie time. Playtime.

There I went again, imagining a future that might never be.

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James

Eating popcorn with King was fun and relaxing, but as much as I loved my dog, his company had its limitations. Some good, as in he never disagreed with me on politics or religion. Did dogs even have those things? Maybe in the wild, pack politics, but only King could tell me if he believed in a higher power, and he chose to keep his piece.

But there were many other topics I enjoyed talking about, less controversial and more fun. Like the daddy/little dynamic, what to order for appetizers, and whether or not it might rain. I had overheard people passing Chained on the street and talking about rumors they'd heard about what went on inside. They were fascinated and for the most part wrong, at least in the part where I spent my time. True, all sorts of things did go on. Bondage, fire play, whipping, hot wax, the electrical fun of the violet wand... And, if I were to be honest, I'd tried most of them at one time or another just to see if I enjoyed them or to share the interests of a friend. But if they saw my friends and I sitting on comfy couches, sipping refreshing beverages and nibbling on the chef's latest creations while littles zoomed cars around on the floor, they'd think they stumbled into the wrong place.

Most of the rumors were wild and crazy, and consent rarely entered into what they thought was happening, but I never considered stopping to correct them. The front of the building was very ordinary, no big signs, just the little one over the door. Not a single window faced the street where the snoopy could peek in.

No one but a member of Chained or its sister club Collared or a guest referred by someone would be admitted, so things were calm if passionate behind that door.

Mark's and my conversation had gotten things stirring in my mind again. For all my denials that I wanted a new little in my life, I had begun to think I protested too much. My previous relationship had been all right. But we were more going through the motions by the end, satisfying one another's basic needs without fully engaging, and I was determined not to let that happen again. We both deserved better. His moving just accelerated something that should have happened sooner, but inertia had held us in place.

And the inertia I'd fallen into since had kept me from striking out and seeing if there was something more for me. A visit every so often to the little room at Chained to scene or play barely took the edge off.

What kind of life was that for someone who found fulfillment in caring for another?

The ease with which I usually entered the club absent. I greeted Miss Lily in the lobby, chatting a few minutes before moving on. She was always friendly and professional, known for putting together incredible events, usually with a charitable aspect.

"James." She held her hands out and took mine. "We haven't seen enough of you lately. Busy at work?"

"Yes." Although that wasn't the whole story by any means. "But feels great to be here. Anything exciting happening?" As if it wasn't always.

"You just missed an adoption event. We raised so much money for a local pet rescue. Our members are so generous."

"Oh, that's wonderful." And very bad timing on my part to decide to be more open to another little right after the event.

Adoption afternoons were particularly popular, a kind of matchmaking only mommies and daddies and their littles could fully appreciate. There were games and refreshments and all sorts of fun, often culminating in a new couple or several and of course funds for a good cause.

The club was hopping, so to speak, as I made my way through the main room to reach the hallway leading to the little room as well as other specialty areas. The rumor mongers seemed sure that all kink was impact play.

Couldn't be further from the truth.

The skill level involved in most of those things on both the doms' and subs' parts were well worth observing, but on this night, I had a goal in mind.

A whole different observation plan.

I knew better than to say I was arriving to find a little to be mine. That sort of thing would never work out. But what I did want was to sit back and watch the littles play and just see if there was anyone I could spend some time with, maybe get to know a little. I'd been too reserved even when I did play, and that kind of shutdown was unhealthy. Even for a scene, the littles deserved a heartfelt daddy.

The moment I entered, the vibe changed. The little room's magic washed over me, and muscles I hadn't realized were tense eased. Unlike the more erotic main room with people strapped to all sorts of equipment or rapt watching a fire master at work, things were light here. Littles able to let free a side of themselves the world at large wouldn't understand.

I found my way to a chair against the wall and crossed one leg over my other knee. Some nights, the only daddies allowed in here were those accompanied by a little, but tonight, the sign on the door had indicated that it was all right to go in on my own and

either watch or play.

Only a few minutes after arriving, my attention was drawn to two of the cutest littles I'd ever seen building a block tower together. Although they giggled and whispered together, their dynamic was not like most of the other play groups in the room, and I was galvanized by the energy between them.

They touched more than could be accidental, their breathing a little faster and shallower than I would expect from "just friends." Also, the biggest giveaway something more was going on—nobody knocked the tower over. The locking blocks could go quite high, but the only time I'd ever seen that happen was in a competition. I'd spent many an evening building a structure for a little or a group of them while they watched with glowing eyes only to send it tumbling to the floor as soon as I moved my hand away.

I didn't mind, even if I'd been into the whole thing and congratulating myself on my awesome castle. The littles rolling on the floor giggling were my reward. Their happiness my peace. These two built and built, until they both touched the same block and heat exploded. I'd seen littles kiss before, usually cheek kisses of friendship and even once or twice more, but these two were fire. I held my breath watching them, not jealous as in I didn't want them to have the love and passion they were clearly expressing for one another, so much as I yearned to be a part of it.

Both of them drew me after a long dry spell, but as they parted and one looked over the other's shoulder right at me, I cursed under my breath. They had each other, and I couldn't approach them anyway. The little room was a safe space where littles held sway and only under certain circumstances, like an adoption event, could a daddy take the lead in an initial contact. I'd missed that opportunity. Had they been there and not found a daddy? Or was their relationship solid as it was and they didn't need one? Most littles did, but like anyone, they varied and some just wanted a daddy from time to time—like the ones I'd played with lately; whereas, others wanted a mommy

or took care of one another. Rare, but it happened.

I felt so helpless, hoping they would approach me but unable to do more than look back into those soulful eyes and try to send a message. Without being intrusive.

If they got it, they didn't want it because they moved on to another area and played with toy cars, seemingly dismissing me as part of the wallpaper. That was their choice. At least I was still capable of being moved by a cute little or two. I had begun to wonder if I'd lost my passion. Standing up, I left the little room for the night and went home. It was still early enough for popcorn with King. He'd be glad to see me, even if he was using me for buttery treats.

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Tristan

I'd seen Bellamy a few times since that kiss at the club, but we both kind of pretended like it never happened—even though I wanted it to happen again and again and again. We shouldn't be ignoring it. I shouldn't be ignoring it. But I had to find the strength to bring it up, to just tell him straight out that I liked it, and I wanted to do it again, and see where he stood on the subject.

But I was scared. What if he said it was a mistake or that he didn't enjoy it or that he didn't want to play with me anymore? It wasn't like I was asking him to be exclusive or be my daddy or...really anything. But to be able to kiss him again when we played? Yeah. I'd really like that and wanted it to be our norm...or at least our norm until we found our own daddies.

I put my pack in my work locker and headed into the kitchen for my shift, resolved to talk to him about it when I got home. It was one of my earlier shifts for the week, so there was no excuse that it would be too late for a discussion, like most nights would.

When I walked into the kitchen, the first person I saw was Janice looking frazzled and rolling silverware.

“Hey, we got a big party tonight, and they're taking the function room. Any way you could help me?”

Even if I didn't have the time, I'd have made it. Stress rolled off her in waves.

“Yeah, sure. What is it, like a club meeting?” I was still new enough that I wasn't up

on all of the activities that took place here, and honestly, I didn't need to be, since the bulk of my job was washing glasses.

"It's a wedding."

That caught me off guard.

"Why didn't you call me earlier?" I'd have come in without hesitation.

"Because they called about a half an hour ago to check on availability. And you know how Miss Lily is—all about love and all that good stuff. She turned the function room over to them." Janice didn't even sound mad about it. She too was all about "love and all that good stuff." She'd met her wife here during a ropes class. I never asked her which of them was the knot master, which I knew wasn't the correct term, but it was what the kid in my scout troop called himself, and it always amused me.

"I got you."

The two of us went about rolling silverware, lining bread baskets with napkins, setting up chairs, and all the fun stuff that came with larger parties. Thankfully, Miss Lily had talked them into having a set menu, so the chef was on that as we did our part. Simple hors d'oeuvres, bread, and soup. That was it, and it was perfect for the servers who came in last minute to help.

They were using the space as more of a place for them to hang out after the ceremony than for a full-on wedding experience. From what Janice said, they met at the club, which was pretty awesome in my books. I half wondered if I would recognize them from the little room the other night. Not that my eyes had been on anyone other than Bellamy and that hot daddy.

I really should've asked him his name...or maybe not. That night had been so far

outside my past, very limited club experience, that was for sure.

It kept me busy and that was good. It distracted me from thoughts of Bellamy and kissing him in the little room, and it made the shift go faster. But as soon as setup was complete, it was time for me to get to my normal assigned duties.

I didn't mind washing dishes. Most nights, I enjoyed it, but tonight, once I got into a groove, my mind went back to the situation at hand. Dishes were monotonous. They didn't require any brain power. And consequently, my thoughts liked to wander straight back to the little room.

It was official, I was definitely talking to him tonight. Because this couldn't go on. I needed to know where he stood, whichever way it went.

"Hey, Tristan?" Janice stood in the doorway, looking quite frazzled.

"Listen, can you help me? The wedding party has decided they want to play in the main area, now, and so we have to dismantle everything."

I looked at the dish pile. It was pretty much done.

"Yeah, I got you. Let me just tell Miss Lily I'm helping, so she isn't looking for me."

It didn't take much effort to get the room cleared. It was a multipurpose space and designed accordingly. Our list included folding tables, stacking chairs, carrying dishes back to the kitchen, etc. But when you had to do it quickly, there was the intensity to it, and it felt like a lot. It didn't take long until I was as frazzled as Janice appeared.

I was on my way out of the room with my last tray of dishes, when who did I come face-to-face with? The daddy from the other day.

“Oh. Hi.” I stood in front of him, staring. Way to make a good impression. “I...uh...I work here. And I was...I’m carrying dishes.”

“I see that.” He chuckled.

“I saw you before, when I was with one of my housemates. And I was, you know, not working.” Talk about losing my ability to speak. I was too focused on his eyes, his smile, the little bit of scruff growing on his cheeks.

“I saw you boys, too.” His smile was warm.

“I...I thought so.”

“Was that little show for me?”

I looked down and shook my head. “No.”

His finger came under my chin, lifting it until I looked at him again.

“So I just benefited from it too?”

I bit my lip, nodded once, and sucked in a breath before blurting out what I was thinking. “Maybe, next time, you could play with us.”

It came out almost as one word. I was working. I wasn’t supposed to be flirting, and I definitely wasn’t supposed to be asking daddies out while on duty.

I looked around quickly, glad to not be seeing any of my coworkers. It hadn’t been my intention to run into him—or to be speaking to him at all—but intentions didn’t matter if I was caught breaking the rules. If this was breaking a rule. I wasn’t sure if I was stepping on the line or had crossed over it.

“Do you mean play with you...or play with both of you?”

Wasn't that the thousand-dollar question.

“I-I don't know.”

“Are you boys together?”

“I don't know?”

“Do you like each other?”

“I...don't know?” Each time I answered, I sounded more unsure. I liked him, but telling this daddy that first really wasn't going to be helpful or respectful to Bellamy.

“Well, how about this? Why don't you get together with your little friend and figure it out? And when you do figure it out, catch me in the playroom.” He took out a card and placed it on the tray. “In case you want to get hold of me.”

“Are you...are you only interested if it's just me?” Because I really wasn't so sure I wanted to exclude Bellamy. In fact, I was sure I didn't.

“Whatever gave you that impression?” He smiled. “I just want to know where and what's going on before we play. I don't want to get in the middle of anything...unless the middle is where you want me to be.”

Janice called me from the kitchen doorway.

“I gotta go.” I walked around him and hurried away, unsure if I was about to discover the best thing in the world...or about to get my heart stomped.

Either way, I was looking forward to it.

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Bellamy

Mondays were the worst. Someone should ban them. Altogether. Start on Tuesdays.

The problems seemed to build up momentum during the weekend and then smack me in the face come Monday morning.

That added to the distraction in my life that was Tristan, and I was grumpy as a hornet. On my second coffee. And nothing was helping.

If only bills weren't a thing. Monroe's rent was reasonable, especially with the safety and security we got with living among people who understood us. It was the price of my education that needed paying, mostly.

Came with the territory.

I walked in after a long day, hoping Tristan was home. We had played together a few times and watched some movies together, but neither of us mentioned a word about the other night at Chained. Not the kiss. Not the palpable attraction. None of it.

We had a good time together. I learned about the things he liked, and he seemed eager to learn more about me too.

We even helped each other with things around the house. I felt comfortable with him in a way I hadn't with anyone else. He didn't judge. He was kind and loving and accepting.

I had a feeling someone had hurt him in his past, but we hadn't gotten into any conversations beyond the surface.

When I walked into my room, he was sitting on my bed, which was surprising. He hadn't been in there yet. We had only interacted in the common areas of the house.

"Tristan?" I asked, putting down my briefcase on the chair. "Is everything okay?"

He nodded. "I wanted to talk to you."

I took my suit jacket off and sat down next to him. His tone worried me. Had someone hurt him? Was something wrong?

Had I done something to distress him?

"Please tell me what's going on," I said. My heart was heavy thinking that this new friend I had, a new best friend, was upset with me.

"I was working today and... I'm getting ahead of myself. I'm so nervous."

I put my hand over his. "There's no reason to be. You can tell me anything. We can talk about anything. No judgment here. You are always safe to talk to me."

He nodded. "I know. Thank you." Tristan paused for a few moments then turned his hand and threaded his fingers with mine. "Do you remember the daddy from the other night?"

"The one who was staring at us while we kissed?" I asked. The daddy who had stood out among the rest and the only one we had even talked about.

"That's the one."

“What about him?” I stopped myself from coming to any conclusions or ruminating about what he might be talking about.

“I ran into him today. I don’t think he knew I worked there, but he came in and we started talking.”

Uh-oh. All promises of not jumping to conclusions went out the door. “That’s nice. Was he kind to you?”

Tristan nodded. “He was. He wanted to know if we wanted to play with him sometime.”

“Us?” I asked. “As in both?”

“Yeah.” Tristan shrugged. He was so unsure of himself sometimes. I wondered what caused that. I wished I could erase all of his fears. He was such a wonderful person, even if I had only known him for a short while. “What do you think?”

“I don’t know. What did you tell him?”

“I told him we would discuss it. He actually suggested we talk about it first.”

I blew out a breath and kicked off my shoes. “Is that something you want? Are you—have you been looking for a partner? A daddy?”

Tristan nodded. “I want one. I need one. Someone to help me take care of myself. Someone I can be safe with.”

My heart sank. It didn’t sound like there was room for me in this scenario. “I hope you find one soon, then. You deserve a good and loving daddy.”

“That’s where you come in,” he said, instantly confusing me.

“What do you mean?”

“We haven’t talked about the other night. I want to clear things up before I even make a decision about James.”

“Is his name James? He looks like a James. Strong and capable.”

Tristan nodded. “He does and, yes, that’s his name. The other night has been playing in my head over and over.”

“I haven’t been able to stop thinking about it, either. How did you feel about it? The kiss?”

A blush rose on his face. Okay. We might be on the same wavelength here. After all, it was Tristan who had kissed me. “I really like you. More than a friend. More than a roommate. That kiss. It was short and sweet, but it’s filled my dreams.”

I wrapped my arm around his waist, pulling him in for a hug. He looked like he needed it. “It’s been on my mind as well. I wanted to talk to you about it, but the last thing I want between us is awkwardness.”

“Me too. Kissing you...it feels like a dream.”

“I would love to kiss you again.” The statement, while fully true, burst from my mouth without permission.

“I would like that too.” He tore away from my hold. “But is it okay? Two littles?”

I ran the back of my hand across the soft skin of his face. “Is this something you

want? Are you attracted to me?”

“I am. You look especially good when you come in from work wearing that suit.” He laughed, and the sound eased both of us.

“You look pretty cute when you get home from work as well. Would it be okay if I kissed you again? You know, make sure we still like it?”

Tristan nodded, and no more words were needed. I leaned forward and pressed my lips to his, gently at first but soon after, he reached for me, tilting his head, asking for more. We kissed and held each other for a few minutes until both of us were breathless.

“I still like it,” he said, getting up from the bed.

“Me too. I was thinking about macaroni and cheese with broccoli trees and mini sausages for dinner. Would you like to join me?”

His smile lit up my whole life. “I would like that very much. Are you cooking? Because I kind of suck at it.”

“I will cook. No problem.”

He began to walk out but looked back one last time. “How about we watch a movie in my room afterward? In our pajamas?”

“That sounds amazing. I’ll come get you when the food is ready.”

“Thank you, Bellamy. You’ve made me feel so at home here and with you.”

“You’re welcome. See you soon.”

We parted ways but only for a while. I showered off the stress from the day, or most of it, and put on some comfortable clothes and went to the kitchen. The short time it took to put together dinner gave me a chance to think things over. We hadn't spoken more about James, but at least we'd settled what was unspoken between us. Did James only want to date Tristan or me, or both of us together? Those were the things I wanted to get to the bottom of, but for now, I was over the moon with excitement that Tristan liked me the way I liked him. The way Colter and Dallas liked each other.

I knocked on his bedroom door a while later to find him in some cute jammies. He was on his tablet. "Ready to eat?" I asked.

"Yes. I'm starving. And I was hoping we could watch one of my favorite movies tonight? And then maybe one of yours?"

That sounded like a dream.

"I like that idea, but we both have work tomorrow." Tristan looked disappointed, and it broke my heart. "We have time for one though. I can pick next time. I'm not going anywhere."

He gifted me the softest smile. "I'm not going anywhere either."

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Tristan

I don't know why I was so nervous. I was going out with Bellamy, not a stranger. It wasn't a first date where I had to worry about if we'd like each other—we already did. I didn't need to worry if there would be any chemistry—there already was. I didn't need to worry about if we had things in common—we had a ton.

And yet, as I was staring in the mirror for the fifth time, trying to figure out if this outfit was good enough, I couldn't help being worried. What if making it official like this somehow made it no longer as good? Or what if he decided, after thinking about it, that I wasn't really somebody he wanted to date, that he really only wanted a daddy, and I just happened to be there that day...and the other day...and this morning...

Oh gods. I was overthinking, and I needed to cut it out. If I didn't, I was going to ruin our night before it began.

I grabbed my phone and keys off the counter and went downstairs to meet him. He was waiting in the foyer, ready to go.

He looked absolutely stunning. He too was wearing jeans, but unlike mine, his were skinny jeans and didn't leave much to the imagination. I didn't try to hide my appreciation.

“You ready?” he asked, holding out a hand.

“Yeah. You look great.”

“You do too.” His cheeks pinkened.

We’d called a rideshare, in case either or both of us decided to have a few drinks while we were out. We hadn’t fully planned our date, just which part of the city we were going to hang out in. We’d wing it from there.

We had perfect timing, the rideshare pulling up just as we reached the sidewalk. He opened the door for me, and I climbed inside, scooching across to leave space for him. This was it. We were really doing this.

Unlike if he drove, we didn’t talk much on the way there. Rideshares could be awkward when it came to conversations, there being an extra person and all. But this was a case of not being given a second to chat.

The older woman who picked us up pretty much spent the whole time telling us about her grandson’s school team. Bellamy and I listened and acted like it was the most interesting thing in the world, but by the time we got out, we were no closer to a plan than when we’d left.

“Should we just walk first and see if anything catches our fancy?” he asked.

I agreed that was our best plan.

He reached over and took my hand. “Is this okay? Because, you know, we’re in public.”

I had shared a little bit about my family and how they were less than accepting of me, and I appreciated the offer. But I was never one for hiding—even when it meant making things uncomfortable as a teen at home, and unbearable as an adult. I returned the squeeze. “I like it.”

I loved this area of the city. An older part of town filled with cute little shops, small mom-and-pop restaurants, a few bars, and a great many food carts. A fun place to walk around.

We wandered through the shops, talking about memories they stirred. Items in the windows and down the aisles brought up stories, including one about his favorite childhood vacation and my first time attending a professional football game. I even spotted a little bird statue that reminded me of my grandmother and shared some memories of her with Bellamy. We never ran out of things to talk about.

Eventually, we stopped at a dim sum place—the kind with conveyor belts where you didn't really know what you were getting unless you were well-versed with that particular restaurant or really quick with your eyes. It was fun grabbing plates, discovering what they were, and enjoying the delicious goodness. We ate every last bite, our stack of plates causing a bit of sticker shock.

The first date I'd been on where there was never a question of who was going to pay. Because we were both little, and since there was no daddy here, we just split it evenly. I took comfort in that. That lack of awkwardness, the absence of unspoken expectations over who would take charge didn't matter in the long run, but still, it mattered.

"I think I need to walk for another, like, forty-seven miles to burn this food off," I teased.

"Since I don't want to go home yet, walking sounds good. But maybe not forty-seven miles." He hip-checked me.

"Deal."

We wandered down to the river, the moonlight casting long shadows and reminding

me more of werewolf novels than romantic strolls. He laughed when I mentioned that, but then admitted he was thinking more along the lines of vampires. In some ways, we were so similar.

“This has been really nice.” I sat on a park bench overlooking the water.

“I’m having a good time.” He hesitated. “I know this probably sounds awful, but...it’s comfortable.”

“How would comfortable sound awful?” I had to be missing some nuance.

He rested his head on my shoulder. “I don’t know. Because some people think dating should be exciting instead of safe.”

“I like it this way.” I’d take someone who was fun to play with, whom I trusted, and who made me smile over a stomach full of butterflies, being worried I would say the wrong thing at any time and ruin it, and questioning if he liked me at every turn. Comfortable and safe for the win.

He kissed my cheek. “Yeah. I do too.”

We sat there, watching as the river cruise floated by. It was lit up, with couples dancing on the deck. I’d been in the area most of my life but hadn’t ever gone on one of their trips. I’d never wanted to. But here, with Bellamy, I wondered what it would be like to have a date on a moving restaurant.

There was so much I wanted to experience with him, including seeing if James was a good fit for us. “I think I do want to play with that daddy.”

“Same, but also, I-I only want to play with him with you. Like, the two of us together. We’re a package deal.” We were riding the same train of thought.

“That’s absolutely freaking fantastic. We’re like a twofer. A BOGO even,” I teased.

“A bundle deal, if you will.” He faced me.

“A gift with purchase.” I winked.

“But who’s the gift?” He pressed his forehead against mine.

“You, obviously.” And before he could argue, I pressed my lips against his.

James

I went back to Chained the next night and the one after. Although I spent the evenings chatting with friends for the most part, I popped into the little room several times each night just in case those cute boys were there. Not that I had any expectations from them, and I for sure did not want them to feel like I was a daddy creeper, but I needed to learn if they were at all interested in getting to know me. If they said no, there would be no more discussion about it, and I wouldn't do more than wave and say hello in passing. Courteous acquaintanceship. I could have hunted Tristan down in the kitchen, but what kind of daddy would do that to someone at work?

But I really hoped no wouldn't be the answer because I'd relived that kiss in my mind way too many times, and it would be hard to shut down the feelings it engendered. They had an innocent sensuality that warmed my heart and had my daddy self planning little meals and cartoon nights. King would love them both. He was a good dog. Did they like dogs?

King and I were a team. Love me, love my dog. But I couldn't imagine anyone not falling for him.

And I was so far ahead of myself.

"Hey, are you going to drink that?" Bridger nudged the beer I'd ordered closer to me. "It's been sitting there so long, it's probably warm and flat."

"Hmm?" I frowned at the glass. "Did I really order beer?" I hadn't had a beer in

months and then only because I was at a barbecue and hadn't wanted lemonade, the only alternative. "I guess I'd better drink it." But one sip confirmed it was as unpleasant as a warm, flat beer could be. "I think I'm going to the little room for a bit."

"You've got it bad." Bridger, who was currently crocheting something purple, smiled down at Hudson. His little was resting against his daddy's legs, idly bouncing a rubber duckie on his own knee. "Not that I'm one to talk."

"You've got a cutie, for sure." My comment earned me a shy grin from Hudson. "And it doesn't matter if I have it bad or not because I don't know if they are interested in me or not."

Mark shook his head. "Well, you need to find out before you invest your heart all the way. Daddy hearts are tender things." He stood up. "Come on, Buddy. Let's go with James to the little room."

Buddy scrambled up from where he'd been lying on his back, kicking his feet. He wore sneakers that lit up with each bounce, a new acquisition that had him fascinated. And Hudson wanting a pair just like them. "We'll play with you, Daddy James," he said. "We can do a glitter project."

Mark groaned, and all the other daddies in our group laughed. Glitter was the bane of all daddies and beloved of every little I'd ever met. "Let's see what's going on. Maybe we can do a puzzle."

The look his little gave him indicated his best shot was if there were not any glitter activities tonight. I held up crossed fingers behind Buddy's back in daddy solidarity, and off we went to the little room to find out what fun things there were to do. It was different every night and, thank heavens, glitter appeared only a couple of times a month on average. It took that long to get the last sparkly specks out of a little's hair.

I always felt a little awkward walking through the main room with its St. Andrew's cross and spiderweb, the snap of the whip and hiss of fire being extinguished with a little by my side. It was like they were too young for such things, although they were all adults. But, as Mark pointed out once when I brought the subject up, the littles were unbothered, most never even paid attention to any of it, so we shouldn't worry.

The whole way, Mark was talking about all the fun things we could do together. "Maybe you'll read me a story, Daddy James?" He was truly one of the nicest littles ever, and he and Mark were so good together. It was rare for another daddy to play with a little, but they were secure and kind, and while I really didn't think I'd take him up on the offer, I appreciated it more than I could express.

When we got to the little room, instead of everyone doing crafts or singing or watching a cartoon, we found Miss Lily seated on a chair in the middle of the room with a big picture book. She didn't often read herself, but when she did, she drew a crowd. Miss Lily could read or tell a story in such a way that even the daddies and mommies were drawn in. Her voice was the only sound in the room.

All plans to amuse me forgotten, Buddy whispered, "Story time," and left us behind. He managed to wedge himself into the criss-cross applesauce seated littles and was soon every bit as rapt as all the others.

"She's magical," I said in the lowest voice I could manage. "Let's find a seat."

We managed to appropriate a love seat far enough from the story time that no other big people had grabbed it, and settled in to leave ordinary reality behind for a while. Miss Lily carried us all, little and big, into a world of fairies and unicorns where anything could happen, and most of it was good.

When the littlest fairy managed to convince the cranky frog that being a friend was way better than being a bully, everyone cheered and applauded. Then, as the group

started to disband, chattering about the story, Miss Lily held up a hand. “Wait just a minute. I have an announcement.”

Every little dropped back to the floor and looked up at her. Miss Lily’s announcements were always going to be for something fantastic, wonderful, and the things dreams were made of. Or so I’d heard some of the middles saying once.

“We are going to have an event called A Little Fun. It’s a fundraiser for City GoldenDoodles, a group that has saved so many dogs and found them their new furever homes. Have any of you gotten your family dogs from there?”

Three hands went up. “Very nice! Aren’t they cute dogs?” Bobbing heads and grins greeted her words. “Anybody else have a pup from there? Daddies?”

I lifted my hand. “King is the best dog I’ve ever had. He’s sweet and brave and fluffy.”

“So you see why we all want to make sure this very worthy rescue has all the funds they need to keep them going into the future. Details of the event will be posted soon, but I just wanted to give you all the very first chance to sign up. It’s going to be so much fun!”

I stuck around for a little longer, but the littles I was looking for weren’t there and as soon as Mark and Buddy were engrossed in a glitter project —Sorry, Daddy Mark—I made my exit. But I decided I would attend A Little Fun and hope for the best. If they were there, great, but if not, it was a rescue I sent money to every month, and it would be fun to help support them even more.

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Bellamy

“Look what I have.” I turned to see Tristan standing in my doorway, an envelope in hand.

“Bills? Do you have bills?” I teased. “Because, if so, I really don’t want any more.”

He rolled his eyes dramatically, which I 100percent deserved. “Does this face look like these are bills?”

I squinted at him, as if I were trying really hard to see it.

“No,” he admitted, “I suppose not.”

I stuck out my tongue.

“I was just messing with you. What I’ve got isn’t good, it’s great.” He handed me the envelope, bouncing with excitement I matched when I looked inside to find two invitations, aka tickets, to A Little Fun.

“Wait... Chained? Their little event everyone is talking about? Isn’t it tonight. I thought this was sold out.” It was a caregiver/little event at Chained where the proceeds went to a local rescue called City GoldenDoodles. The tickets had to have cost a fortune.

“They are,” he said with a smirk. “But I have an in with the management.”

“Let me pay for them.” We usually went even-steven on all date-like activities, but this was different. The night was outside of his price range, especially with him needing the money he made for school.

“An in . Meaning, I got them for free.”

“I guess if you’ve got an in, I’ll let you pay.” I stuck out my tongue. “And we have to go. It would be rude not to.”

As if there was a way to keep me from attending, especially since James might be there.

“Let’s be matchy.” I couldn’t think of anything more irresistible than two matching littles.

“Matchy for the win.” A giggle erupted from him.

“Exactly!” He spun around and darted to my stash of little clothes, pulling out half a wardrobe and tossing pieces across the bed. “What do you have that matches any of this?”

He came here with very little; his sudden move from college to his shitty parents meant most of, if not all of his little belongings had been lost forever.

He glanced at the pile. “I have nothing. We can just be cute, no need to match today.” The disappointment in his voice nearly broke me. Twinsies had been a fun idea, but now it was mandatory.

“Let’s go. We need to get something new for the occasion. The dogs are counting on us,” I said.

“You just want to get dressed up because you think the hot daddy might be there.”

“Or maybe”—I winked—“I want to get dressed up for my hot little.”

Either way—we were going. I was now determined that we were going to be the cutest littles in attendance.

There was only one place in town where I knew we could find club-worthy little gear, and it wasn't a hard decision what to get once we got there. Front and center were two onesies. The first had a little bunny that said I'm the cute one , and the other had a puppy that read No, I'm the cute one .

There was no choice to be made—we had to get them.

I grabbed a pair of shorts that matched the puppy to go with my bunny onesie, and he got the shorts that matched the bunny to go with his puppy onesie. We were going to coordinate epically. No one there wouldn't know we were together.

We added knee-high socks—mine covered in glittery hearts, his with tiny carrots. Did they match? Not even remotely. Did we care? Absolutely not.

We looked like a million sparkly, pastel-colored dollars.

“Will that be all today?” The cashier grinned, clearly amused by our selections.

I loved that there was a place in town now where we could freely buy what we wanted. That hadn't always been the case. My first onesie was from an online store and came in a generic plastic mailer, somehow making it feel dirty instead of fun. I much preferred this.

“Almost,” I said. “We need one more thing.”

I'd been searching the shop but hadn't seen what I wanted: a paci clip for my friend. Tristan was constantly losing his paci or dropping it and needing to wash it mid play. I knew how much he loved that thing, and I wanted him not to have to worry about it tonight.

When I explained, the cashier lit up. "I've got just the thing," she said, disappearing into the back room. She returned with a paci clip decorated with bunnies, kittens, puppies, and ducklings. Cuteness overload, and I was there for it.

"This one's on me," she said warmly. "Honestly? I haven't seen such adorable coordinating littles in a long time. Makes this mommy's heart so happy."

We thanked her, probably too many times, and headed home where we showered, packed our bags, and made sure we had our invites more than once. Tonight was going to be epic. I could feel it.

We were doing this.

We were going to the club—together.

Not just to play, although we were definitely going to do that, but maybe, just maybe, we'd catch the eye of the hot daddy we were both interested in. But even if he didn't come, I was going to have fun with Tristan. We clicked in more ways than I ever considered possible with another little.

Thanks to his position, Tristan had access to any of the dressing rooms if no one else reserved them for the night. And while the one we got wasn't fancy or decked out with little themes, and it felt more high school locker room than luxury, it gave us what we needed as we got ready: privacy.

"Tristan," I said, voice low. "Can I get you ready tonight? Can I take care of you?"

His eyes widened just slightly. “Yeah,” he whispered. “As long as I can get you ready too.”

Like I could turn that down.

We slowly undressed each other, planning to put on our new clothes immediately afterward. but standing there, with him naked in front of me had me hard as a rock, and his cock mirrored mine.

“It might not be the best idea to go out there with a boner.” Tristan licked his lips, his eyes on my erection. “It’s not like we can hide them under our clothing.”

Neither of us had brought diapers, just two pairs of thick underwear. Diapers were the only chance we had of keeping our arousals from being too evident to the wrong people. Honestly, we hadn’t expected to need them, not without a daddy present. Diapers alone were not the same as with a caregiver, not by any stretch. And besides, that was more Tristan’s thing than mine.

“I...think I need help taking care of that,” Tristan murmured, his cheeks pink, his eyes still glued to my length.

“Do you?” I asked, brushing his hair back with my fingers.

He nodded.

I yanked him into a searing kiss, mumbling against his lips, “Only if that means I get to take care of yours, too.”

He groaned, his eyes fluttering shut as he dropped to his knees in front of me. The room seemed to quiet around us. Gone were the noises of the people walking by, leaving only him and us and this moment.

His hands slid up my thighs, slow and firm, like I was everything he desired. I wove my fingers through his hair, careful not to push him while letting him see and feel how much I wanted this.

He wasn't rushed or frantic, the way I would've been had I got there first. He was so much more controlled in his desire, kissing a path up my thigh, heading to where I longed him to be. I didn't care if we ever made it out of this dressing room as long as he didn't stop.

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James

The event was packed. Although it was a daddy/mommy/little shindig, other club members had contributed items for the silent auction, and the only reason they weren't there in person was because it had sold out.

Chained had a reputation, among those who knew it existed, for being community minded, and that rep was well earned. In the time I'd been a member, I'd attended many parties and balls and auctions and other such things for charities in the city and actually around the world. But this one was especially exciting to me because it was to help the people who had saved my King from neglect and sadness. While he hadn't been directly abused, some of their rescues were, and the day I picked up King, I wanted to take every one of them home with me. Only the assurance that they were all being treated like royalty until their furever person showed up convinced me to go with just him.

I contributed automatically every month, but what was more meaningful were the days I put in helping out. So I knew the staff well and was delighted to see Ray and Georgie at Chained. They were not members, but they were daddy and little, just the kind who preferred to live their lives in privacy. But for this evening, they were here, wearing their City GoldenDoodle T-shirts and smiling ear to ear.

The auction, while it was likely to be the biggest earner for the dogs, was not the part that drew the members. If I had to guess, it was the dogs.

"You brought Dutterpup and Elsie!" I went to my knees to hug the pair. They had been King's buddies at the rescue, and the only reason they were still there was they

were Ray and Georgie's actual pets. Others came and went, but when I showed up to volunteer, I had to bring King and let him play in the guys' kitchen while I scooped the poop or made dog food or whatever they needed me to do. "How are you cuties?"

"Where's King?" Ray ruffled Dutterpup's ears. "I thought you'd bring him."

"I wish I had, but nobody told me it was allowed. If he finds out his friends were here, he's going to be angry with me."

"I won't tell," Georgie said, "but I cannot promise about Elsie. She's a gossip."

I walked with them to the function room, where everything was set up for today's activities. Is this your first visit?" I asked them. "I know it's not your thing in general to be in a crowd, but a lot of people just come to pass the time of day and visit with like-minded folks. At least part of the time."

"It is the first time, but who knows. Maybe in the future, we'll get a visitor's pass. Truthfully, we don't get out much with all the dogs to care for."

"If you ever want a date night, I'm your sitter," I avowed. "King and I will be right over to take care of the doodles. They like us."

"They sure do. Now, where do we set up our display?" Georgie, the little, was not little tonight, rather all business, but he still managed to be adorable. I didn't know how; a skill I guessed.

Miss Lily sailed over at that moment and took each of them by the arm. "Come and see what we did with all your posters and brochures and things. We've been talking you up every day, and I want to show you the silent auction items. World travel, paintings, a sailboat if you can believe it. And all the little competitions tonight? We're calling it a fun day, but it's kind of the little world games."

Having not seen most of this myself, I was trailing along behind when I spotted the two littles who'd been kissing that night. After meeting Tristan here and not hearing back from him, I'd begun to think they weren't at all interested, but when I stood nearby, Tristan caught sight of me.

"Bell, it's the daddy from that night. I told you I saw him here one other time as well. When we were having the wedding and I helped with it."

"James," I said. "Nice to meet you."

"I remember." Bell smiled at me, and I couldn't help but smile back. At both of them. They were in mix-and-match little ensembles covered with the most adorable bunnies and puppies, and even their knee-high socks carried on the theme. "Nice to meet you too."

We stood and talked a little bit. They weren't fully in little headspace yet, but that didn't do anything to negate the cuteness overload.

They were so excited, and I wasn't sure if it was to see me or because of the fun contests planned, but five minutes later, they each grabbed my arm and towed me over to where the competitions were all set up. They put their heads together and whispered, then Tristan said, "Will you be our daddy for the day? Play with us?"

"It would be my honor. What would you like to do first?"

I was only grateful that the daddy's job in the "athletic" competitions was that of cheerleader and waterboy. Because the obstacle course, zip line, and other games looked pretty tough to me. Tristan and Bell, on the other hand, were fearless. They did the baby-crawl race and came in second and third. "How many times can you go down the slide in a minute" they didn't win but loved. Several other races, corn hole, ring toss...I lost count, but by the second hour, while the silent auction was being

announced, every little boy and girl was wearing multiple medals around their necks, and they were starting to look kind of sweaty and ragged. But happy. So many smiles.

I found some paper towels and mopped their foreheads, presenting them with their third bottles of water and asked if they wanted to take a little rest.

Bell shook his head hard. “We haven’t even played the best part,” he insisted. “It’s over here. So sparkly.”

“Sparkly?” I was starting to get a bad feeling. And I was right. Of course, management knew the littles would overdo and need to sit down. But they wouldn’t want to just sit quietly, so art project. But why...glitter.

And then I saw the models they were working from and had to laugh. Dutterpup and Elsie sat in front of the art table, posing with sparkly accessories like scarves and hats on, and the littles were vying with one another to make their drawing just as sparkly as the goldens. I took comfort in the fact that we weren’t at the point where I would be shampooing the glitter out of anyone’s hair and sat down on the sidelines to watch.

When they finished, Tristan and Bell raced over to show me their work. A trail of glitter littered the floor behind them, but it didn’t stop me from admiring their work. “Does Elsie have on sparkly shoes?” I asked Georgie.

“No, but she wants to.”

Made perfect sense to me.

So much money was raised for the rescue, and we finished off our fun time having refreshments before heading back toward the front. They had mentioned having a dressing room and I almost offered to go in and help them change, but then I didn’t. It was up to them if they wanted, but we’d had an incredible time together, and it was

enough. Not enough...but enough. I left them at the dressing room door with a kiss on the cheek and their agreement to go out with me.

Best event ever.

Tristan

Tonight was my first solo date with James, and I was excited—but also nervous. It was one thing for him to like spending time with the two of us together, but would he still like me, just me, on my own? And if I messed it up, well, not messed up exactly, but if it just didn't click, what would that mean for the three of us? For him and Bellamy? This was meant to be a low-key night of getting to know each other, but it felt like so much more than that.

It was safe to say I was putting too much pressure on myself. But I couldn't help it. I wanted it to work so badly. I'd never thought of myself as poly in any sense. I'd always dreamed of meeting a nice man, settling down, and growing old together. Of course, as I discovered my little side, I added that man being my daddy to the equation, but it had always been one plus one equals couple .

But now that I had Bell in my life and a daddy who wanted us both, that dream had changed. I waited for jealousy to rear its ugly head when it came to the two men who were worming their way into my heart. It hadn't and I suspected it never would. If anything, I liked the idea of them being together a bit too much and woke up hard after dreams of the two of them having naked fun. I wasn't sure I would call myself poly because I suspected my desire for them both had more to do with the two of them than my actual longings in general, but I'd never been huge into labels, anyway.

“What do you think?” I stood in Bellamy's doorway wearing what Bell called my “good-ass jeans” and a button-down shirt. It wasn't fancy, but it didn't look like I was dashing out on a dump run or heading to the hardware store.

“I...I don’t know.” He tilted his head. “I think you need to turn around slowly. I need all of the information before I decide.”

He looked at me like he already had his answer and it was a positive one. Still, I stepped inside and did as he asked, making sure to add an extra little wiggle when my ass was in his direction.

“Yeah, I think that’ll do.” He crossed over to me, grabbed me by my belt loops, and pulled me close. “Are you gonna think of me when you’re out?” He nipped my bottom lip.

“How could I not?” I kissed him back, the kiss getting pretty intense pretty fast, only breaking apart when we were both out of breath.

He brought his lips to my ear. “Be sure to tell Daddy all about this kiss during your date and how hard you made me.”

“You’re killing me, Bell.”

“But what a way to go.” He rubbed his cheek against mine then stepped back enough to turn me around and smack my ass. “Now go. Go have fun with Daddy. And if there’s any good stuff, maybe you could tell me about it when you get home.”

“Ugh. You’re a menace.”

“Live with it. Now go be a good boy for Daddy.”

After adjusting myself, I headed downstairs to wait for James. My timing was pretty good. He showed up a few minutes later, and we were off on our first official solo date.

I wasn't sure where we were going, and honestly, I didn't care. If he'd said he wanted to walk around a big-box store and look for clearance socks, I would've been excited about it—because it was with him. But of course, he had a better idea.

He took me to an old drive-in-theater-themed restaurant I'd never been to before. It was adorable. All the chairs were made from old car seats, each table complete with its own little TV where you could pick what old movie you wanted to watch. And by old, I didn't mean from the early 2000s—these were oldie oldies. Only one of the movie choices was even in color.

“What do you think?” He set his menu down. “Do you know what you're having?”

I looked at the menu again, the one I'd been holding for ten minutes, and realized not a single item had stuck in my brain. I was just too excited—about where we were, about who I was with—to focus.

“Maybe I'll just ask the server to pick.”

He reached across the table and placed his hand over mine. “How about I pick for you?”

I like the sound of that. A lot. “Please.”

He rewarded me with a huge smile. If that was what I got for being good, he was never going to see brat behavior from me...ever.

When the server came, James ordered for both of us. I wasn't even sure what I was getting—each menu item had the same name as one of the old movies playing. But it didn't matter. He knew me well enough by now to avoid my major dislikes, and that was good enough for me.

We were starting to talk about which movie to watch when someone stopped by the table. I turned and was shocked to see one of my dad's friends from church.

"Mr. Riley." I'd always called him that. I was sure he had a real name, but that wasn't how things worked in my family. "Nice to see you."

It was the opposite of nice, but pleasantries it was.

"Nice to see you. Are your dates coming soon?"

Of course, he assumed we were on a double date. It was outside his grasp of reality that two men could be out for any other reason. At least not in a place like this.

"No, Mr. Riley. It's just us." I pinched the bridge of my nose. This was not a conversation I wanted to be having. Not because I was embarrassed by James—I wasn't. Or that I was embarrassed by who I was—I definitely wasn't. But because this would inevitably lead to judginess and mentions of the interaction to my father.

James didn't need to deal with any of that.

"This is my first time here," James said, sounding far more chipper than I was at the moment. "I heard the food is delicious. Did you want to join the two of us?"

Mr. Riley looked like he'd been drop-kicked. "Oh, no, no. I was just leaving. It was nice to see you both. I'll be sure to tell your father I saw you."

"That sounds...swell, Mr. Riley." I was not sad to see him race away, but I wished he hadn't added the bit about telling my father. Ever since I moved out, my parents had been cordial but distant. I wanted to keep it that way.

"Guessing there's a story there," James said.

“Yeah. My family...they’re a little involved in their church, which doesn’t quite align with, well, me. And who I am.”

“Then I made the right call.” He gave a mischievous grin.

“What do you mean?”

“Inviting him to join us,” James said, “then punctuating it with a wink.”

“Oh my gods. You did not wink at Mr. Riley.” I’d been so focused on my father’s friend that I missed that. No wonder his jaw nearly went into the basement.

He nodded, grinning. “Got him out of here quick, didn’t it?”

“You are my hero.”

“I wasn’t going for hero status,” he said, leaning closer. “I have another title in mind.”

Daddy.

“You’re ridiculous.” And also, he already had that title, at least in my mind. “But also, thanks for that.”

I wasn’t really sure what to say other than that. I didn’t want to talk about my homophobic parents on our first date—but I didn’t want to hide things from him either. Letting this conversation lie here felt like the perfect way to go.

“I didn’t make things worse for you, did I?”

“Nah. I think that ship sailed when I got a job at Chained.” Before that, really, but

that was what cut the anchor free.

The rest of the night was just the two of us getting to know each other, eating delicious burgers, and watching what used to be a horror movie—but was now mostly just funny. Campy. The monster moved slower than slow, knocking down fake trees one at a time.

The date was perfect.

Except...I missed Bellamy. And that left me with two choices: keep it to myself so as not to hurt James' feelings, or be honest. If this relationship had any hope, honesty had to come first leaving only one real option.

"Is it weird that I miss Bell?"

"No," James said. "It'd be weirder if you didn't."

"I think that's good...because I do."

"Thank you for telling me," he said. "Means a lot to me that you already trust me with something that big."

I hadn't thought of it as a trust thing. But he was right. It was, and I did.

"Does that mean I was a good boy and get dessert?"

"Of course. Do you want something here, or should we go for ice cream?"

I slid right out of my seat, ready to go, not wasting time with actual words.

Daddy chuckled. "Ice cream it is, Tristan. Ice cream it is."

Bellamy

Tristan had a great date with James. He didn't give a lot of details, which was fine, but I could tell by his smile when he came in that evening that things had gone well. His eyes were red-rimmed, so at first, I thought something bad happened, but he assured me they had a bonding moment.

I was happy for them. I thought there might be a bit of jealousy but instead, there was nothing of the sort. Inside, I warmed with happiness for them.

Even more, I was excited for my own date with James. We had gotten to know each other with Tristan and I together but not one on one.

I'd been excited from the moment my eyes fluttered open that morning, and now that it was time to get dressed, I vibrated with it.

"Are you okay?" Tristan asked, sticking his head into the door opening after he knocked.

I stood there with a towel wrapped around my waist. One of my suits just wouldn't do. Those were for the office, and this was no legal meeting. "Come in. I'm trying to decide what to wear."

"Do you know where he's taking you?" Tristan asked, already taking the liberty of pushing hangers aside, scanning my clothes.

"A restaurant. He said it was less casual but nothing formal. While that sounds nice, I

have no idea what that means in terms of what I should wear.”

Eventually, we decided a button-down shirt and some casual pants would work. No tucking in the shirt. Sleeves rolled up at the elbow. A pair of Converse I hadn’t even taken out of the box yet. He stayed with me while I sat on the couch and waited for James to arrive. One thing about the daddy, he was always on time, early even. So five minutes before seven, when the doorbell rang, both Tristan and I stood up.

“He’s here. I’m going to go back to my room. Have so much fun.”

“No. Come to the door with me. We’re in this together.” I took Tristan’s hand in mine, and we walked to the door to greet James. When we opened it, the smile that creased his face was onesie-melting. He was dressed similar to me but ten times more handsome.

“I was wondering if I’d get to see both of you. Tristan, I hope you’re well.”

“I am. Thank you. You two have a good time.”

James placed a kiss on Tristan’s cheek and then reached for my hand. It felt weird leaving Tristan behind but, if this was all going to work, then each of us had to have time with James. We would be stronger together that way, better roots. “Shall we?”

I waved to Tristan, and James showed me to his car where he opened the passenger door for me. We drove to a place that I’d never seen before. The restaurant was tucked into a gathering of trees whose branches and leaves gave it an umbrella of concealment.

“Thank you for coming out with me tonight. I was eager to have you all to myself, I have to admit.” James was a romantic, and it showed.

“I’m excited about it too. This place looks cozy and private.”

He nodded. He’d turned off the car, and we sat there with a few streetlights the only glow lighting up his face. “Before we go in, I was hoping…”

“Hoping what?” I asked, eager to hear what he had to say. James didn’t mince words, so it was strange to hear him fumble to finish his sentence. The world around us became eerily quiet, or maybe it was just me tuning out everything but the sexy man in the driver’s seat.

“I was hoping to kiss you before we went in. I’ve missed you.”

Heat flooded my veins. He missed me. This perfect, handsome man missed me. “I’ve missed you too. And, of course. You can kiss me anytime you want to.”

“Oh, good. Come here.” We leaned over and I gasped as his lips met mine. They were soft and full. He placed his hand on the side of my neck and urged me closer to him. The kiss deepened and, before long, I wanted to leave the restaurant, and food was the last thing on my mind.

However, my stomach soon rumbled, interrupting that plan.

“Ah, I’m keeping you from eating. Let’s get you inside and fed.”

“Oh.” Still reeling from the kiss, I took the few moments to calm myself while he came to open my door from me. We shared another sweet kiss before walking hand in hand into the restaurant.

The place was as comforting as it looked from the outside. Wood tables were accented with soft amber lighting on each one. The leather chairs were comfortable and felt more like one you would sit in at home than a place to eat.

“Tell me about yourself, Bellamy.”

I shrugged. I didn't like to talk about myself or my job. I'd once been told I was boastful about all of it, but that wasn't true. I was simply telling the truth. “What do you want to know?”

James beamed. “Everything. Let's start with how you're a lawyer at such a young age.”

My cheeks instantly warmed. “I graduated high school at sixteen with some college credits already on record and completed my law degree in what they would call record time. The law firm I worked for offered me summer internships when I was in school and, before I graduated, I was offered a position. I've been with them ever since.”

James leaned back, arms crossed over his chest. “That's impressive. That's incredible. Your work days must be very stressful.”

I nodded. “They are. But I'm glad I'm able to help people. I told the firm when I came in that I wanted to have the freedom to pick my cases. If they hadn't agreed, I would be working for a nonprofit, I think. I've only ever wanted to help people.”

We talked more about both of us through the night, but more and more I missed Tristan, and I told him so.

James chuckled. “You know, Tristan said the same thing last night. That he missed you.”

By the end of the meal, I realized nothing felt right unless the three of us were together.

“I don’t want the night to end,” James said.

“It doesn’t have to,” I whispered. “I’m off tomorrow. Tristan is off tomorrow too.”

James bit down on his bottom lip. “How would you feel about calling Tristan and asking if he wanted to join us at my house.”

“You want us to spend the night at your house?” I asked, my tummy buzzing with a billion butterflies.

“I do. Do you want to?”

Instead of answering, I got my phone out and called Tristan. He answered on the first ring. “Bellamy, is everything okay?”

“Everything is great. James and I were just talking about how much we missed you and James wanted us to spend the night at his house. What do you think? We could swing by in a few minutes and pick you up.”

Tristan sighed. “I was lying here missing both of you as well. Please hurry. I’m packing a bag.”

“What did he say?”

“He is packing a bag.”

James chuckled and rubbed his chest. “Damn, I am so lucky to have found you two. I wished for a partner to share this life with, but I never dreamed I would find two of you. The gods have most certainly smiled on me.”

We arrived at the house in record time and I rushed in to get Tristan. We told him all

about our date and how much we missed him being around.

“I know we agreed solo dates would be good,” I said. “But let’s not ever do this again.”

Tristan reached to hold my hand in the car. “I feel the same way. James?”

“Absolutely agreed. But if either of you needs a bit more time and care, please let me know. I would hate to accidentally give favor to one of you. Promise you’ll tell me.”

We talked all the way to James’ house, and what a house it was.

“Let’s go inside, my sweet ones.”

James

“Oh my god, he’s a goldendoodle! Like Dutterpup and Elsie.” Tristan fell on his knees in front of King, who accepted his hugs and pets as his due. My dog had never met anyone he didn’t like—at least not while he’d been in my care, and I didn’t like to think that he’d had a rough time before City GoldenDoodle. All I could do was make his life as perfect as possible going forward. “What a good boy.”

“He actually is besties with Dutterpup and Elsie. When I volunteer there, he comes along to visit.”

“Wow, you volunteer at the shelter, too?” Tristan scratched King under the chin. “That’s very nice of you.”

“Well, my friend comes from there, and I’m very grateful for the good care they gave him.” I led the way into the living room. “Who wants something to drink?”

Nobody said a word.

“Who wants the tour?”

Two hands went up.

“All right, then, this is the living room, and the kitchen is through the door on the left.” I gestured as we passed the doorway. “If you wake up hungry or thirsty, please go on in and have anything you want.” Proceeding on, I led them up the stairs. “There’s also a den downstairs and a dining room, and up here, we have the

bedrooms.”

I opened the door of each and showed them the rooms. The master had an ensuite, and the other two, smaller bedrooms across the hallway had a shared Jack-and-Jill-style bathroom. I didn’t want them to think I was assuming anything. If they wanted to stay over just in a friendly way, so be it. “And that’s all we got. All the beds are made up, so you can stay in whichever one you like.”

“You don’t want us to stay with you?” Tristan’s voice was so unsure, I regretted what I’d said. But it was still important.

“I do want you to, but if you’d rather just watch a movie and have a snack then go to one of the guest rooms and be alone or even if the two of you just want to be together, I respect that. Your choice.”

“And one of those choices is spending the night in bed with you?” Bell asked, standing tall but not meeting my gaze. “Is that all right?”

“Yes, it is.” So much more than all right. “As long as you’re sure. But maybe you’d like to—”

Bell opened my bedroom door and peeked in. He glanced back at me, and I rested a hand on the small of his back.

“Come in.”

Somehow, at that moment, any hesitation on any of our parts melted away, along with our clothes. I shut the door behind us to keep King from wandering in and then took Tristan’s and Bell’s hands and tugged them toward the bed. I wanted them there, in my nest so to speak, where I could touch their skin and kiss any part of them I wanted to. I landed in the middle, which worked well for me, and we were all kissing.

I couldn't have said who was kissing me in any particular spot at any time, and I doubted they could either, but when someone ended up straddling my hips, I opened my eyes to find Tristan there, and my cock nudging his hot hole. "There are condoms," I gasped, but he shook his head.

"You don't need them unless you have something?"

"No, I've been tested," Tristan said. "You fine too?"

"I am now. But, Bell, grab the lube from the nightstand." He not only grabbed it, but he squirted it on my cock and stroked it in before working a dollop into the other little's hole. When he leaned back, the tip of my cock prodded at his hole, pushing through the tight ring of muscles and into his hot, tight body. Then, as I paused gripping Tristan's hips and holding him still, allowing him to adjust, Bell threw a leg over my shoulders and presented me with a long, stiff cock I couldn't wait to get my mouth around.

Each of them, in the dim light filtering in from the hallway, was like a work of art, and I wanted to taste them, fuck them, and stroke them slowly to sleep afterward. So we set about doing all those things, configuring differently each time throughout our first night together. Both of them had hot tight asses, and I did my best to be sure I filled them as many times as my body permitted, which was more than I'd ever experienced before. Having the two men made for me had that effect.

When we finally collapsed onto the bed, utterly spent, I gathered them close and held them to me, never wanting them any farther away from me than this. King was going to have to learn to spend some of his nights in the hallway.

Yet, I woke to sunshine, my men, and at the foot of the bed a smug-looking goldendoodle. He'd gotten one of them to let him in, the tricky beast. Love me, love my dog.

Tristan

The ceremony was...small. Tame and tiny compared to a typical graduation. There weren't many of us who finished midyear, and most of us opted to wait until spring to walk with the full class. But I didn't need all that fanfare. I was proud of myself for figuring out how to salvage the rest of my academic career while balancing my job and not one but two partners. I wanted to be done and to hold my diploma in my hand, not wait for a big fancy event. In fact, it was small enough I'd suggested King come along, but he was visiting with his besties at the rescue, so that was all right. He'd have a better time there anyway, and I could tell him all about it later.

I'd managed to take the last few classes online and finally be done despite all the odds against me. I didn't get any of the scholarships I'd hoped for, but I paid for the classes a couple at a time—two in the summer, two this fall—and that was enough to get me across the finish line.

Despite the small ceremony, the cheering when they called my name wrapped around me like a hug. I waved my diploma in the air as I crossed the stage and moved back down to the rows reserved for the new graduates, scanning the area from familiar faces and instantly seeing my daddy and Bell.

I'd known that Bellamy and James would be in the audience. What I hadn't been as sure of were my mom and dad. I'd have been surprised if they were there, and they weren't. When I'd invited them, they'd said it wasn't a "real" graduation. Which it 100 percent was. Any hope I had that they'd changed their mind had vanished.

Didn't their lack of attendance perfectly sum up their parenting style? If it wasn't

exactly what they envisioned...what they deemed the “right” path, then it didn’t count in their eyes. That went for my graduation, as well as for my relationship. But I’d come to terms with it. And this time? It didn’t even hurt, like I thought it would.

That felt like a step forward.

As soon as the ceremony was officially over and the orchestra played their final piece, I ran straight to my men, who pulled me into a three-way hug and showered me with praise.

“You did it! You did it!” Bellamy peppered my cheek with kisses.

“So proud of you,” James murmured, rubbing his cheek against mine. “It’s time to go celebrate.”

We were staying in town at a hotel. It wasn’t fancy, but it was clean and cozy, everything we needed for the night. It felt nice, having one bedroom for the three of us.

We’d been spending more time at Daddy’s place than at home lately, but between my job and finishing school, we weren’t at the point where we saw him every day. I did see Bellamy every day—that was because we lived together. And honestly? I wished we all lived together, wished it to the point where it started to fill my thoughts regularly. But the time hadn’t been right to bring it up.

Now that I’d graduated and could maybe get a “real” job...maybe now was the time.

I tossed my graduation cap and ropes onto the dresser and slipped out of my gown. It was nice being all formal, but I was ready to be free of it all. “Let’s go someplace to celebrate.”

Bellamy raised a brow.

“Someplace...maybe we can talk and get a good meal?” As opposed to the restaurant downstairs that was already jam packed, thanks to it being open-mic night.

“Is everything okay?” James asked. “You seem nervous.”

“Shouldn’t you be all relieved and stuff?” Bellamy saw it too. Great. I was making them worry when what I wanted to talk about was something good. At least, in my mind, it was good, but regardless, it was hardly bad.

“Yeah, but...I’ve been considering something. I thought maybe we could talk about it.” The second the words left my mouth, I realized how ominous it sounded. I’d somehow managed to make it worse. There was no way I hadn’t just sounded like I was about to break up with them or drop some bad news like I was offered a job in Antarctica or someplace equally far.

So, as usual, I blurted it all out at once. “I don’t like us living apart anymore. I love you both, and I want us all to live together.” I was speaking a mile a minute.

Daddy crossed the room to me and placed his hand gently on my shoulder. “Say that again—maybe this time a little slower?”

I sucked in a deep breath and did my best to speak at a more decent rate. “I don’t like that you have your place and we have ours. I want us all to be together.”

“We understood that part,” Bellamy said, touching my chest. “Can you do the other part again?”

“What part?” Now I was confused.

“The part where you said you love us both.” Bell gave me my favorite grin.

“Oh, the part where I said I love you.”

“Yeah. That part.” Bell watched my face. “Can you do it again?”

“I-I thought I just did.”

“Yeah, I think we need one more time.” Daddy tapped my nose.

I smiled. They weren’t going to let me botch this too much.

“I love you, Bell. And I love you, James. And what I don’t love is spending nights apart. This hotel room—cheesy and dated as it is—has me so ridiculously happy, because I know at the end of the night, we’re going to tumble into that bed together. And in the morning, no one’s sneaking out early for work, or heading home to shower, or worrying about the right toothbrush or if we packed the right clothes. It’s just...us here together.” I took a breath and expressed my fear. “I don’t know—is it too fast?”

“No, my sweet boy,” James said, brushing hair from my face. “I don’t think it’s too fast. I’ve been thinking about it too.”

“Me three,” Bellamy added, kissing my cheek.

“So...are we gonna do this?” Please let us be doing this. “All of us under one roof?”

“Yeah. Let’s do this.” Bell squeed.

“Excellent.” Daddy kissed first me and then Bell.

“Let’s go celebrate!” I started for the door, but they hung back. “Are you two coming?”

“First,” James said, “we bought you something. A present.”

“Of course. The present.” Bell bounced on the balls of his feet. “You graduated and need prezzies.”

Daddy placed his suitcase on the bed, opened it up, and pulled out a gift bag. “This is from Bell and me.”

I reached inside, pushing aside the tissue paper until I found the frame. I pulled it out—it was a photo of the three of us, together. Nothing too fancy or formal and yet absolutely perfect.

“I love it, guys.”

“We figured you needed a picture of your family in your room,” Daddy said. “Or, I guess, now...our room.”

“Family,” I whispered, smiling. “I love the sound of that. It’s absolutely perfect.”

They didn’t need me to say why it mattered so much. They knew. My family not being there that day only made the separation between them and me more obvious. But this—this was them choosing to be my family. To claim me in the most significant way.

It meant everything.

Bellamy pulled me close. “I really do love you both.”

James joined in, wrapping around me from the other side, and I became the center of a very warm, very happy, very hot sandwich. “I love you, too...both of you.”

“So much love in this room, I almost hate to leave it.” And if Bell’s stomach wasn’t rumbling, I might’ve considered not. “Let’s hurry up and grab dinner so we can come back here and test out this big fancy bed.”

We were out the door in record time.

Bellamy

It had been a couple of weeks since James asked us both to move in with him. We spent most nights there, but last night, we'd stayed at the little house. It was a bit nostalgic for me and Tristan. After all, this was the place Tristan found safety, understanding, and belonging when it seemed the rest of the world had turned their backs on him.

"Any more boxes?" James asked from the front door.

I shook my head no, but Tristan gave him one last cube of a box labeled bathroom stuff . "This is the last one."

All that was left was to say goodbye to our friends. We would see them again, of course. At the club, we all promised to see each other in between and keep in touch, but it was still a bit sad.

More than anything, I was happy. Tristan and I found a place to belong with a daddy and partner who loved us for who we were. And as a bonus, we'd found each other as well.

"Give us all hugs," Monroe announced. Goodbyes were hard, but he was trying to keep a smile on his face. I didn't know if that was for us or for him but, either way, it worked. We all shared hugs while James stood by the door, arms crossed over his chest, a huge grin on his face. I knew he looked incredible on our dates and in the club but today, with a plain white T-shirt on and worn jeans that cupped his ass, I thought he looked the handsomest. A bit red-faced. A sheen of sweat made his face

glisten from all the hard work.

James might've been the happiest of us all.

He'd made room in his house not only for the three of us to be comfortable but already had a playroom ready. He stocked it with all the things we liked and promised us a shopping spree when we all had a day off. He was simply the best, and the fact that I got to share him with Tristan made that even more special.

We got into the truck, and James treated both of us to a smoothie. It was getting hot out, and we'd worked hard to get everything moved in one day.

That night, after we'd unpacked all of our things and gotten fully settled, we sat on the couch, blissfully exhausted.

"How about some dinner? Anything you want. We'll have it delivered. We're all beyond tired."

Neither of us spoke.

"Come on. I know there's something you two want. You're pretty much always in sync. What is it? Thai? Indian? Pizza?"

"Thai," Tristan and I both said at the same time.

"That's what I thought. Thai sounds amazing. The spicy, crispy chicken?"

We nodded. That was one of my favorite dishes in the world.

"White rice or fried?"

Jamies got out his phone and put in the order. He didn't like us to eat out all the time, saying it wasn't healthy for us, but tonight was special. I agreed with him. My meals of takeout had begun to get stale, but now that the three of us were living together, we could share the meal making. But James loved to cook for us. Especially breakfast. Silver dollar pancakes were his specialty.

"It's going to be about an hour. What should we do until then? How about some playtime while I clean up the kitchen. It needs a deep clean."

"We can help you," Tristan offered.

James ruffled his hair and leaned over to kiss his temple. He was always affectionate with us, and we both soaked it up. "I know you can, but I think after the day we've had, you two need some downtime. Don't you agree?"

Tristan looked at me. "Bellamy?"

"I could use a breather," I replied. "But we can clean the kitchen afterward."

"I've got it. Don't you worry."

We changed into our soft overalls, and Tristan had a onesie underneath. We held hands going to the playroom and made a beeline for the new record player James had bought us. He'd also gotten us a collection of little music that brought smiles to our lips and helped us settle in. James was the best daddy. He thought of everything to make our lives as easy and calm as possible. Once we chose a record that told stories about trains, we sat with our new train set and set up the tracks to be as silly as possible. Tristan pulled back the train once the tracks were set and let it go. It wrecked over the bridge we'd built, and we both laughed at our silliness.

"I think we made it too high. It can't go over the top."

We were immersed in play when the doorbell rang. We listened in while James greeted the delivery person and as we knew from experience, probably gave him a generous tip.

“He’s the best,” Tristan said, leaning his head on my shoulder.

“He really is. We should do something special for his birthday.”

For a few minutes, we planned James’ birthday. We both had good ideas, and it would be one heck of a celebration.

“What are you two conspiring about?” James chuckled. I hadn’t noticed he’d come in. And from Tristan’s surprised expression, neither had he.

“Something special, but it’s a secret,” Tristan answered him.

“A secret from me? That’s not nice.”

“It’s a good secret,” I intervened. “Nothing bad. We promise.”

“Of course,” James said. He opened his arms for us and we ran to him, again, so eager for his embrace and affection. I didn’t think I would ever get enough. “You two are so sweet. I’m sure it’s something very special indeed. Now, who’s hungry.”

We went to the kitchen and ate together, and James promised us a long bubble bath but only if we ate our veggies. That was him, always taking care of us.

James

Quite the birthday party my littles had planned for me. We had cake and ice cream and games, coffee and tea for the bigs and chocolate milk or lemonade for the littles. Finger sandwiches, which the littles made to look like real fingers, lots of fresh fruit to dip in chocolate fondue, and dishes brought by all our friends from Chained. It was wonderful and fun and messy and not a single piece of glitter was used in any of the party games and crafts.

“Because it’s our favorite but not yours,” Tristan told me. “And there’s a big glitter project next Tuesday at the club.” My mood went up and down very fast on that one.

“He’s teasing, Daddy,” Bell said with a severe glare at the other little.

“Oh, okay.”

“The glitter project is in two weeks.”

But even that couldn’t stop me from having a wonderful time sitting with my daddy friends and watching the littles have a blast. Even the City GoldenDoodle owners came, and turned out, while they were not club people, they really enjoyed the playdate vibe of the birthday party.

Was it a surprise? I’d never tell, but I made sure to act like it was, and they were so gleeful when they led me blindfolded into the playroom where all our friends were waiting that it was worth anything in the world to maybe pretend.

Balloons and streamers galore, all held up with big triangles of blue painter's tape leftover from painting the playroom. So many decorations. Bridger, sipping a cup of jasmine tea, took another stitch in his crochet and pointed to the ball pit I'd added in the corner. "You know I'm going to have to get one of those for Hudson, now."

I laughed. "Or you can just come over here for playdates anytime you like." In the past several months, I'd gone from starting to think I didn't have it in me to want a little of my own again, to realizing it was because I only wanted these littles. They brightened my days and nights with their laughter and their need for macaroni and cheese and when we curled up on the couch with King, we all shared the popcorn.

I looked around at all of them and noticed Ray and Georgie were nowhere in sight. "Did you see where the GoldenDoodle people went?"

Mark shrugged and Bridger shook his head. "They were just here," he said. "Maybe the restroom."

"Probably." I settled back in to watch the fun, but suddenly everyone stopped and faced the doorway and the question of where the rescuers had gone was answered. Ray entered first, and said, "Recently, we have found homes for so many of our residents, and we give the people of Chained much of the credit." He smiled. "And all the funds raised upgraded our facilities so much, but we also had something happen we hadn't anticipated. You see, since a certain dog was rescued, his mother gave birth to one more pup we didn't know about. He wasn't hurt or neglected, but he did come into our care, and we thought, that is if you want..."

Georgie pushed past him with an armload of fluff and thrust him into my lap.

Ray cleared his throat. "If you want him, this is Duke, and we thought he'd be nice company for King."

My eyes filled and my throat tightened as I cuddled the puppy close.

“It’s not just me that has to decide now,” I said. “A puppy is a big responsibility, and there are three of us in this home. Two who might not be big enough to care for him.” Like there was the slightest chance this puppy was leaving!

“Four.” Tristan called King over. “What do you think, boy? Can your brother come to stay?”

My wonderful dog, the one who kept me company when I was lonelier than I wanted to admit, nuzzled his brother and whuffed .

“You’d almost think he knows him already,” I mused. “But I’ve never seen Duke when I am volunteering.”

Tristan and Bell exchanged a guilty look.

“Fess up, boys,” I ordered, wondering what they were keeping from me. It wouldn’t be bad. My boys were never that.

“You know how you had to work two Saturdays ago?” Bell asked, wringing his hands in front of him.

“Yes. I remember.”

“Well, we’ve been volunteering with you lately,” Tristan added, as if it was new information.

“Uh-huh?”

“So we went on our own, and we might have seen Duke there...”

“Can we keep him?” Tristan asked, hope in his eyes and lower lip thrust out. “I’ll feed him and Bell will pick up the poop.”

“Me? I thought we agreed that you would do that.” My littles weren’t all that little at the moment, but their bickering was adorable nonetheless, and once we’d established that they would take turns with all the puppy jobs, they crawled over to the train set and joined their friends.

Big or little, I loved these men more than the whole world combined. This playroom would see so many fun playdates with friends or just us, the dogs would take up any empty space on the sofa, and my heart was full unto bursting.

I couldn’t imagine a happier birthday.