



A NAUGHTY OR NICE STORY

*A Daddy
For Kinkmas*

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

REESE MORRISON

A DADDY FOR KINKMAS

NAUGHTY OR NICE SEASON THREE

REESE MORRISON

CONTENTS

Untitled

Naughty or Nice Season Three

Author's Note

1. David
2. Naftali
3. David
4. Naftali
5. David
6. David
7. Naftali
8. David
9. Naftali
10. David
11. David
12. Naftali
13. David
14. Naftali
15. David
16. Naftali
17. David
18. David
19. Naftali
20. David
21. Naftali
22. David
23. Naftali
24. David
25. Naftali
26. David
27. Naftali

Epilogue

Books by Reese Morrison

Cuffed Collection

About the Author

Thank you!

*A Daddy
For Kinkmas*

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Naughty or Nice Season Three

A Daddy for Kinkmas (Naughty or Nice Season Three)

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Content Warning

This book contains sexually explicit and kinky material which is suitable for mature readers only. All kink represented is shown with consent, communication, care, and love. This book also contains a brief scene (at the beginning of chapter 18) where a character is deliberately misgendered and disrespected for his autistic traits, though he has the support of many others who value him.

NAUGHTY OR NICE SEASON THREE

This book is part of the *Naughty or Nice Season Three* multi-author series. Each book can be read as a standalone, but there are so many Daddies and boys finding their happily-ever-afters, why not grab them all?

A Cutie for Kinkmas by Morticia Knight

A Kitten for Kinkmas by R.J. Moray

A Silver Fox For Kinkmas by Colette Davison

A Daddy for Kinkmas by Reese Morrison

A Beauty for Kinkmas by R.A. Frick

A Ginger for Kinkmas by Chara Croft

A Brat For Kinkmas by JP Sayle

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I think that all of my books reflect my life in some way, but I don't always know what that will look like until they come pouring out onto the page. Dustin in *Love Lessons* arose from a series of conversations I had with a good friend about his struggles with auditory processing disorder, and how little it was understood. Zhong in *Love Limits* was influenced by the many Chinese students in my classes who have so generously shared their experiences and perspectives with me. I wrote Austin in *Pretty 'n Peak* while reading some beautiful essays written by a rabbi friend of mine about being blind and Jewish, and also turning back to my childhood memories of my blind father. And of course, my beloved trans and queer community is reflected in so many aspects of my stories.

This year has been an exploration into neurodiversity for me. I finally managed to get my nine-year-old the ADHD diagnosis that I'd suspected for years. For the first time, he can now tell me the names of the children who sit next to him every day at school, and he says that his handwriting looks "like a font." (Perhaps one of those messy handwriting ones—but he's extremely proud of himself.) Naftali's ADHD is an amalgam of experiences I've had with my kiddo and several friends, including several fellow authors.

I've also had the delight of several deep conversations with a friend who is both autistic and co-studying neurodivergence with the college students that he teaches. I've learned so much from him, as a teacher and a person. Autism appears in so many diverse ways, but many of David's characteristics in this book are modeled after my friend.

You'll also see a quick mention of "Cara," who's another close friend of mine and is currently going back to school to study psychology so that she can diagnose ADHD and autism in adults. Like so many people, she never received these helpful diagnoses as a child, and she is part of the movement for advocacy, acceptance, and education now. I've tried my best to faithfully represent my friends' amazing strengths as well as their challenges in these pages, with the support of several neurodiverse authenticity readers who've provided their own insights.

I also discovered in this book that I may still have some of my own trauma that I'm working through regarding family responses to trans children. David's mother in this book is heavily based on my mother-in-law, and the way she's treated me and my genderqueer partner. Looking back, I realized that she also haunts *His for Hanukkah*. In both books, however, there's a ton of support—from other family members, from friends, from partners—in handling the complexities of those relationships. If this is a trigger issue for you, you can skip the first half of chapter 18... but I think my characters do a good job of handling it with humor and moving on to spend time with supportive people.

As always, this is still a book about two guys falling in love, overcoming their internal battles, and spending a kinky Chrismukkah together. I hope that you enjoy the journey with them.

Love,

Reese

DAVID

There was an image that David always came back to.

It wasn't complicated, or even detailed. A man on his knees, naked except for the rope bound around his wrists. He would look up with a raw vulnerability and desire that matched the need unfurling in David's chest.

David didn't know what he would do next with that man. Only that the man belonged to him: to pleasure, to punish, to adore. That was the entire fantasy.

He'd tried for years with his ex to pretend that image wasn't there.

The initial idea had actually come from Mike. A few months after they'd moved in together, Mike had come home with a set of costume handcuffs. David had been more intrigued than he wanted to admit, but played it cool.

The second David had clicked the locks shut though, it was like something clicked in his head. It was heady, having that power—even for an hour. For weeks afterward, his body had tingled with excitement, just knowing those handcuffs were in the dresser drawer.

When he'd suggested they try again, Mike had claimed that he'd had a good enough time, but once was enough.

So David had put that idea away. It was just a rogue desire after all. Not a big deal compared to how much he'd loved his boyfriend. To how much he'd wanted to make him the center of his world.

But three long years later, loving him hadn't been enough.

Or more exactly, it had been too much.

Which is why David was here now, walking up the steps of The William Way LGBTQ Center, hoping to get it right next time. The building was just a few blocks from his apartment, but of course, he'd left ten minutes early so he wouldn't be late.

To be honest, he'd assumed he'd have to explore his sordid fantasies in a dungeon with handcuffs drilled into the cement walls, possibly next to a huge man wearing a metal face mask and black leather. The reality was quite different.

When he'd finally gotten up the courage to check, Google quickly revealed that Philadelphia didn't have any public dungeons. Or kink clubs. At least that David could find. The closest equivalent billed itself as "an improvisational interactive theater utilizing concepts that involve fetish as well as BDSM," which was a bit beyond his comprehension. It probably had something to do with Pennsylvania's puritanical laws.

But what David did manage to discover was workshops. Specifically, the one that was happening today.

At least the LGBTQ Center was familiar. Mike had dragged him to fundraisers and events here before.

David tried to act casual as he entered the building. For all anybody knew, he was just a guy who was mildly interested in the kink demo series on the schedule. He wasn't going to explain that he'd read every book and blog on kink that he could find, or that the notebook in his hand was already full of color-coded notes on terms, knots, and toys.

Information had always been his best defense. Doms were supposed to be confident and in charge. Which David *could* be... after he'd known someone for about a year and felt pretty comfortable with them and the situation.

When David was younger, he'd somehow thought that after he transitioned, when everyone could see the man outside that he'd always known he was inside, that he'd be more

assertive and self-assured. The awkwardness would fall away, and he'd be able to charm anyone in the room.

It turned out, the awkwardness was all him.

That was the whole reason he was taking this class. He might rather hide in his apartment than go on a date, but when he *did* get there, he wanted to at least know what he was doing.

In his fantasies, he always fast-forwarded to the end, where he was already dating someone and they were both comfortable with each other. Even more, the mystery sub would adore him—despite all of his awkwardness—and surrender his mind and body freely. David would dominate him expertly, words flowing, anticipating his partner's every need.

Or, at least, he might come close enough not to look like a complete idiot.

He climbed the wooden stairs and found the room. There were about thirty folding chairs, arranged in rows, and he was relieved not to be the first to arrive.

At the front, a shorter man with messy brown hair gave David a welcoming wave. He laid out coils of rope on a white plastic table, handling them with a relaxed familiarity as he chatted with a few students near the front.

Just seeing the rope made David's stomach twist with arousal. It felt out of place in the airy room with its sunny yellow paint.

Did this cheerful Dom want the same things he did? The man had to be an expert to be standing at the front of the class. He tossed a coil of rope up into the air, then fumbled it on the way down, almost tripping as he rushed to catch it.

David would have been mortified to trip like that in front of an audience. But the Dom just laughed, a deep hearty sound, before tossing it into the air again without breaking the conversation.

David found himself watching him, trying to figure out what made him a Dom. He was always impressed by people

who were outgoing like that—able to be a bit goofy, inviting everyone into the fun.

The presenter kept tossing that rope into the air while he talked, and David couldn't help but notice how attractive he was. The scruff at his jaw brought out his strong cheekbones. His eyes were alive with excitement as he welcomed in a student who he'd clearly met before.

He was slender and agile, but still all man with the way his broad shoulders filled out his sweater. His chestnut hair bounced when he chased after the rope, especially when he threw it far too high into the air. His body language was half gangly boy-next-door and half dancer when he raced to catch it and then sauntered back.

He was basically the embodiment of every guy David had ever watched from a distance in high school, palms sweating and heart racing, but never had the courage to approach. Every guy he'd wanted, and every guy he'd wanted to be.

David was sure the man had plenty of subs who wanted to be with him.

Which made it more surprising when he caught David's eye. Probably because he'd been staring.

But the Dom just gave a wide smile, and what David would have sworn was a wink.

Naturally, instead of smiling back, David ducked his head and slunk into a folding chair three rows back. Close enough to hear, but far enough away that the presenter probably wouldn't notice him again.

But he kept looking at the rope on the table. And the way the Dom up there handled it so confidently. Playfully. The way he tapped the end of the coil against his other hand.

David's stomach tightened. He wanted to touch that rope.

Another dozen or so people filed in after him. Some were chatting with each other companionably or holding hands with a partner. Others drifted in quietly, some with eager confidence, and a few who sought out the seats at the back. Isolated, like David.

He realized after a while that he had no idea who was a Dom and who was a sub. They just looked like regular people. Did subs even go to these events? It seemed like if the Doms were the ones planning the scenes, the subs wouldn't need classes. Or maybe that was wrong.

The presenter introduced himself with a resonant voice. He wasn't overly loud, but he filled the room with his presence. "Hey everyone! Thanks for coming out to Bondage for Beginners. My name's Naftali and I've been part of the kink scene in Philadelphia for about a decade."

David repeated the name a few times in his head. He was *terrible* with names. *Naf-TALL-ee. Naf-TALL-ee.*

For some reason, he really wanted to remember this one.

"I'll be introducing you to some bondage basics this morning," Naftali continued, "then doing a demonstration scene with Rick here at the end." He gestured toward the front and a tall, slender man turned and waved to the group. "I have a few things that I want to share, but you can stop me at any point to ask questions. Oh, and I'm going all out of order. After the info bit, you'll have a chance to get your hands on the ropes and try out some basic ties yourself."

David's fingers tingled at the idea. He wondered if they'd practice tying up something inanimate like a stick or work awkwardly with a partner. Being so close to recreating the image from his fantasies made his heart race, but he wasn't sure if it was from excitement or terror.

"First, we're going to talk about RACK," Naftali began. "Risk Aware Consensual Kink."

David knew all of this from his reading, but it was different hearing it in person from someone who'd actually done all of this stuff. He listened attentively.

"RACK is different from Safe, Sane, and Consensual because it respects that people have different mental health situations and are still able to fully consent to kink. It also allows for certain risks, as long as everyone is game. Which

makes things more exciting, I think.” He gave the audience a mischievous smile, and everyone laughed.

David’s stomach flipped. That smile reminded him of other things he’d let himself imagine. Sometimes in his fantasies the man kneeling naked in front of him would mouth off or try to get away. Not for real, but because he wanted David to stop him. To make him behave.

Was that what Naftali’s partners did? Was he so joyful and relaxed when he was in a scene? Or did he have a stern, hard side? It made David wonder what a Dom could be. If he were a sub, he was sure he would find Naftali’s laid-back confidence attractive. Unfortunately, that wasn’t David at all.

David took another surreptitious look at the people in the room. There was an older man with a gray mustache and a beefy body who looked like he could throw someone over a table. He sat with his legs spread, taking up space, exuding a mysterious Dom energy that David didn’t think he could emulate. On the other side of the room, there was a woman whose leather wrapped around every hard angle of her body. She leaned forward in her chair, sharp like a predator.

But there were also folks in jeans and t-shirts, lounging around casually or paying attention like there was going to be an exam. Were they all Dominants?

David opened to the first empty page of the notebook he’d brought. He’d worried that other people would think it was ridiculous, but he wasn’t the only one taking notes.

Notes gave him confidence. Notes were things he could control. Information that he could master.

David shifted his focus back to Naftali, both so he wouldn’t miss anything and because he was thinking about what kind of Dom he wanted to be. Maybe someone like him.

“So this next little section, I like to call *Don’t Do It 101*.” Naftali laughed at his own joke, and David found himself laughing with him, welcomed in. “Starting with... No ropes around the neck.” He stroked his throat and David’s eyes followed. “All of these delicate little arteries are kind of

important for, you know, getting oxygen to the brain. Now breath play is a whole other thing for another class, but you don't want a rope in charge of that edge between sexy and brain damage."

Wow. That somehow made this whole thing really, really real. David didn't know if he could restrict someone's air for fun, but there were people who did it, possibly sitting in this room. There were people who *enjoyed* it. And there were classes you could take to do it safely.

Hearing about it in person was so different from just reading about it. Or even watching porn, which he knew was mostly fake.

He kept listening... and kept watching the enthusiastic Dom. His movements were always fluid, like he was dancing, with an easy openness. His mouth was always tilted up at the corners, even while he spoke, drawing attention to his full, pink lips.

David knew he shouldn't be noticing his lips. But confident, charming people had always attracted him, and he was hoping he didn't look different from anyone else in the room. He was supposed to be listening, right?

There was something about watching an attractive presenter that felt safe. It was like falling in love with a character from a movie. You could be swept up in it, secure in the knowledge that they'd never know who you were, and it would all be over in a few hours.

Naftali took off a thick sweater to reveal a black ribbed tank top. David knew it was so Naftali could demonstrate safety issues, but he was drawn to the sharp collar bones against the lean muscles of his shoulders.

He watched, entranced, as Naftali outlined each nerve to avoid. He offered up long, elegant fingers as he demonstrated the nerves on each hand. He traced the way up the pulse point of his solid wrist. Then, he moved higher, hugging himself as he located a point on his elbow before highlighting the place where his bunching muscles left a gap along his upper arm.

When he traced a line along that tender place where his thigh met his pelvis, David couldn't help but let his eyes drift just a little further. The zipper of his loose jeans laid flat, but he could still imagine what it concealed.

David shook his head. He was still taking in all of the information, but he should be taking more notes, not undressing Naftali with his eyes. If he ever got the opportunity to tie someone up—not Naftali, of course—he wouldn't want to hurt a sub, or worse, cause permanent damage.

Then David looked up, and he swore Naftali caught his eye and something passed between them.

A thrill shot through David, leaving his skin buzzing. Naftali was just so confident and masculine and sensual. Maybe he could... show David around this whole Dom thing? Was that how it worked?

Naftali had to know David was a Dom, right?

David wondered for a moment if he'd want to be submissive if it were with someone like Naftali, but the idea made him uncomfortable. He knew Doms should experience whatever they were expecting their subs to try, but emotionally, he couldn't envision himself in the other role.

Not to mention that he'd probably made the whole flirting thing up. David was *famous* for not noticing when people were flirting with him. This was probably just his own libido playing tricks on him because he was finally getting to learn about kink.

Naftali probably smiled like that at everyone. David had met people like that, who could make everyone in the room feel like they were important.

And even if Naftali had been flirting with him... so what?

David knew that he wasn't too shabby in the looks department. People *did* actually flirt with him, even if he didn't realize it. It would just inevitably grind to a halt once he opened his mouth.

So there was no reason for him to hyper-analyze a ten-second look.

“While we’re talking about anatomy,” Naftali announced, “let’s do a brief chat about trans bodies. Since I’m trans, I’ll share some tips based on my experience and some comments I’ve heard from a few friends.”

That pulled all of David’s spinning thoughts to a halt. Naftali was trans? David scanned over his slim body that was still moving around the stage in a sort of dance.

Now he definitely wished Naftali could be his mentor. David had never really gotten into the trans community in Philadelphia, since most of his intense transitioning moments happened back in college and right afterward. Even if the only thing he got out of this workshop was meeting another trans Dom, that would be golden. That was a much better reason to be watching him.

David listened intently as Naftali launched into the discussion, still flashing that mesmerizing grin.

“I already said that everybody, and every *body*, is different. The basis of any kink is always strong communication. But there may be some specific areas that you want to talk about with a trans partner. One of them is comfort with different parts of their body and names to call them. What feels sexy? What feels connected? What feels uncomfortable or doesn’t affirm their identity?”

David wondered what felt sexy to Naftali. Not only what names he used to describe his body, but how that translated into the way he dominated someone.

“For example, the chest is a good, broad canvas for intricate knotwork, but for a trans man, something that highlights the chest might not feel affirming. For a woman with breast augmentation, this is a lovely chance to accentuate, but check how much sensation she has, and whether you need to avoid squeezing—the material in older implants can degrade. You’ll want to avoid scar tissue—it can either hurt a lot more or a lot less, and both of those can lead to tissue damage.”

David tried to memorize everything. He hadn’t considered having a trans partner... but of course he could. That might

even be easier.

Naftali continued. “A trans partner’s comfort and sensitivity with any body part is something you’ll talk about a lot. You might not involve some body parts. Or you might mix techniques to respect their biological parts while also highlighting their identity. For example, what makes a cock feel like a cock? Is it psychological? Physical? How could you incorporate a packer or strap-on into your play?”

That question was wildly arousing. In so many of David’s fantasies, he had a biological cock. After all, they were fantasies, right?

When David had been with Mike, he’d used a strap-on, and they’d both enjoyed it well enough. The rest of the time, though, David never really felt connected to his packer beyond how it looked, and Mike didn’t show much interest. Why touch something that didn’t register sensations?

Naftali’s impassioned words gave him another perspective.

David kept taking notes, but he could have sworn that Naftali’s eyes came to rest on his more than they should have. And... alright, maybe David did look back a bit.

As long as Naftali was safely leading the demonstration and David didn’t have to talk, he could pretend that a sexy guy actually wanted to hit on him. It was like fast-forwarding the movie, picking up his fantasy where David was suave and confident and someone like Naftali would drop to his knees and...

No, that didn’t make any sense. Naftali was the one holding the ropes. David was going crazy.

Better to concentrate on the notes.

Naftali took a long drink from his water bottle, then glanced at the clock. “It looks like it’s time for a break. Wow, that hour went by fast. Time flies when you’re being naughty, right?”

People stood and wandered out to the water fountains or their choice of gendered or gender-neutral bathrooms in the hallway. David had an aluminum water bottle, so he stood by

his chair to stretch out his muscles before the next hour of sitting.

“Hey,” Naftali called out, meandering right over to him. David realized that his eyes were brown. A deep, warm brown that almost glowed. “How are you liking the workshop so far?”

“Oh, um... I’m l-l-learning a lot.” His voice sounded hollow to his own ears. At least there was only one stutter.

Though that was still too many for some people.

“You seemed entranced.”

David hoped he wasn’t blushing. He hoped that Naftali hadn’t noticed how he was staring at him, either. “I’m p-p-pretty... Pretty n-n-n-new to this.”

Ah, there it was. Game over.

“I could tell.” Naftali chuckled, but it was warm and inviting. There was no way he hadn’t noticed the stutter, but at least he didn’t seem bothered by it. “It can be hard to walk into something like this. The first time I attended a munch, I was terrified. I thought everyone would know how ignorant I was and kick me out.”

“W-What happened?” It was hard to imagine Naftali either worried or new to this.

“They saw how ignorant I was and offered to educate and support me. I’m still friends with a lot of the people I met that first morning, actually. One of them ended up becoming my first Dom.”

It took a moment for David’s brain to catch up with that. When it did, he blurted out, “You’re a s-ss-s—” Or at least he tried to. He took a deep breath and tried to relax. “A *s-s-sub*?”

Naftali gave him a look like he couldn’t figure out what he was talking about. Yep. Another guy who couldn’t look past the stutter. Or maybe the overall awkwardness.

And for some reason, David was a little pissed right now. He seriously didn’t stutter that much when he was feeling

calm. And Naftali shouldn't have winked at him if he was just going to walk away.

But then Naftali slapped his palm against his forehead. "Crap. Did I forget to say that? I mean, a lot of Doms mentor with another Dom, and yes, they do submit. But the whole reason I like giving this demo is because it's important for riggers to hear about how bondage feels from the rope bunny's perspective. But I guess it doesn't make as much sense without that context."

David shook his head, still trying to catch up with all of this. Was Naftali a *sub*? He was so confident. So knowledgeable. He didn't match David's vision of what a sub was like at all.

The image of the fantasy man on his knees resurfaced, messy hair falling over his face as he flashed that mischievous smile or looked up pleadingly with those sparkling brown eyes. For a moment, David imagined Naftali sitting in his lap, arms hooked around his neck.

David swallowed quickly, trying to retain his composure. He latched on to one thought from earlier, trying to keep things normal. "If you're a s-sub, you can s-still be a rigger, r-r-right?" Dammit. He'd almost gotten through that sentence.

"A-plus," Naftali beamed, like he hadn't noticed at all. "I absolutely could, and I've even done it a few times for friends or in demonstrations. But I much prefer to be on the other end of the rope. God, there's just nothing like it." His expression went soft and dreamy.

"W-w-what do you like about it?" David asked, eager for every word.

Naftali leaned in a little closer. "It sounds backward, but it's the time I feel most free. When I give everything over to a Dom, I can just let go. All the stresses of the week—work, people, responsibilities—it just floats away. And the endorphin rush... it's like sex but better. Like I'm open to the universe."

Desire pooled in his groin. How would it feel to be the man to make Naftali free—to let him fly?

Now David was really wondering if Naftali was flirting with him. Was that even possible?

The murmur of voices started to rise in the room.

“Oops! Got to go back to the workshop. Nice to meet you!” Naftali gave a smile so brilliant that David was left dazzled. Then Naftali flounced back to the front of the room, like he did this every day.

Was that flirting? Checking in on a nervous student? Making small talk?

David reined himself in. Naftali could have his pick of men. He could certainly choose a Dom who knew what they’re doing. And could pronounce full sentences.

“Alright everyone, the moment you’ve all been waiting for.” Naftali rubbed his hands together like a mad scientist. “We’re going to practice some basic single-column knots. Remember a column is any part of the body that’s long and narrow. We’ll start with a Burlington bowline. These knots are safe because they can’t compact down, though you’ll still want to check if you move someone to a different position—the loops won’t change size, but the distribution of fat and muscle underneath it might. We’ll begin tying on the back of the chair. Ready to get started?”

David figured he was. He was already familiar with several single-column knots. That was a relief because he didn’t want to make a fool of himself.

Naftali’s description of being tied up played over and over again in his head.

When I give everything over to a Dom, I can just let go. It’s like sex but better. Like I’m open to the universe.

He wrote the words down in his notebook. Naftali was way out of David’s league, so it wasn’t even anything personal. But thinking about Naftali submitting to him—putting a real sub’s features and emotions to that nameless fantasy—felt a lot like buying his first book about kink. It was giving him permission to dream about what could be.

And since there was another trans guy here, maybe he could find someone he had some things in common with.

The idea filled his heart with hope.

NAFTALI

The moment Naftali opened Facebook on his phone, he regretted it. It was a good twenty minutes until the kink class was supposed to start and everything was ready, so it seemed like a good use of his time. He had so many projects and organizations that required a social media presence that there was usually something that needed to be answered or checked. The problem was that they were all tied to his personal account.

He'd barely scrolled through half a page when Eitan's beaming face popped up. First in his own post about getting a huge grant for the Jewish urban agriculture program he founded. Then, in Noah's post congratulating him on the same grant. In the first post he looked professional but laid back, a model program director. In the second post, Noah was pressing a noisy kiss to his cheek while he laughed.

Naftali flicked between the two pictures for far too long. Noah used to kiss him like that, and a lot of other ways, too. The longer Naftali looked, the tighter his chest felt.

The thing was, he really liked Eitan. The guy was friendly, focused, and doing a lot of good in the world. Naftali was excited about his new program and really glad he'd gotten that grant.

He was also envious as hell, because Eitan represented everything that he wanted to be. It was clear why Noah had chosen him. Unlike Naftali, he knew what he wanted in life, and he'd made it happen. Naftali had no idea what degrees he had, but he was sure Eitan was using them. He had one job

that he loved, and Naftali would bet he had hours that let him get home at the same time every day.

Noah would never sigh at Eitan and tell him it was time to grow up or ask pointedly what he was planning to do for his career. Naftali would bet that no one ever nagged Eitan to just stay focused, or reminded him to take responsibility for his problems, or told him that he wasn't living up to his potential.

Naftali also knew that Eitan had the time and focus to dedicate to a real relationship. In his imagination, Eitan's desires matched Noah's perfectly. That Facebook post was the equivalent of riding off into the sunset together in a haze of kinky bliss.

It was only when the first participants started to wander into the workshop that Naftali realized he'd wasted fifteen minutes. He clicked off his phone and dropped it into his pocket. He had a class to get ready for, and no time to dwell on his failings.

Fortunately, teaching required all his attention. It always lifted him up and left him buzzing.

Naftali drifted over to greet the first few participants as they settled down. He knew two of them from previous workshops he'd run, and there was a couple from his munch. His co-presenter, Rick, showed up right on time, and fortunately brought all the handouts that Naftali had frantically texted him about last night. Naftali checked in for a moment, but Rick knew him pretty well at this point. They'd scened and presented together before, and Naftali didn't have much to update him on today.

The next person who walked into the room made Naftali smile a bit. His dark hair was neatly parted to the side, and he was wearing a collared shirt like he'd just stepped out of a business meeting. He had a thick, but well-trimmed beard. He was clearly nervous, pausing in the doorway for a long time.

Naftali gave him a friendly smile, and then a wink. He figured the newcomer could use the burst of confidence. Even if he ducked his head and slunk into a row of chairs near the back.

Did Naftali make him nervous? That was adorable, too.

Once the man found his seat, his eyes kept drifting to the table where Naftali had set up the coils of rope. He could almost feel the waves of anxiety and desire radiating out from him.

Naftali assumed he was a Dom because that was who usually attended this particular workshop. Naftali loved teaching, but baby Doms like this one were the reason he was here. They needed someone to tell them that they weren't crazy for wanting what they wanted. That there was a whole beautiful community to support them. And even more importantly, that there were subs out there just dying for them to work their wicked wiles on them.

Naftali would be the first to volunteer.

Even though he was chatting with two Dominants in the front row, he kept glancing over at the baby Dom. He wanted to invite him in, to help him feel comfortable. The man's eyes grew large when Naftali picked up a skein of rope and tossed it into the air. Naturally, he almost dropped it, because while his coordination was pretty good, his attention was not.

Did he just throw something into the air and forget that he had to move if he wanted to catch it? Yes, yes he did.

He had to laugh at himself though. He was getting into the teaching groove where he was a little bit on display. Being a bit goofy could help participants relax.

Though he couldn't help but notice that the baby Dom's wide-eyed stare was now focused more on him than the rope.

When everyone arrived, Naftali launched into his usual spiel. Somewhere in the middle of discussing how to avoid rope burn and whiplash, he caught the baby Dom's eye. His goal was mostly to look welcoming and supportive, just making sure that everyone was doing alright.

But there was something in the air between them, a sizzle that promised more. Naftali was *so* down for it. He was pretty sure now that the man wasn't just watching him present—he was watching him *move*.

Naftali snuck another look when Rick stepped up to add something. Baby Dom wasn't even glancing in Rick's direction.

So did that mean they were flirting? Naftali always hammed it up a bit when he was in front of an audience. Now he turned the seduction up a notch. He could see the way Baby Dom's eyes followed his hands when he traced shapes on his body to demonstrate rope placement. Every time Naftali passed him to distribute handouts, he was scribbling in his notebook, but he definitely caught those eyes on his ass as soon as he walked away.

After the day Naftali had—and watching Eitan get everything he'd wanted for himself—just knowing that someone was attracted to him made his chest feel warm. He didn't know this guy at all, but it felt good to be desired. To think that maybe he had something to offer after all. And Baby Dom was pretty hot.

A thrill of hope swept through him. He wouldn't normally flirt with a student, but this was a one-time workshop—it wasn't like there were any ethical issues with getting his number. Even if nothing came of it, it felt good to have someone watching him.

There was one thing he needed to clarify, though, and fortunately it was easy enough to drop into the lecture. “Let's do a brief chat about trans bodies. Since I'm trans, I'll share some tips based on my experience.” He always said this when he was teaching kink workshops, but this time he watched one face carefully.

Baby Dom startled for a moment, then seemed to be... pleased? Comfortable? It made him think about something, but it wasn't anything negative. His eyes were right back on Naftali a moment later.

Clearly, he didn't have a problem with it. Awesome.

When it came time for the break, Naftali rushed over to him. Subtle? Absolutely not.

Rick laughed at him, but only because he knew him so well. He wasn't Naftali's Dom, but he looked out for him.

"Hey!" Naftali greeted the baby Dom. "How are you liking the workshop so far?" That was casual enough, right?

"Oh, um... I'm l-learning a lot." He sounded like he'd forgotten how to make words. It was possible that he was still working through his feelings about being kinky, but Naftali liked to think that he'd stunned him into silence. It fed his battered ego, and he needed that right now.

He might be crap at following through on a relationship, but he loved flirting and there was an electricity crackling between them now. "You seemed entranced," he said directly, letting the honey drip through his voice.

Baby Dom looked up, then quickly back down at his collar bones. He seemed to like them an awful lot, which was why Naftali hadn't put his sweater back on. "I'm p-p-pretty new to this," he finally managed. His cheeks flushed pink above the dark beard.

Just cuter and cuter. So he wasn't exactly flirting back, but Naftali didn't think it was from lack of interest. He wondered if that stutter was always present, or if he was making him nervous.

Naftali wanted to fill him up with confidence. There was a myth out there that Doms were supposed to be all-knowing and assertive all the time, but he found humility and honesty far more attractive. Naftali got the sense that Baby Dom would have all the authority he needed when he finally stepped into a scene.

They chatted for a few moments, but that was all they had. Naftali only realized after the fact that he hadn't gotten his name. Oh well, there were still two more hours to go.

Naftali demonstrated the single column knots with Rick, each of them on one side of the room with a cluster of people around to make it easier to see. When they passed out the short lengths of practice rope—cheap cotton that still did the job—Naftali was tempted to go back and visit Baby Dom first. But

there was a guy who needed him to go over the steps a dozen more times and two others hung around to watch for the first few rounds. To be fair, there were a lot of steps for just the Burlington bowline, and it wasn't something you wanted to mess up.

When Naftali finally made it to the back of the room, Baby Dom had a string of beautifully executed knots along the back of his chair, and he'd run out of rope.

Naftali noticed his hiking boots, too. Unlike his professional clothes, the hiking boots spoke of thorough use. In Naftali's imagination, the man would love camping and exploring the outdoors—a definite turn-on in his book.

“Mmmmm...” he hummed. “Lucky chair.”

Baby Dom looked up, startled. “Oh, um... th-th-thanks.” His cheeks turned a bright pink. His eyes drifted down to Naftali's chest, then snapped up to his face. Still no flirting, but more than enough interest. He just seemed shy. And maybe a little self-conscious about his stutter, too.

“No, these are really well done. You picked it up quickly. Nice spacing.”

“I w-wanted to be a boy scout when I was a k-kid. I was so j-j-jealous of my brother that I stole his handbook and p-practiced for all the badges. It's just doubling up the rope that's different.”

He gave a look like Naftali was supposed to figure something out. Why would he be jealous of his brother and not... Oh. Oh! He was trans, too.

Naftali grinned. “I was fortunate as a kid. I never wanted to be a scout, but my parents bought me all the gear. Pocket knives and rock collections and science kits. Maybe not quite the same, but I had a lot of support.”

“I'm glad your parents were so supportive. Mine were... less so. But man, did I practice some knots. Maybe I was secretly preparing for this.” He gave an amused smile that hinted at a confidence Naftali wasn't expecting. At least not

yet. Something told him this baby Dom wouldn't be a baby for very long.

Naftali also noticed that in those last few sentences, he didn't stutter at all. Seemed like a good sign, right?

“Naftali!” Rick shouted over the crowd. He pointed to his watch.

Oops. “Sorry. Got to do the next part. Hey, do you want to be my volunteer?”

“W-w-w-w...?” He took a long breath. “What d-d-d-do I do?”

Oops again. Maybe that was a little too much. But Baby Dom seemed like he was down for it. “Hold your arms out while I do a double column tie. And then if you want, you can try one on me.”

Naftali caught his eyes roving over his body again, worry and desire at war on his face. He probably wasn't the type to volunteer for things like this. But Naftali could feel what he wanted—his ropes around Naftali's wrists. It was pulsing between them.

“No pressure. I'm gonna talk for a minute, and if you want to volunteer, just raise your hand.” That would give him some time to think about it, too.

Naftali gave everyone a one-minute warning to finish up their practice while he wandered to the front of the room, checking out progress as he went. Everyone seemed to be in pretty good shape.

He launched into his lecture again. “You can do a lot with single-column ties. The pressure can feel relaxing or exciting, and you can create beautiful displays. You can also use that loop that sticks out as a pulley for suspension or tying someone to an object.”

He looked around to make sure everyone was following along. Baby Dom finally met his eyes, and for a moment Naftali forgot what he was talking about.

Something had changed in the man's expression. There was a new confidence and determination, and it transformed him. Maybe knowing the role and expectations had helped him prepare—that could make all the difference sometimes.

Naftali continued talking, and it was only his passion for the topic that kept him from focusing on his new crush. "I'm guessing that most of you are Doms, but I can't reinforce this enough: If you're going to do something to someone else, you should know how it feels on yourself first. For any subs in the audience—" he paused to waggle his eyebrows "—here's your chance for a little bit of payback."

Everyone chuckled. Baby Dom's eyes shone.

"This is also a good opportunity to practice checking in with your partner. Do they have any physical or emotional concerns about having their wrists bound? Would it be better to tie their ankles instead? Not be a rope bunny at all? Just give your limits, and we'll find a way for you to participate. This is important for the rigger, too: How do you prefer to receive feedback? What will make both of you feel safe?"

That little speech was probably the most important one that he gave. He'd had people cry sometimes when they came to his workshops and heard that for the first time after attending other workshops where there was only one acceptable pose, or there wasn't a way to politely opt out. He never wanted to put anyone in that position.

"Any questions before we start?" He waited a few long beats. "Great. Rick and I will each need a volunteer to model a double-column wrist tie. Anyone up for it?"

Naftali's baby Dom raised his hand, strong and sure. Naftali nodded for him to come up, a frizzle of excitement running through him. Rick picked a slender, hawk-faced woman in a leather jacket. "Alright, choose a circle and gather around."

When Naftali's half of the crowd was arranged around him, he turned toward his tempting volunteer. "Thanks for being brave today. What's your name?"

“David.”

Naftali liked it. Simple and straightforward. It sounded like him.

“Alright, David.” He gave a dazzling grin and got a sweet smile back in return. “Let’s check in first. Do you have any injuries or anything I should know about your hands, arms, shoulders, or back?”

The shy Dom shook his head. “I don’t think so. Some l-l-l-l-lower back pain from sitting t-too much at work, but I don’t think that’ll apply.” Naftali latched on to that bit of information: he worked at a desk.

Then he realized he was being ridiculous. *Everyone* worked at a desk.

He did notice, though, that David only stuttered twice. That seemed like a good sign.

“That shouldn’t be a problem. If that or anything else starts to hurt, let me know. Let’s get started. Arms out!”

David extended his hands with good humor. His wrists were thick and strong, and Naftali was already excited about the chance to brush against him, even through the fabric of his shirt. He kind of wished he wasn’t teaching a class right now, but the anticipation was exciting, too.

“Alright, can everyone see? I already found the bight by folding the rope in half.” Naftali held up the rope then walked through the steps, pausing at each one for nods of agreement, and ending when he got to the dangling tails.

“Now I could just split these up and tie a square knot at the bottom. But if I expect my rope bunny to struggle...”

On the word *struggle* something passed across David’s face. Hell, yeah.

“...or if I want to attach these to something, I need a more stable knot. So I’m going to wrap them around again. How are you doing, David?”

“Good.” He nodded, as if he hadn’t been expecting this. “I’m not sure how many times I’ll want to be-to be-to be tied

up again, but it's surprisingly comfortable. Not too t-t-tight."

His Baby Dom was a good sport. Naftali gave him a warm smile before demonstrating the next step.

"See how everything tightens neatly when I give a little tug, but the loops on his wrists don't move? That means if I give a little pull—" Naftali caught David's eye to make sure he was ready, then took a few steps backward, forcing David to follow. "—this knot takes all the force and his wrists are still safe. This is called a lead. Alright? Let me show you how to untie it, and then we'll do it again."

Naftali walked through it all quickly one more time. David was laser focused on his hands, nodding in agreement at each step. Naftali fielded a few questions from other participants, but he was pretty sure David had the hang of it.

"OK, last round." He looked up at David. He was standing close, and their hands were practically touching. "You want to give this a try, boy scout?"

David's lips tilted up at the nickname. Naftali could see his confidence coming through. He wasn't the nervous guy who'd walked in here anymore. And that was really hot.

"Sure. I'll give it a shot. Just let me know if I get anything r-r-r-r-wrong." His eyes still showed a bit of his worry, but his shoulders were squared, and his voice came out strong.

Naftali handed him the rope, then held out his bare wrists. "Tie me up!" He was *so* ready.

David's eyebrows furrowed, then his face cleared. He cradled Naftali's loose fists in his hands, and Naftali thought he might melt from just that gentle touch. Electricity crackled between them. "First, I need to know about your safety c-c-concerns. How are your hands, arms, and shoulders?"

Oh, yeah. Right. Naftali should have remembered, and he was even more impressed that David did. Also, now that David's focus was on Naftali, he was barely stuttering.

"No injuries to worry about. I try to be careful with my hands because I play guitar, but you're unlikely to do anything that could be a problem."

Naftali could see him tucking that factoid away. He bet his brain was as organized as his neatly-printed notes.

“Relax,” David told him in a deep, soothing voice. But it wasn’t a suggestion—it was a command.

The tension drained from Naftali’s shoulders, and he let his hands rest heavily in David’s arms. This was what he loved about having a Dom.

David’s eyes widened, and Naftali could almost feel the rush of power flowing through him. That’s what it was all about. All of the ropes and things were just details.

“I’m going t-t-to start now,” David said quietly. There was still a crowd of participants gathered around them, but Naftali could tell that David was only focused on him. The moment felt reverent. Almost magical.

Naftali watched with half his attention as David carefully replicated the double column Lark’s Head. But mostly he was soaking in the sensation of those coils around his wrists, the brush of warm fingers against his skin.

Usually when Naftali was the practice bunny, he was just thinking about technique and how to help the newbie rigger. With David it was different. Not just because he was executing the whole thing perfectly, if a little slowly. But because of the way David kept looking up, checking on his enjoyment. When he slipped a finger inside each loop to check the tension, it was a caress.

David wanted him to be transported by this, and he was.

It wasn’t just his arms that felt secure as his mobility was taken away. It was his whole body. There was nothing in the world like the sensation of being tied down so that he could float.

When David finished, he gave an experimental tug, drawing Naftali’s loose fists away from his body without tightening the loops. “How was that?”

“Elegantly done.” Naftali had to remember that there were a dozen people watching them right now, and this was a practice session, not a play party. “All that boy scout practice

paid off.” No one else in the room needed to know the full story behind that.

“I’d say it did.” His eyes sparkled. “Should we t-t-test it out?”

Naftali wasn’t sure what he meant. They weren’t combining this with any other knots, so there wasn’t much more to do. He nodded anyway.

David stepped back, then pulled on the lead ropes until Naftali’s arms were straight in front of him. Now he had two choices: follow David obediently, or resist. Both were fucking sexy, but Naftali didn’t know which one he wanted.

David smirked.

Naftali tugged back, but he was just pulling with his arms, while David’s feet were braced. David didn’t budge. He just coiled the rope around his hands for a better grip. Naftali pulled back harder, the thrill of trying to get away racing through him.

Especially since he knew that he couldn’t escape.

He darted a few feet to the side, mindful of the audience and not quite putting his full weight into it. In another time or place, he’d claw and struggle his way out. But right now, it was enough to just watch David pull in another coil, drawing him nearer while he pulled back.

David pulled him closer. And again.

Naftali’s heart pounded in his chest. David was the predator, and he was the very eager prey. He felt small, cornered and helpless. He felt alive.

He darted to the other side, leaning back. But there was only a foot between them now. Something had told Naftali that David would be brilliant at this, and he was a natural.

David reeled him in again. They were almost touching. David’s eyes burned with triumph, but he was still checking so carefully that Naftali was okay.

Naftali had been caught.

He wanted to lean in for a kiss. Every inch of his skin was buzzing. But that wouldn't be appropriate.

Instead, he did the other thing he'd been wanting to do. A little dramatic, he knew, but part of his mind still knew that he was putting on show.

Naftali dropped to his knees.

David let out a soft gasp, and the audience quietly clapped behind them.

They stayed like that, posed for some unknowable amount of time. Naftali's arms felt heavy above his head. The rough texture of the rope bit into his flesh. One knee hurt because he'd crashed down too quickly.

He didn't want it to end.

Did David know that he wanted him to take him home? For a single night or something more, he didn't really care. This is what he'd been craving, and he knew David wanted him, too.

Please, he begged in his mind. Please don't take all of your Dom-y skills after this and use them on someone else. See what a good sub I can be?

He was close enough, almost, to rest his head against David's thigh. He could inhale his scent, something clean and a little woody. Naftali was quivering just to touch him. Or please him. *Anything.*

At last, David broke the spell. "Thank you, Naftali." He didn't have the pronunciation quite right, but there was a gentle melody to it. Naftali liked hearing his name on David's tongue.

Reluctantly, he rose to his feet. David looked like he wanted to say something, but instead he just quietly unwound the rope. The group was silent around them, but Naftali could still hear Rick's voice instructing on the other side of the room.

Naftali took a deep breath, moving back into a teacher headspace. "Thank you to our talented volunteer. *That* is how

it's done." He fanned himself dramatically. He wanted David to know what a good job he'd done. "When you're ready, find a partner, check in about safety, and give it a try. The steps are printed out on the next page of the same handout, and I'll be around to answer questions."

Unfortunately, that also meant that David was going to partner up with someone else for the next bit. There were an even number of students, so Naftali couldn't even pretend that David needed a buddy.

He laughed when he saw the not-so-competent rigger from before latched onto David. Well, that would be good for both of them. David could practice a few more times to boost his confidence, and the other guy would have a one-on-one coach.

Naftali drifted around the rest of the room, checking on people here, leaving reminders there. David was very patient with his partner. Naftali could hear him explaining—for what had to be the fourth or fifth time—how to make a loop for the tail to go through. Naftali wanted to go over, but David had it well in hand.

When it looked like everyone had gotten a few chances to practice and the knots were getting faster, Naftali gave everyone a five-minute break. He pulled Rick aside. "I don't think I want to do a full demo today."

Rick looked him over, then glanced at David, who was being slowly unknotted by his fumbling partner. "Big plans?"

"Not yet. I'm just hoping. I don't know if you caught anything from my group, but David took a turn with the rigging, and mmmm..." Naftali gave an exaggerated shiver. "I'm not going to hope that he wants to sweep me off my feet and take me home, but I at least want to get his number."

Rick laughed, not offended at all. "Sounds good. Save your energy for your man. Should we walk through a few possible poses then? I was thinking I could do a simple chest harness and maybe just sketch in one or two ways to use it. Oh, and something with a pulley—at least for one arm—because people were asking about it. But nothing elaborate. Does that work for you?"

“Perfect. Do you still want to lead that, then?”

“Yeah, I know you’re going to space out anyway.”

“I so am.”

The next hour flew by quickly. Naftali felt more like a show pony than a rope bunny. Stand up. Turn around. Hands behind you. Kneel here. Let them see that. Sit this way. And so on. He told the audience how he was feeling with each pose, along with a few comments, but mostly he was thinking about David. And feeling his eyes on him like a caress.

The workshop drew to a close. Folks started to file out, but a small group gathered around Naftali. Rick would usually field the after-class questions, but since they hadn’t really done much, Naftali was ready for it.

He talked a little about rope quality and the local Philly kink scene. A few folks were interested in joining the munch he attended on Sunday mornings, and he got excited telling them about it. “Yeah, it’s a great crowd. And it’s at this local brewery that makes brick oven pizza. It’s called Dock Street. They have all sorts of weird flavor combinations, like this mustard pizza. But it’s really good. The munch is very supportive. A lot of new folks come through, but there’s a crowd of old-timers who just go to hang out and offer some mentorship. It’s a good way to meet people in the scene.”

He could see David lurking in the background. Naftali sent him a look that he hoped meant *just a few more minutes, and then I’m all yours*. David nodded and slipped out the door. Using the bathroom, Naftali figured. Or maybe picking up some pamphlets or reading the flyers posted on the cork board. That’s what he would do while someone else was wrapping up.

Naftali gathered the last few coils of rope into his backpack and shrugged his sweater back on, packing up while he talked. He walked out the door with the last few students.

David wasn’t anywhere to be found. Naftali wove around the corners—the bathrooms and elevator were in all sorts of weird places, and it was different on different floors.

But he wasn't anywhere. Naftali even peeked into the male and gender-neutral bathrooms, but there weren't any shoes visible under the stalls.

Why did David leave? Did he think Naftali wasn't interested? Was *David* not interested? Had he read everything wrong?

Naftali retraced his steps with a growing sense of self-recrimination and loss. Why hadn't he just said something? Given him his phone number? Hell, he could have just held up his hand to ask him to wait a minute. All the things he could have done differently slammed down on him.

David wasn't back in the ballroom where they'd held the event. Naftali even checked the library on the way down, just on the off chance that he was hanging out there, but there were only a bunch of teens chatting with the volunteer librarian. Naftali frantically checked the lobby. There was a couple chatting over to-go cups of coffee, and someone reading on a couch. He burst out onto the street.

David really wasn't there.

Dammit. Damn, damn, dammit.

Naftali wasn't looking for everlasting love, just a night of fun with someone who looked at him like he meant something. Even a phone number and a chance for a coffee date. Was that too much to ask?

He thought about calling Rick, whether to ask him for the rope session that he'd now missed out on, or just to complain about the unfairness of the universe. Maybe even begging for the attendance list that Rick took home, even though getting David's contact info that way would be unethical, and Naftali would never use it.

He'd just really *liked* David.

But he knew that Rick had other things to do today. And Rick wasn't his Dom. He had two subs he played with regularly—they just did workshops together.

Naftali leaned his head back on the rough brick of the building and watched the parking lot across the street until he

got so cold that he knew he needed to head for the subway.

Dammit.

DAVID

For the rest of the week, David went to work in a daze. He didn't know what had come over him at the kink demo, but he hadn't been able to get it off his mind.

Every night and most of his days, he relived those five minutes with Naftali.

Partially, it was just *Naftali*. His throaty laugh. The way his breath had hitched when David first held his hands. The feel of the rope against his skin. How he'd winked and leaned closer, even after David had stuttered. And, fuck, the way he'd looked up across his bound wrists with those deep brown eyes, like David was his personal God.

Partially, David could still hardly believe that he'd done all those things. Where had all of that even come from? He'd *acted like he actually knew what the fuck he was doing*. He'd never have thought that he could feel so comfortable doing something like that, let alone in front of a crowd. Which was all due to Naftali, too, he figured.

And it had been a thousand times better than anything he'd ever imagined.

Even now, David couldn't tell how much of that euphoria was about Naftali and how much was about himself. He kept trying to downplay it in his mind. But the connection he'd felt to Naftali during the demonstration was unlike anything he'd ever experienced before. The image of Naftali on his knees before him, tugging on that rope, would be forever branded on his mind.

It was too bad that Naftali was completely out of his league.

Even if David knew how to contact him.

That was why he was spending another weekend on his couch Googling events that he'd probably never go to.

David had looked up the next workshop in the series, but it was about couples' communication in a D/s relationship and taught by someone else. Naftali wasn't doing another demonstration until the end of January.

David was debating visiting the munch that Naftali had talked about—not to see him of course, just to meet people—when his phone rang. He fished it out of his pocket and winced.

He didn't need to look at Mike's name at the bottom because the picture flashed up first. David should really change it. Or just delete it all together. He didn't need a photo of the two of them eating ice cream cones at Pride and grinning like fools staring back at him every time his ex called.

David waited to pick up until he knew he could make his voice smooth and even. "Hey Mike."

"Hey David." They'd lived together for almost two years, and they sounded like acquaintances. They used to have nicknames for each other.

It also used to hurt, but now it was just weird. David was glad that they could talk to each other like adults, though. It felt like they were starting to get their old friendship back. "What's up?"

"Well, I was just looking at the calendar and I realized that the trip is still booked for December. I'm assuming you're still going to fly out, but do you want me to cancel the whole lodge thing or just my flight?"

Crap. David knew immediately what Mike was talking about, and he wasn't sure what to do. His parents' fortieth wedding anniversary was two days before Christmas, so of course he was going to head back to Portland. But he'd

planned to spend most of the trip skiing and snowshoeing in the mountains. Mike wasn't big on outdoor sports, or really anything outdoorsy or sporty at all.

But David had chosen a charming little bed and breakfast lodge where Mike could either join him for some of it or get some work done while he drank hot chocolate and watched the falling snow.

Last March, it had sounded romantic.

Now David was wondering if he wanted to go to a place they'd picked out together, alone.

"Give me a s-s-sec to think."

He could just fly out for two days, stay at a hotel near his parents' house, and then come home. He could also stay for all four days and go skiing like he'd intended. Hell, he could even join his parents for Christmas, since he wouldn't be spending it with Mike's family. The thought made him shudder.

It occurred to David to cancel the reservation at one lodge and switch to a different one. But that was just stupid. It was late-November, and everything would be booked up or more expensive.

"Don't cancel the lodge," David finally decided.

Mike laughed. "I didn't think anything could keep you away from the mountains."

Now it felt weird that Mike knew him so well. "You're right. So for the airlines, just cancel your ticket. I'll Venmo you the cost of anything you can't get back. Just let me know how much it is."

"Sure thing." Mike always took everything in stride. Things were easy for him. On one hand, it was something David had always respected about him. But it also meant that Mike had never needed him.

That had actually ended up being the thing that drove them apart. David wanted to take care of Mike in little ways—buying him cheesy gifts to make him smile or packing him

lunches for work. He'd asked attentively about Mike's challenges each day, in case he could help untangle them.

He'd thought that was what good partners did, but Mike had called it suffocating. He'd been nice about it, but he'd still pointed out that all of this stuff was maybe serving David's needs more than his own.

That had hurt. Even if it was true.

"How's Carmen?" David asked. That was Mike's new girlfriend. David had only met her once, but she'd seemed nice. Confident and relaxed in the same way Mike was.

"Good. We went to the art museum yesterday." It wasn't a dig, but from someone else it could have been. Mike just sounded pleased.

"I take it she lasted more than twenty minutes?" David was referring to a particularly horrendous exhibit that Mike had dragged him to.

Mike laughed. "She did. We spent the whole day there. You would have hated it." He said this fondly.

"I truly would have. I'm glad you found her." David meant it sincerely. He and Mike were so much better as friends.

"You know..." Mike dragged his words out, and David already knew he was going to roll his eyes at whatever he said next. "You could take someone with you to Portland."

David had been right. He ended up rolling his eyes. "Mike! That doesn't-doesn't, doesn't-doesn't make any sense! How would I even... I mean, it's not like I'm s-s-s-s-seeing anyone."

David could practically see Mike's grin through the phone. "So meet someone! Come on, you know you've been dying to play sugar daddy."

"What!?!?" David squawked. That was really the best word for it. "I haven't... I'm n-n-n-not..."

Mike chuckled. "Yes. You. Are. Or something like that. Don't you want to find some nice submissive boy and take care of his every little need?"

David pictured Naftali on his knees, gazing up at him. The way his head tilted back when he laughed. “No.”

He couldn't believe he was having this conversation with his ex.

Except, of course, that Mike was the only person he could have it with.

“Aw, come on. You could break out the handcuffs on that big brass bed. I looked at the pictures of the suite again.”

“People don't just... do that.”

“Sure they do.”

“Like for... money? I'm not paying someone t-t-to have sex with me.”

“No! Just for fun. Seriously. Carmen's friend Nina was telling me about this kinky app, Cuffd. She uses it all the time. *And* she went on a trip with someone that was just like this. This guy took her to the beach for a weekend of sunbathing and spankings.”

“I think we need n-n-new boundaries.”

“I didn't tell her anything about *you*. She was just telling me about how she uses it for dating, and I asked a few follow up questions. They have all sorts of screening protocols. And you can use it for hook-ups or relationships. Or, you know, taking some guy to a cute ski resort outside of Portland.”

“No, Mike.”

“Just think about it. You deserve something fun. And I want you to be happy, too.” His voice grew soft and sincere.

“Thanks.”

“So you'll try it? It's C-U-F-F-D. No E.”

David sighed. “Maybe.”

“Really?”

“No. I mean, not for the vacation. I might try the app.”

“Yes! My master plan is working.” He did a terrible impression of an evil laugh. He was probably rubbing his

hands together, too.

David found himself chuckling. It was kind of funny that his ex was so invested in his dating life.

“Oops! Gotta go. My sister’s here.”

David hid a pang in his chest. Was it weird that he missed seeing Mike’s extended family as much as he missed his ex? Or maybe that should have told him something important about their relationship. “Give Katie and the kids my love. Bye!”

“Bye! And... keep thinking about it. Those headboards look sturdy...”

David rolled his eyes, but he was smiling as he hung up.

He spent the next hour cleaning the apartment, but in the back of his mind was the app. Would he really have the nerve to date someone he met online? Specifically, someone who expected him to be a Dom?

He was washing a few dishes when the phone rang again. He dried his hands just in time to catch the call, but he was sorely tempted not to answer it. That would just make things worse in the long run, though.

“Hi, mom.”

“Hi, honey. I was just calling to see how you were doing.” That was a lie. She mostly wanted to talk about herself.

“Just great! What are you up t-t-to?”

“Oh, not much. I worked two double shifts last week because we’re short-staffed again. You know how that is. But Gladys just asked me, and I couldn’t say no.”

“Mm-hmm.” David put the phone on speaker. At least while she was talking, he could continue with the dishes. He only listened with half an ear.

He loved his mother, but the story was always the same and it was only the details that changed. She worked too many hours because she was a hero and a martyr. She volunteered a

lot at church and so-and-so personally told her just how much it meant to them.

She met some poor unfortunate soul and solved their problem.

She saw some of the people David grew up with, and they were all happily married with adorable children.

David made the occasional *I-heard-you* noises, and switched from washing to drying.

He only tuned back in when he heard Mike's name, realizing that he'd missed half the conversation. "...going to stay a few days, or just for the party? We'd love to meet him. And we'd really like to see you for Christmas."

David gritted his teeth. He hadn't told her that they'd broken up. When she'd wanted to send him a package last summer, he'd just given her his new address without explaining why he had it.

She was still slightly confused about the fact that he was a man, and also attracted to men. When he'd told her that he was dating Mike, she'd asked if that meant that he'd decided to be a woman again. Then she asked if Mike *knew what he was*.

She'd confidently told him that their relationship wouldn't last. It had taken her almost two years to "remember" his boyfriend's name. When she'd finally come around enough to ask about Mike, well... they were on their way to breaking up.

Some part of David wanted to believe that his mother was truly trying to understand now. She'd started telling him last year about the lesbian couple and the one gay man at her church, and how accepting everyone was. She'd relayed back every word of her several five-minute conversations with each of them. In her mind, that probably made her a champion for queer rights.

At the same time, she was still the mother who'd frowned as she told him that she'd love him no matter what, but she feared that he'd never find a job or get married if he transitioned. Somehow, his stutter and general awkwardness

had ended up in that conversation, too. It seemed there were too many strikes against him.

His relationship with Mike and series of promotions at work had never felt like enough evidence of his success.

That she was excited to meet Mike *now*... He just didn't know what to do with it.

He took a deep breath and plunged in. Funny how Mike had just called him about the same trip. "Actually, M-M-M-Mike's not c-c-c-coming."

"Oh? I know his job is very..."

"W-w-we broke up. A w-w-while ago."

"Honey, I'm so sorry. I knew that..."

He didn't want to hear whatever it was that she knew. "I'm dating again," he blurted out.

"A... woman?"

He scrunched up his eyes. "N-n-no. A m-m-m-man. I m-m-mean..." His tongue twisted around itself. He wanted to explain that he wasn't dating any specific man, but that if he were to go on dates, it would be with men. Except that he would be lying again, because he actually hadn't been on any dates at all.

And his tongue just wouldn't behave.

"So is he coming?"

He nearly dropped the dish he was drying.

His mother carried on. "We'd like to meet your young man. What does he do? Does he like to ski?"

Warm brown eyes and tousled chestnut hair flashed through his mind. The only thing he knew about Naftali was that he played guitar and led kink workshops. But he seemed like the type who would enjoy skiing. David bet he enjoyed everything.

Though he had no reason to think about him.

“I d-d-don’t know. I m-m-mean, I don’t know if he can c-c-come. I’ll ask.” Now he was lying again. He didn’t even need to be lying. His mother had no bearing on his life or relationships. He didn’t care if she was disappointed or proud. They only talked on the phone every couple months.

“Alright. Let me know. We need to tell the caterers how many people are coming.”

And that was the end of her interest in his love life. Maybe his life in general. She started telling him about the food she was ordering, and he tuned out again.

David started to make a plan. In a couple weeks, he would send her a text that he’d be coming to the anniversary party alone. No details. If she asked about his boyfriend, he’d just tell her that it hadn’t worked out.

Then he could spend the time skiing.

Except his mind kept going back to what Mike had said. About finding someone to go with him. Someone to... to handcuff to the brass headboard that his room in the B&B apparently had.

Would that be weird?

In his mind, Naftali grinned up at him, eyes alight with mischief and desire.

No, not him. But someone *like* him. Someone who liked to ski? And might let David try something with him if he ever got up the courage.

David also imagined himself walking into the anniversary party with someone on his arm. Someone for his relatives to talk about instead of him. Someone to show his parents that he was a proud gay man with a boyfriend.

He hadn’t been back home in three years. He hadn’t seen most of his aunts and uncles and cousins for longer than that. He was pretty sure they all knew he’d transitioned—he was friends with some of his cousins on social media at least. He had a very visible beard and a muscular, masculine body that he hadn’t had a decade ago. He had no idea what anyone was

going to say about that. A “boyfriend” could be a sort of buffer.

His mother’s voice cut through the thought. “Are you still there? Honey?”

Apparently, he’d missed too many *mm-hmms* in the conversation. “I’m here. But I’ve got to run out to a meeting soon.” A meeting on Saturday? That didn’t even make sense.

“OK. Well, good to talk to you. Let’s talk soon.”

“Sounds good,” he said, vaguely. “Bye.”

“Bye! And let me know about your plus one!”

NAFTALI

“How about this guy?” Zeev was poking at Naftali’s phone, brown eyes squinting under their asymmetrical tuft of spiky hair. They thrust the phone toward him, causing their shimmery pink shirt to fall off of one beefy shoulder, exposing a wide expanse of thick chest hair. “LatexLover82.”

“Nah.” Naftali grabbed another tomato and began dicing.

“Really? You’re not into latex?” Zeev sounded shocked. They were thumbing through Naftali’s Cuffd profile, trying to find him a Dom.

Technically, Zeev was supposed to be helping him cook, but the two of them had abandoned that plan over a year ago. Now Zeev just kept him company on both of their assigned dinner nights, and sometimes opened the oven door when Naftali’s hands were full.

Oh, and tried to find him dates.

Not that it was working.

“I’m not *not* into latex. I just know him. Nice guy. We did a scene like... four years ago? Didn’t click though.”

Zeev sighed melodramatically and popped a grape into their mouth. That was their other contribution to the joint cooking efforts. Naftali wanted to sigh with them.

“Um, here’s someone. TipTop. That’s a cute name. Says he’s...”

“No. That’s Tip. Goes to my munch.”

“But you *haven't* slept with him?”

Naftali stuck out his tongue. “No!” Then he amended his statement. “He flogged me. One time. Totally different from sleeping together.”

Zeev didn't look convinced.

“I promise you. It's different. Sex would be like... we don't know each other *that* well.” He chopped another tomato while Zeev kept scrolling.

“How about LuckyL92?” they asked. “He's got a high match percent. Looks like he's into impact p...”

“I wrote to him. He ghosted me when I said I was trans. Even though it's in my profile.”

“Asshole.” Zeev swiped him away with a vengeance.

Naftali slid the first pile of tomatoes into the bowl.

Zeev ate another handful of grapes as they read. “Oh my God. You have to see this one.”

Naftali was too far away to see the screen, especially with the mountain of groceries and dishes in the way. But Zeev was about to fall off their chair laughing, so he knew it was going to be good.

“Read it to me.”

“Nope. This one you have to see.”

Naftali walked around the counter, trying not to drip tomato juice everywhere.

The picture showed a dick. It was large and veiny, erect with a strong hand wrapped around the base. Naftali could appreciate a good dick—on a person, not on a dating profile—so he wasn't sure why he was looking at it. “It's a dick,” he commented, hoping for enlightenment.

Zeev couldn't even talk, they were laughing so hard. They flicked to the next picture. Same dick, different angle. Maybe outside, judging by the leaves in the background? They tapped again. There was the dick. Crappier lighting, a little blurry. Another tap. More dick.

“How many of them are there?”

“Eighty-four.”

“No way.” Laughter burst from his mouth. “Eighty-four dick pics? Does he even show his face?” He watched, mesmerized, as the parade of cock continued.

“Nope. Just the same dick, eighty-four times,” Zeev announced gleefully. “Oh, and there are some with other people’s dicks, too.” They kept thumbing through them. Dick. Dick. Dick. Yeah, he got the idea.

“Maybe he’s an exhibitionist,” Naftali mused. “Like, this is probably his actual kink.” That made it, strangely, a lot more acceptable. He wondered if the guy explained it on his profile.

“Oh, right. So that’s like... not weird?” Zeev wasn’t kinky, but they loved reading the Cuffd profiles. Naftali figured it was like click-bait kitten videos for them or something.

“Um, it’s not weird. But it’s probably not a good way to get dates. Or maybe it is. Who knows?”

Zeev stopped on one photo. The now-recognizable dick was jutting out into the frame. Below it was another man’s slender, hairless chest and eagerly spread legs, his cock securely enclosed in a shiny metal cage with just a glimpse of his exposed hole below it.

“He should have led with that one,” Naftali commented. Mr. Look At My Dick didn’t do anything for him, but being the one on his back, bound and helpless with a Dom standing over him...

Zeev snapped their head around to look at him. “What even is that? Like... they do bondage on your cock?”

Oh, sweet summer child. “That isn’t even the *beginning* of bondage someone can do on your cock.” Naftali sighed wistfully.

Zeev looked him up and down. “Did you just sigh because you don’t have a bio-dick for someone to squeeze into a piece of metal?”

“Or tie up with a string. Or hang weights from, though that’s usually the balls.”

Zeev mashed their thighs together, cringing. People with penises were always so squeamish about their junk. It cracked Naftali up.

“Or you can squeeze them in a vice,” he added, just to see Zeev squirm. “You can even use needles along the shaft to....”

“Nope. Nope, nope, nope! Safeword!” they crowed. They were still chuckling, though. “You are one kinky dude.” They gave him a look of awe.

Naftali finished chopping the tomatoes and slid them into the pan of fragrant, ground spices in glistening oil.

He didn’t mind very much now that he didn’t have a bio-dick. When he’d been a teenager, it had seemed like the end of the world. Now he knew a thousand ways to get off that were even better, and that his parts didn’t define his gender. And there were plenty of Doms out there who didn’t care that he was trans.

He just needed to find one.

Or a couple to alternate between. Whatever. He wasn’t looking for anything long term.

He rinsed his hands and started on the cauliflower. Since he had Zeev’s cooking duty too, he was making enough food for at least four meals for everyone. He’d gone Indian-themed tonight, with a pot of lentils already bubbling, tofu baking in the oven to make a biryani with the fluffy rice on the stove, cauliflower gobi that he was going to start next, and what was about to be chana masala once he found the cans of chickpeas.

“OK, how about this one,” Zeev said, voice a bit more serious. “High match percent with your kinks. Says he’s really into rope bondage.”

“Good start.” Naftali opened the chickpeas and dumped them in with the tomatoes. He probably should have waited for the tomatoes to cook down, but there was still a lot more cooking to do.

“Says he’s a Daddy? But that probably means something different to me than it does to you. I mean, I thought of some older guy with silver in his hair and a nice belly, but this guy’s twenty-three? Oh, and he’s looking for a 24/7 dynamic, it says.”

“Yeah, Daddies are usually older guys, but they don’t have to be. It’s more of a caring Dom role that can go into financial and emotional support in one direction, or age play in the other. Often both. Pass on that, though. I’m way too busy for 24/7 and I don’t need a Daddy to take care of me.” Naftali shuddered. “I had enough of that with Noah trying to run my life. Never doing that lifestyle thing again. Plus, all of that patriarchal bullshit. Why *Daddies* anyway? Why can’t they just be... well... anything non-gendered, really? Cuddle Doms or something.”

Zeev laughed so hard that a tear leaked out of their eye. “Cuddle Doms? Is that what you want?”

OK, so that sounded better in his head. “No... OK, fine, laugh at me. But cuddles are really good though. You can have both.” Or at least that was the dream in his head. Someone who could wield a whip and still bring him breakfast in bed.

Er... without any attachments or expectations of him outside the scene.

Naftali’s thoughts were interrupted when their housemate Shira walked into the kitchen, her curly hair bouncing. “Hey guys.” She stole a piece of raw tofu from the bowl where it was marinating.

“You know, if you wait half an hour, you can eat that cooked.”

She shook her head. “It’s good like this.” She grabbed another piece. “You could serve it like this as a salad. Maybe add some carrots and cucumbers. What are you guys up to?”

“Looking at dick pics,” Zeev answered, without missing a beat.

“Ewww.”

“They’re better in person,” Naftali suggested.

“Um... gonna havta disagree on that one. I’ve *seen* dicks in person. They’re all dangly and squishy.”

“When have you seen a dick?” Zeev teased. Shira was very proud of her status as a gold-star lesbian.

“I mean, I don’t try to look. But backstage during dance productions in college when people were changing? The mikvah at Freedman?” Isabella Freeman was a Jewish retreat center, and they *did* have all-gender ritual baths in the pond.

“Good point,” Naftali conceded. “So, what are you up to?”

“Just taking a study break.” She stretched her arms overhead, elongating her dancer’s body. She was in her third year of rabbinical school now and the reading load was intense. “I’m layning on Saturday.” She wrinkled her nose.

“I can help later if you want.” Naftali loved chanting Torah. There were a few dozen mini-melodies that are used when reading Torah as a performance in shul, with little notations about which ones to use for each word. He thought it was a fun way to connect with the text and traditions.

Shira—despite her name, which meant *song*—was not at all musical. They practiced a lot together.

She squeezed him from the side. “Thank you! Oh, and do you have a receipt for me by any chance?” She clasped her hands under her chin and batted her eyes.

Naftali looked around the kitchen, his stomach sinking. There was a jumble of reusable cloth bags sitting on one chair. He’d already folded up three or four extra paper bags and put them away with a pile of others. And there were still another five or six cloth bags sitting on the floor, waiting to be unpacked.

Somewhere in there was the receipt from his shopping trip. For the whole household. For the week. That he needed for Shira to reimburse him from the common household fund.

“I’ll start looking,” Shira said brightly. She started digging through the cloth bags without even waiting for him to say something.

Naftali knew that other people forgot receipts too. And he knew that Shira was trying to keep things low key. But he forgot things like this a *lot* more than other people.

“I’m on it!” Zeev chimed in. They went for the loaded bags. “Hey, um, Naftali?”

“Yeah?” Naftali washed his hands and started going through his pockets.

“I think we forgot to put away the ice cream.” They were being generous. *Naftali* had forgotten to put away the ice cream. Zeev hadn’t even been there when he’d unpacked and started cooking.

Naftali groaned. It was probably six cartons of sloshy dairy and non-dairy sludge at this point. When they refroze, they were going to be bricks.

“I’ll put it in the freezer.”

“Sorry,” Naftali said to both of them. A little voice in his head told him that he should have just *remembered* for once and put the receipt in his wallet like a normal person. That frozen things should get unpacked first. That he should have just *tried* harder.

Zeev wrapped him in a hug from behind. “You were doing a million things. You forgot one.”

Naftali sighed. He knew that, but it was something that he was extra sensitive to. “I forgot two things. Shira still needs the receipt.”

She held it up triumphantly. “Found it! And this other one from September. Is that your credit card number?”

He looked at the old receipt sadly. It was smudged and wrinkled. “Yep. But I don’t know if you reimbursed me for that already.”

“I’ll check. And hey, everything smells great. I’ll be back down for dinner.”

Naftali let Zeev hug him for a little longer, soaking in their non-judgmental presence.

Naftali hated that he was so disorganized. He hated that he was so *sensitive* to being disorganized. Luckily, Zeev knew this about him. They dropped a kiss on the top of his head, the only part that they could reach with the tremendous height difference. Naftali awkwardly cradled the arms that were wrapped around his chest. “Thanks.”

“Any time. And I just want to remind you that you’re doing all the shopping for a household of five, helping Shira with trope, and making a kick-ass feast when I would have just ordered pizza. You’re amazing.”

“Thanks.” Naftali tried to remember that. He *was* amazing.

Eventually, he went back to chopping cauliflower. Zeev gave him a moment to collect himself, then went back to poking around on Cuffd.

They found something that made them titter. “Ready for another one?”

“Hit me.” Naftali was ready to be entertained. It was a good thing Zeev had a gift for finding weird shit on Cuffd.

“So first, his username is literally AwkwardNewDom.”

Naftali snorted. “Yeah... Not really selling himself. But maybe... honesty in advertising?”

Zeev shook their head. “It’s like he doesn’t even *want* to get laid. But look. He’s got a high match percent with you, and he likes to... Wait. No.” Their eyes grew wide. “No way.” They started to giggle. “This is too good. You have to hear this.”

Naftali rinsed the cutting board and started on the cauliflower, already in a better mood. “Go for it.” He walked around the counter again, narrowly avoiding one of the bags of groceries that he still needed to put away.

Zeev tilted the screen toward him as they read aloud.

I know this is completely crazy, but I’m looking for a travel companion for a skiing trip. But not in a skeezy way.

Zeev editorialized. “Yeah, dude. You’re totally not skeezy.”

Naftali elbowed them in the side as they kept reading.

I'm going to my parent's fortieth anniversary in Portland, which will probably be boring, but I would like to bring a date. But I'm not trying to buy sex. I promise.

Zeev interrupted themselves again. "He *promises*." Then they cleared their throat and continued.

The area has great fine dining, great public parks, and of course skiing and other outdoor sports that I'd love to share with you when we're not trading passive-aggressive barbs with my mother. Which I swear is only for one afternoon. The other four days are for fun.

"Fun at the public park!" Zeev added before reading on.

I'm new to kink, but I'm pretty sure I'm a Daddy Dom. If you let me, I'd love to pamper and provide for you for the entire trip. Unfortunately, I can't offer much else yet because I don't know what I'm doing. But I can help you with your taxes if you need it. Only a little bit joking.

In all seriousness, I would greatly appreciate anyone who wants to join me.

P.S. I'm trans masc and out-ish to my family.

Naftali took back his phone and re-read the letter slowly. Okay, so it was mega-awkward. But it was also kind of sweet. Certainly earnest. And lord knew trans folks could have all sorts of shit going on with their parents and need support.

Maybe this guy just needed a friend to get his pronouns right. Or someone who could demonstrate that he was worth dating. Or he could just be really lonely.

Naftali's heart always went out to queer folks who struggled with their families. And the guy was trans masc. Supporting other trans folks was important to him.

Zeev was dying. "I can't get over the great public parks! Who even says that? And he's really, seriously not buying skeezy sex. And the taxes... Oh my god. Is that like a kink thing too that I don't know about?"

Naftali shook his head absently as he read the profile description a third time. Yes, it was a little clumsy, but it was also kind of cute. And with a nice joke at the end. Maybe even a joke at the beginning, if that was actually on purpose. Naftali's chest felt all fluttery. He was almost sure that he knew who wrote it. "Scroll up," he told Zeev. "Find a pic."

They were looking at him like he was crazy, because he actually wasn't laughing. "Don't tell me you're interested in him."

Zeev clicked on the profile photo, and there he was. "It's David!" He was wearing a slickly-tailored suit. Damn, he sure cleaned up well.

"Who's David?"

"The Baby Dom from the class!" Naftali grabbed Zeev's arm and squeezed, no doubt getting cauliflower crumbles all over them.

"Ohhhhh..." Zeev's expression of understanding had at least five different words in it.

Naftali just might have whined to them for a whole week, in a lot of detail, about how upset he was that he hadn't gotten David's number back in November. And how it was sucky being ethical and not asking Ryan to get it for him off the event registration. Then Naftali had kind of forgotten about him. Well, a little bit.

"Uh... he certainly looks like an Awkward New Dom." They were teasing, but it was gentle. They knew Naftali liked this guy.

"Hush. He's trying."

"That's totally the same picture he has on LinkedIn."

Naftali had to laugh. It was true.

"So are you going to write to him?"

Naftali looked at the picture again. Maybe he was exactly what he'd titled himself, but he was so much more, too. Honest. Playful. Willing to learn. And also, a guy who was

trying to prove himself to his family and enjoyed skiing. Naftali *loved* skiing.

“I think I’m going to Portland,” he said slowly, the plan taking form even as he spoke.

“Nafti, that’s insane.”

“No, it’s really not.” The idea was growing on him. “It’ll be like a vacation. With a hot guy. I’ll get to enjoy four days of great public parks and skiing. What’s not to like?”

“Maybe that you don’t know him? And that he might have a homophobic, transphobic family?”

Naftali shrugged. “I’ll get to know him. And he’s allowed to want support. You would do that for one of your friends.”

Zeev grumbled. “I would do that for my *friends*.”

“Well, we’ll become friends. He’s a nice guy.”

Zeev narrowed their eyes. “Tell me again what it is that makes this guy so special, when he didn’t even wait for you after the class?”

This was the part Naftali hadn’t really put into words yet. It felt almost like a secret. “There was just this... this something. About how he was watching me. I don’t know. You know how sometimes guys look at you, and you just feel like a piece of meat? Like they only want you for your body?”

“Yeah, and it’s gross.”

Naftali rolled their eyes. “I wasn’t done explaining. David *didn’t* do that. But it wasn’t like he was trying to flirt with me either.” He hadn’t been that confident, at least at first. “He was just watching me like he was kind of in awe. Like, transfixed. By *me*.” That was as well as he could explain it. David made him feel important. Like he couldn’t tear his eyes away.

Zeev considered this, serious for once. “Nafti, anyone worthwhile should look at you like that. But that doesn’t mean he’s actually going to follow through. You still don’t know him.”

“I know. But I can get to know him!” Easy. They could go on a couple dates or something. Maybe break out the ropes a bit early. So what if David didn’t know anything *now*... Naftali already knew he was a quick study. The thought of David and those ropes around his wrists had him shivering.

“You just want him to tie you up,” Zeev surmised.

Wow. It was like they were psychic or something.

“Obviously. And he’s going to *pamper* me.” Naftali didn’t know what it was about that word, but it made him feel all warm inside. Especially when he thought about David’s eyes on him. He’d never been pampered before, but if that was David’s kink, he wanted the full experience.

Especially since it was just for vacation. A few days of fun, and then it would be over before he started to feel smothered by constraints. They wouldn’t be together long enough for David to have any long-term expectations, so Naftali couldn’t be a disappointment, either. Easy peasy. And hopefully kinky, too.

Zeev gave him a weird look. “You hate it when people spend money on you.”

Naftali shrugged. “It’s different if it’s a kink. I promise.”

“Didn’t you just tell me that you don’t want a Daddy?”

“Yeah, but this is just a Daddy for a week. Like a rent-a-Daddy.” It made sense in his head. Like an all-expenses-paid resort, but with the bonus Dom feature. “It’s like going bungee jumping or something—you have to do it once just so you know what it’s like.”

“Only you,” Zeev said with exasperated fondness.

“Plus, he’s trans, too. That makes the Daddy thing totally different.” Naftali couldn’t fully explain it, but he respected that David was claiming his masculinity in his own way.

“Yeah,” Zeev agreed, thoughtfully. “It does. You just have to promise that you’ll call me if anything goes wrong.”

“Of course.” Naftali went back to the cauliflower and tossed it in a pot. He was really excited now. “This is going to

be amazing. David is taking me to Portland!”

“You might need to write back to him and get him to agree first.”

Naftali started to sing a made-up song about Portland and public parks. And how his rent-a-Daddy was going to take him skiing.

Writing back was just details. He was sure David would pick him for the trip. Oh, this was going to be awesome. He could feel himself grinning as he danced around the kitchen, giving everything on the stove a stir.

“Naftali!” Zeev interrupted.

Naftali sang louder. About bondage, and then a line about how nothing rhymed with *bondage*. It was hard to stop, when he was so irrepressibly excited. Daddy David was *so* going to take him skiing and tie him up.

Zeev hit him with a grape.

DAVID

David couldn't believe he'd posted a profile.

It had been a late-night decision fueled by a night out with Mike and Carmen and too many beers. They'd both insisted that most subs would love an all-expenses paid vacation to Portland in exchange for tagging along to a family event.

David wasn't convinced, but he figured that it would at least be nice to have a travel companion. If the guy didn't like him, they could just ski.

So he put his crazy request out there. Why not?

What he didn't expect was for people to actually respond. Not just people, but a *lot* of people.

People with usernames like *SugarBaby18*, which he sincerely hoped wasn't his age, and *BadBoy4U*. Even more overwhelming were the offers. Some of them asked for gifts up front, putting out their list of expensive tastes like it was part of the flirtation. Some of them offered a whole menu of ways he could "use" their bodies to meet both of their supposed desires.

And then there were the pictures. Mostly younger guys, model-thin and pouting, or hunky and beefed up. He got dick pics. He got *asshole* pics, which he didn't even know were a thing. Like, actual pictures of people's spread open butts.

He was pretty sure that half of them didn't even read the part that said he was trans, but since he didn't write back to any of them, there was no way he would ever know.

Dick pics made him extremely uncomfortable. Because... What was he supposed to do in return? All of these cis guys just had this thing dangling between their legs that he was *dying* to have between his... And it wasn't there.

Most of the time he was pretty comfortable with his body. He just... didn't think about that part of it too much. He had a couple packers that he liked, and when he wore them, he felt good about himself and how he looked. He could fuck with a strap-on, and he knew that he wasn't too bad in bed.

But flaunting all of those bio-dicks in his face when he couldn't send the same pic in return just made his stomach turn.

Freud had gotten something right with that whole penis-envy thing, but David didn't need it rubbed in his face.

David finally decided to delete the whole account.

He wasn't even going to look at the messages again, but a subject line caught his eye. He clicked on it quickly.

Hey Boy Scout! ;)

I love skiing! I'm sure you got dozens of replies, but I hope you pick me. I'm down for everything in your letter. The passive-aggressive anniversary, the restaurants, the public parks, the pampering, and even the help with my taxes. I'm in.

When's the trip?

He read the letter four times. It had to be from Naftali. Right?

OK, obviously it was. No one else would call him that. Except... Dammit. David had tried to make a stupid joke about being good with knots in his profile and said something about being a boy scout. So someone else could have picked that up.

In retrospect, he was probably subconsciously hoping that Naftali would find him. That, and he really wasn't a funny person. It was a good joke once, so he figured it would be okay to recycle it a little bit.

The message was still probably from Naftali.

David poured over the person's profile, trying to glean everything that he could. There was only one photo, and his eyes traced the ropes crossing the curve of an elegant spine. Another wrapped around one lean but muscular upper arm. There was a stretch of corded neck and a patch of short, dark hair. The lighting was artistically stark, like this was from a professional photo shoot, but there was no hint of the man's face, or even much of his body.

David started to read. The username was SubOnAMission. Cute. His writing continued in that humorous vibe. When he mentioned that he was a teacher and musician, David's stomach got all fluttery.

It had to be him, right? Naftali taught that class like he was up in front of students every day, and he said that he played guitar. Plus he was trans. SubOnAMission was Jewish, which made sense. David had Googled Naftali's name like a creeper after the kink demonstration, and it was definitely a Jewish name. How many guys in Philly were trans, Jewish, kinky, and interested in music and teaching?

David read everything again, pausing to look up terms when he got to the kinky parts. Primal play? He wasn't sure he fully understood it, but it sounded hot. Sensory deprivation? He thought he could do that—at least earplugs and a mask. What would it be like, being so responsible for someone that they trusted you with their sight? Their hearing? Their whole body, just spread out for him to play with...

David swallowed, desire pooling low in his belly. It hadn't felt real before, but when he put Naftali's face to these requests, he could imagine it all.

Naftali—if it was him—had a long list of things that he liked to be hit with. It appealed to David more as he read each one. It wasn't so much the idea of striking someone, but the memory of wonder and desire in Naftali's eyes. Would he look like that when David was lashing him across the back? Would he cry out in pain and pleasure like David imagined?

Impact play had never been a big part of David's fantasies, because he couldn't reconcile it with his desire to nurture. But

maybe it would be now.

And of course bondage. He couldn't stop looking at that photo. It was one of the most beautiful things he'd ever seen.

The only thing that pulled him up short was the section on relationship interests. SubOnAMission had clicked Scenes, Short-Term, Sex, Non-Sexual Kink, and Casual Dating. Glaringly missing was Long-Term Exclusive.

So... that was a letdown. On the other hand, all David was asking for was a four-day trip, right? Five days with the flights. And enough of a connection that he could maybe feel confident trying out some kink.

David drew in a slow breath. If this wasn't Naftali, it was still a submissive trans guy who wrote back that he loved to ski instead of sending an unsolicited picture of his buttocks.

Carefully, and with many revisions, David wrote back. He hated this sort of thing, but he would just keep it short and simple.

After a lot of deliberation, he didn't ask who it was. If it was really Naftali, he didn't want to look stupid, like he didn't know it was him. And if it wasn't, asking him if he was some other guy sounded rude, like David was wishing he was someone else.

Thank you for your interest. It's a five-day trip including the travel. The week before Christmas. Does that timing work for you?

As soon as he pushed Send, he thought of a million things he could have done differently. Hell, it sounded like a business proposition. Was he supposed to flirt? Technically, Cuffd was a dating website. So SubOnAMission was clearly looking for someone to do sexual and kinky things with. He hadn't mentioned any of that at all.

David kept his phone with him for the next hour, waiting for an alert. He even left the ringer on when he went to bed, which he never did. He didn't get much sleep anyway.

All day Saturday, he made excuses for why Naftali might not be getting back to him. And in between, he did his chores

and daydreamed about what it would be like to spoil a sub for a week. The B&B was supposed to have nice restaurants all around. There was a picture of a little coffee and hot chocolate bar in the lounge.

A year ago, David had imagined bringing hot chocolate to Mike, who might have given him a slight smile and absent word of thanks, or shooed him away if he was reading.

Would Naftali's eyes light up? Would he understand what it meant to David to deliver that mug... even if David didn't fully understand it himself?

By the afternoon, David was feeling jittery. He wanted this to work out. He needed it to. Which meant that he needed to have control. He started googling things to do in the area, saving the best ones in a spreadsheet. Hours and rates of different ski slopes. Restaurants and reviews. Day trips into Portland. Maybe even a Christmas concert? No... that didn't seem right. Naftali was Jewish.

David shook his head. He was pretty much an atheist, but he and Mike had always set up a tree and gone over to Mike's parents' house for Christmas. Before that, he'd flown home, or at least called his family and done something special for the day.

What would it be like to not celebrate Christmas? It felt like it wouldn't really be December. The offices and schools all shut down. The streets were hung with tinsel and pine.

Actually, what was it like for Jews in general to not celebrate the biggest national holiday of the year? David knew they celebrated Hanukkah instead, but was that the same?

He dove into more research. It looked like Hanukkah overlapped Christmas this year. It was the eighth night. So maybe Naftali would want to light candles instead?

He had mixed feelings about that—and religion in general. But it wasn't like they were really dating, was it? The whole trip would be more like... taking a vacation from real life. Trying something out.

He could light some candles with Naftali, if that was important to him.

He added that to his list, along with three synagogues in Portland. That was an even weirder idea, but he wanted to be ready.

By the time evening rolled around, though, he was just exhausted.

Naftali hadn't written back.

David knew he had a tendency to get fixated on ideas. Hyper-focusing until little explorations became obsessions.

It had only been a day, but he already couldn't imagine doing this with anyone but Naftali.

In fact, he wasn't sure he wanted to.

How awkward would it be to meet someone else... someone who he maybe didn't know how to talk to. Someone who might make fun of his stutter and social fumbles.

Or worse, someone who wouldn't make fun of him to his face, but only go with him because he was paying for the trip.

That would be much, much worse.

No, he was right about this one. He could do this with Naftali, but not with anyone else. If Naftali didn't write back—or if it was someone else—he would just go alone.

Still it was disappointing when dusk fell.

There had been three more messages from other subs that he deleted as quickly as he saw them.

SubOnAMission was silent.

David ate dinner. He watched a show. And finally he brushed his teeth and got ready for bed. Apparently, it wasn't going to happen.

And that was when Cuffd sent one more alert. He nearly fumbled the phone, but he got the message open.

Hey! I'm Jewish, so I don't need to fly home for Christmas. (And that's also why I disappeared for a day—I don't check my

phone on Shabbat.) Any time that week is great for me. Let me know about logistics. OMG, I'm so excited!

David's heart pounded. Naftali hadn't been ignoring him after all. He drafted his responses three times before finally hitting Send.

I'm looking forward to it, too. What do you want to know?

Yes, that took him three attempts. Fortunately, Naftali's response took just as long. The little bubbles kept appearing and disappearing, so at least David wasn't the only one who couldn't figure out what to say.

Only when Naftali replied, it was practically a novel.

I want to know everything! Where are we staying? When are the flights? Do you have any siblings? Cousins? How much skiing experience do you have? Cuz I can't do the black diamonds, but maybe I'll get better this trip? What are your parents like? Is it too cold to go hiking? Do you like hiking? Did you grow up in Portland? Oh... and Portland, Oregon or Portland, Maine?

David could hear Naftali's bubbly voice in his head as he read the questions. It just *had* to be him.

I don't know where to begin with all that, David finally replied.

It occurred to him suddenly that Naftali had just agreed to go on a trip without even knowing which side of the *country* it was on. David had never been that adventurous.

He was about to at least answer that question when Naftali replied first.

Ha! Sorry. I get excited sometimes. Want to call?

David debated how he wanted to answer. He really didn't like talking on the phone. Texts, in his opinion, were one of the best inventions in the past century.

Not to mention that he was already flustered enough by this whole situation. He knew he would stutter a thousand times. With texts, he could take the time to plan out his responses.

Would you mind if we just texted?

Sure. No problem. ;) Just expect me to jump around between topics.

That was surprisingly easy. He'd had other people push back when he asked to text, especially for important conversations.

So, he was really doing this. Anxiety and excitement warred in his belly.

I guess I can start with Portland, Oregon. I've never been to Maine.

Naftali's replies were rapid.

Oh, awesome! I've never been to Maine, either.

I visited Portland, Oregon once, but I didn't get to see much of it.

I've heard there's great hiking around there.

And an awesome queer scene.

Oh, wait. Is it too cold for hiking? :)

I love skiing!

He followed this with more ski-related icons than David thought his phone even had, interspersed with a rainbow array of hearts. Naftali had already jumped over a few of the key details, like when the trip was. But David supposed they'd get back to that. He replied as carefully as he could.

The resort is actually on Mt. Hood. And I think that if it's too snowy for hiking, we could snowshoe or cross-country ski.

He'd seen rentals for both of those when he was looking at the ski slopes. Meanwhile, Naftali had leapt ahead again.

Ooh! What's the resort called? I wanna see. And yes, we are definitely going on those trails. I always wanted to try snowshoeing.

David couldn't help but think about how different it would be visiting this place with someone who seemed as passionate about the outdoors as he was. His vision of this trip with Mike

was spending the day on his own and coming back to his boyfriend in the evening. The idea of doing everything with Naftali by his side had him flushed with excitement.

If it was Naftali, of course.

The Meadowlark Lodge, David told him. Then, since they were jumping around anyway, he added, *Do you want to give me your details so I can book your flight?*

Oh, yeah! What do you need?

Full Name. Date of Birth. Phone Number.

David practically collapsed onto his bed in relief when he saw the response. It *was* Naftali. Naftali, who had actually met him, awkward fumbles and all, and still wanted to do this. David still couldn't quite believe it was happening.

He saved the phone number in his address book and noted that his birthday was in May. David wondered if he'd still know him in May. He hoped so.

When he got back to the Cuffd app, of course Naftali had written a dozen more texts.

This place is gorgeous!

Which room do we have?

Did you see this one?

There was a picture of a room richly appointed in dark blue. The base of the bedside lamp was a heron roughly carved from knotted wood.

Or this one?

The cheery yellow bedspread and wooden desk were beautiful, though not as stunning as the view of the gorge from the expansive windows.

Look at this bathtub!!!!

A claw-footed bathtub looked out over the snow-swept trees, which rapidly dropped away to reveal a stunning sunset. Naftali's texts never stopped.

And there's a cross-country skiing trail right from the lodge.

OMG. The lodge is doing the Cuffed Kinkmas thing. And they have a dungeon!

Tell me we get to visit the Meadowlark playroom.

Can we stay for kinkmas, pretty, pretty please?

Naftali added a picture of what David recognized from other research as kinky furniture. Metal and wooden structures in strange configurations with a lot of vinyl padding and attachments for restraints.

David's pulse raced. He'd had *no idea* that was there. It was both exciting and terrifying. He wanted this desperately, but that wasn't the same as actually doing it. Especially with someone he'd only met once.

But he could extend the trip, right? Even if they didn't go to the kinky event? It wouldn't be hard to book a few more days. The idea of having more time with Naftali was exhilarating.

David continued reading the posts, but Naftali had already gone on to talking about the hot chocolate in the lounge. David didn't even know where to begin.

It seemed like there was one thing that he needed to clear up before anything else, though. *You know I'm not very experienced, right?*

With kink? I wouldn't have guessed.

He wouldn't? Then Naftali followed it up with a winky face. Right. Sarcasm. Or... maybe a joke?

David took a deep breath and pushed on.

That day at the workshop was only the second time I tried anything.

But what I really meant was I haven't done a lot of dating.

Or things like that.

By which he meant sex. Because of his transition he hadn't started dating until after college. Mike was only his second boyfriend, and the fifth person he'd tried sleeping with.

Naftali replied immediately.

We can explore together then.

I'm easy.

Ha! I didn't even mean that as a joke, but that's true, too.

David loved the idea of exploring with Naftali, but the next sentence brought back all of his fears. He usually hated the term *easy* because it was used to shame people. Naftali used it like he was proud of it, though. Like it was something fun.

Naftali had to have so much more experience. He probably went home with different Doms every weekend.

It was only the safety of the screens between them, the anonymity of not having to see Naftali's face, that let David type what he needed to.

I haven't had a lot of casual sex, either.

It works better if I sleep with people who I'm friends with first.

So I'm not sure if I'll be ready for that.

He held his breath. This might be the end of it for him. He'd posted on a kinky app, after all. A huge part of the implicit promise was doing kinky things together, like everyone else who wrote back assumed. Still, if David realized that he wasn't up for it, he'd rather have Naftali back out now than be disappointed on the trip.

There was no response.

Not even bubbles.

David's brain started racing around in tiny circles, like a hamster on a squeaky wheel. He wasn't really a Dom. If he were, he'd be confident and outgoing. He'd be able to plan and control everything for his sub. He'd be ready to leap into sex with a guy he barely knew and rock his world.

Instead, he'd used a kinky dating app to find someone to go to his parent's anniversary party because he didn't want to go skiing by himself.

He felt like a fraud.

Finally, there were bubbles again. He almost wanted to turn off his phone instead of reading them.

Hey, sorry about that. My phone died so I switched to my laptop.

We don't have to do anything that you're not comfortable with.

I'm still looking forward to skiing.

And pampering. ;)

Is that still on the table?

David didn't know what a heart attack would feel like, but he thought he'd almost just had one. His fingers were almost too tingly to type.

Yes.

Awesome. We can see how things go.

I want to get to know you anyway.

We can be friends first.

First, like this was really going to turn into something. Naftali kept typing.

But I'll bring the rope, just in case. ;)

David had to close his eyes, overwhelmed with the image that flashed through his mind. Naftali, on his knees at the workshop, head tilted up, all mischief and desire and a wordless plea for something *more*. Something that David was almost sure he could give him.

And at the lodge, they'd have privacy. A space where he could take off all of Naftali's clothes. Where he could taste the skin covering those sharp clavicles. Learn where curls of dark hair covered that solid chest. Bind him everywhere and see those ropes crossing his skin, just like in the picture...

Maybe by the end of the week, he could work up to it. Or maybe at this kinkmas thing? If there were other people doing it too?

No pressure, though, Naftali added.

If we end up shagging, we enjoy it.

If you want to test out those boy scout skills, I'm your willing sub.

And if we don't do any of that, we have a fun vacation.

I'm excited about the trip no matter what.

I like you.

David's heart truly must have stopped beating for a moment. Did Naftali just say he *liked* him? Of course, Naftali had to like something about him, or he wouldn't be doing this. But this felt more like getting a note in seventh grade, with the blue-lined paper all rough on the edge where the spirals were torn off, the penciled letters uneven. Twenty years later, and the butterflies in his stomach were just as fluttery.

What was he supposed to say in response? That he liked him back? That sounded ridiculous.

Thank you.

Yeah. That was dumb. So he wrote that.

I feel silly now. I'm not sure what to say.

Naftali didn't have a lack of words.

You're adorable.

You knew I was flirting with you at the class, right?

Another heart-pounding moment. He'd *hoped* that was flirting. He'd imagined it a thousand times. And Naftali thought he was adorable. Which was... maybe not the most Dom-y complement, but it was good, right?

I thought you were. I wasn't sure.

I was. ;) Even my co-presenter thought I was going to get you to take me home.

As fast as David's elation rose, it plummeted again. So... basically, he'd fucked that up. For once, David typed back faster. It was better to get this over with.

I'm not very good at picking up social cues sometimes.

If you want me to know something, you might have to be very blunt.

Got it. :)

I can be very blunt.

Feed me. Snuggle me. Tie me up.

Like that?

I'm joking a bit, but just tell me what I can do to make communication easier for you.

David felt like he was on a roller coaster tonight. Naftali had just... accepted that about him. And then asked what he could do. Like it was something simple.

Yeah. That's good.

Perfect. ;) And we'll get to know each other first.

Naftali went on to talk about skiing, but David was still trying to decide if should mention anything else. It wasn't something he had to disclose. It wasn't even something he'd been sure about for a long time.

But if it would make a difference, he should say it. Labels had power.

So he interrupted the flow of chats.

I'm neurodivergent.

And in case he needed to be clearer, he added, *Autistic*. And then, *A little bit*. Which wasn't quite accurate, since autism was a whole constellation of different things that could each be present in different amounts. But he wasn't ready to explain that now.

The ways in which he was autistic weren't always visible to people right away. So the explanation kind of made sense.

Now he just had to wait to see how Naftali would respond.

Bubbles formed and disappeared.

Then formed again.

Cool. Thank you for sharing that with me.

Anything that I need to know to support you?

There were probably a dozen things, but that was enough for now. Just revealing it had been difficult enough.

He wasn't ashamed of it, really. Most days, he really appreciated having a label. Feeling like he was in this club of people who shared experiences, so that his own finally made sense.

Sometimes I need to take breaks from people or too much stimulation.

OK. Just let me know.

I can always give you some space.

And let me know if I get overstimulating.

I can tone it down.

Probably.

Or go take a walk.

Then he sent a gif of a dog frantically running around before turning cartwheels.

That sounded just like Naftali, and David had to laugh. It broke up some of the tension he'd stored up but also... Naftali seemed to take everything in stride.

He was glad that he'd shared, because now Naftali wouldn't be surprised by anything. Or at least he hoped.

Labels had power that way, too.

While David was pondering what to ask next, Naftali dove in again.

Speaking of walks, want to meet up sometime?

Dinner? Brunch?

He was about to reply, but Naftali kept going.

Park? Coffee?

If we're gonna show off for your family, we should get comfortable with each other first.

And I might have some ulterior motives myself. ;)

David sucked in a breath. Naftali wanted to get to know him... so that he would feel comfortable enough to have sex?

Then again, wasn't that what David wanted?

He was mostly... pretty sure... that it was.

How about brunch? he finally replied.

Perfect. Tomorrow?

Wow. That was really fast. But then, the trip was in less than three weeks. Wow. He'd be able to see Naftali tomorrow. To figure out if this whole thing would work out or if he was just deluding himself.

Tomorrow sounds good.

They worked out the details, but David wasn't quite ready to say goodnight. He didn't know what to say to keep the conversation going, though.

Naftali fortunately didn't have that problem. *What's your favorite sport?*

To do, not to watch.

It took David a moment to catch up with the sudden shift. But then he realized that Naftali was doing exactly what he'd wanted to do—extending their chat.

Mountain biking. I used to do all-day bike trips in the mountains.

Jealous. I was going to say soccer, but now I want to switch.

And just like that, they were having a normal conversation. David told Naftali about his friend Kelsey who used to go biking with him until she moved to Atlanta. Naftali talked about his best friend and housemate, Zeev, whose name was apparently pronounced like it was spelled to rhyme with

heave. They didn't play any sports at all and sounded hilarious.

The conversation wandered to their shared love of camping in the mountains, where David learned that Naftali did Jewish nature education. That was when he'd been in Portland for a few days, when he was working at a summer camp near Seattle. Naftali was full of funny stories about his campers and his own minor misadventures.

Eventually, David's thumbs got tired, and he switched over to his laptop. He was already in his pajamas, so he settled into bed with it. He felt like a high schooler in more ways than one—he was staying up late on a chat, but also his heart was racing and his palms were sweating because a boy *liked* him. Each message seemed like it was imbued with some deeper meaning. Each thing that they had in common felt like a cosmic connection.

And they were already making plans to go on a trip together.

Hey, were you serious about the tax help?

By the time Naftali tossed that into the conversation, David was surprised to see that nearly two hours had passed. It was almost ten o'clock.

I could be, I guess. I think I was trying to be funny, but I was drunk. And Mike had been pestering him.

Hehehe. That explains so much.

What did that explain? Was that bad? David played it safe and stuck to what he knew.

If you want to bring me your tax forms in February or March, I could help you out.

That was practically a guarantee that David would get to see him again. And a part of him really liked the idea of helping Naftali out. Like he had something real to offer him.

Um...

What if I said I hadn't filed my taxes.

In two years?

David wrote back immediately.

Seriously?

You can't do that.

You could have huge fines.

Or even jail time for tax evasion.

There was a very long pause before Naftali replied.

I know.

David wanted to ask what happened, but even more, he wished he could see or hear Naftali. This was the first time he hadn't written back a dozen replies. David figured that, whatever his story was, he probably already felt guilty or worried enough. So he wrote back first.

I'm sure we can get it taken care of quickly. Do you want to switch our brunch date to tax filing?

As soon as David hit Send, he regretted it. A brunch *date*? Naftali hadn't called it a date. He'd just been thinking of a time to meet up with someone not a...

Nooooooooooooo.... If I have to do taxes, I want brunch first.

I'm not THAT easy.

Unless you're too busy.

I mean, I don't want to waste your time.

Not at all. David was eager to see Naftali again any way he could. And just like the workshop, this would give him enough structure that he would feel pretty comfortable.

Maybe brunch and then taxes? David suggested.

How long do you think we'll need?

David considered. If Naftali was behind by two years, he'd need to look some things up. He wasn't even sure if he could use an off-the-shelf tax program.

A few hours?

Naftali sent him a frowny face.

I teach Torah school on Sunday afternoons, so I'd need to leave around 1:30.

David didn't know what Torah school was, but... probably school where kids studied the Torah? Kind of like when he'd gone to Sunday school while his parents were in church? He would have to ask about it sometime. Right now, he liked knowing that little bit about Naftali's schedule. And having the possibility of seeing him twice.

Brunch tomorrow and then taxes the next weekend? We could do 10AM both Sundays.

Ugh. David sounded like he was scheduling an appointment at the office.

Then, of course, Naftali surprised him again.

It's a date.

Two dates. ;)

Did he actually mean that? David internally rolled his eyes. Like Naftali was going to be impressed by his tax filing prowess. He had to be the nerdiest guy out there to actually think that this could be something like a date. There was nothing sexier than W-2s and 1040s.

On the other hand, he was already thinking about ways to make Naftali smile. What he might order at the cafe. How close to Naftali he might dare to sit while they were working together.

When they finally signed off, far too late at night, David found himself jittery in anticipation.

He fell asleep dreaming of Naftali's brown eyes. And coils of rope around his wrists.

DAVID

The Green Eggs Cafe was one of David's favorites. It had huge windows and an exposed brick interior, right in the heart of the Gayborhood. The tables were small and packed close together with potted plants as a centerpiece. It was one of the first places he'd eaten at when he moved here, and it always reminded him of those early weeks when he was so nervous, but hopeful that he could build a life for himself—where everyone would see him as a man.

In fact, he'd come here on the way home from the DMV, when he'd first gotten his name and gender marker changed on his driver's license.

Today he'd arrived on the early side, so he got a table in the back corner of the cafe with a promise to the wait staff that the person joining him would be there soon. Their coffee was good, and he sipped it slowly, willing his body to be calm.

He was going to meet Naftali again. Naftali who had, miraculously, been flirting with him.

If he'd met Naftali in any other way, he'd be afraid to imagine even kissing him. Yet he'd already tied Naftali up. At least his wrists.

And he kind of already had a nickname.

He knew what Naftali looked like on his knees, face tilted upward, eyes begging.

He couldn't believe they were actually going on a trip together.

For about the hundredth time, David imagined texting Mike to tell him about Naftali. And maybe get some advice.

It was probably weird, texting your ex-boyfriend to talk about your potential new... friend who was going on a skiing-slash-potentially-kinky trip with you. But this whole thing had really been Mike's idea.

Mike was also good at untangling people in a way that David wasn't. Mike would have known that Naftali was flirting with him, for example.

David took out his phone, only to realize that it was already three minutes after ten. Alright, so Naftali was running late. David hated being late. It threw things off his schedule, and made people ask him questions.

But this wasn't too late. He knew Naftali was taking public transit, and it could be unpredictable. Still, he checked his messages on Cuffd to see if Naftali had written anything.

Nope. Nothing since last night. Naftali had ended their conversation with a *good night* and the little icon of the sleepy face with the trail of Z's.

David realized suddenly that he'd gotten Naftali's full name and phone number, but hadn't shared his name in reverse. Maybe he could do that now and... not be too weird about it?

He opened the text window to Naftali's number. What should he say? Should he remind Naftali of the address? No, that would be annoying if he was already almost there. Should he ask if he was still coming? That would definitely sound too insecure.

He traced around the edges of his phone. He'd gotten a case with little ridges at the top and squishy bumps along the side. It was supposed to protect the phone if he dropped it, but he could fidget with it for hours. It just felt good. Calming.

But not calming enough for this situation.

He should really ask Mike. Except, if Naftali actually didn't show up, he wasn't sure that he wanted Mike to know. He would look so pathetic. And even though Mike would be

supportive... No. He couldn't call him right now and just explain everything in the middle of the restaurant.

David flipped the phone around in his hands, pressing each of the bumps in order.

Maybe in a week or two he'd bring it up, when the embarrassment wasn't so fresh.

It was almost ten-fifteen now. And no sign of Naftali. Slowly, he typed out, *Hi. It's David. Now you have my number.*

There. That wasn't so bad.

Except that there was no reply. Was Naftali even coming?

Possibilities sunk their tendrils into his mind. Naftali might have had an emergency. But then he would text, right?

What if he'd completely forgotten about their brunch date? He could be sleeping in. Or even off laughing with someone else. That didn't seem like Naftali, but what did he know?

David could be the laughingstock of Naftali's entire community right now. The guy with a stutter who wanted to take someone to his parents' anniversary party and wasn't even sure if he wanted sex. Oh, and who'd promised to do Naftali's taxes.

Hilarious.

By the time ten-thirty rolled around, David's stomach was twisted in knots. The diner was too noisy. There were too many people crowded close.

He might have handled it on a normal day, but right now his anxiety was at a peak, and each spoon clanging on the inside of a coffee mug grated on his nerves. How hard was it to stir your coffee quietly?

But the real issue was that he'd finally accepted that Naftali wasn't coming.

A server had already come by twice to ask for his order, and David waved to get his attention. He'd just have to explain that he wasn't ordering—he couldn't bear the thought of eating here by himself after all this—and leave a big tip.

Just then, a short man barreled through the restaurant, almost running into a different server with a dish in each of her hands. There was a whirl of dark blue coat, a fuzzy hat, and a deep voice, frantic in apology.

It was Naftali.

David watched him apologize again to the server, and then to someone else he bumped into, before scurrying over to the table. His whole body was vibrating with energy this morning, but it wasn't anything like the kink demonstration. He looked stressed.

"I'm so sorry. I was doing this thing for work that I totally forgot I had to do, and I was planning on leaving, but then I was getting some things ready for Torah school, and by the time I sent the emails, it was just really late." His voice was high and fast.

"It's okay," David answered automatically, even though it kind of wasn't. He reminded himself that Naftali clearly meant to be on time. That was the important thing. He hadn't meant to blow him off. "I texted you," he added.

Naftali pulled out his phone—an older model with plenty of scratches on the case, in between a rainbow sticker and another one with an alien. "Yeah, I forgot to charge it last night. It turned on for a minute in the subway to try and message you, but then it went off again. Should I... still sit down?"

It was the first time David had seen Naftali anything less than confident.

"Yes. Of course." It did sound like an accident. David wasn't going to cancel their whole trip and the chance of... well, whatever would happen, just because of one mistake.

Naftali exhaled a hearty sigh, still catching his breath. He must have run from the train station. He took off his coat, shook his head a little like he was clearing it, then slid into the chair.

He turned his million-watt smile on David. "Hey!"

God, he was gorgeous. Not just physically, but the way that he just breathed confidence and radiated desire. The way he made that one word sound like they were sharing a sexy secret.

All of Naftali's hesitation from a moment ago seemed to have evaporated like it had never been there.

"H-h-hey," David finally managed to answer. "Th-th-th-thanks for c-c-coming out here."

"My pleasure."

Even David could tell that Naftali intended every possible double meaning with his words.

Not that David had any idea how to respond. None. Zip.

He wasn't good at flirting. And Naftali was way out of his league.

Fortunately, he was rescued by the server, who was no doubt very glad that he was ready to order. "What can I get for you?"

David already knew what he wanted, so at least that part was easy. "The breakfast b-b-burrito. And a refill on m-my coffee."

"And for you?"

Naftali picked up the menu. "Hi. Sorry. Could I get a coffee and... give me just a sec to look." He flipped it over. Then back. "Oh, man!" He was addressing David now, eyes crinkled with delight. "Have you seen this thing? Salted caramel banana stuffed French toast. Are they serious? Cookie dough French toast? You just made me soooo happy."

Not even a minute in Naftali's presence, and David was already flushed with Naftali's approval.

The server interjected. "If you're not ready, I can..."

"No, hang on." Naftali frantically flipped the menu over again. And back. "Ummm... Decisions, decisions... choose, choose, choose, choose... Aaaaaahhhh..."

He set the menu down and stabbed one finger onto it with a thunk. “That one.” He looked up at the server, all charm. “The crème brûlée French toast, please. Ooh! And it has berries.” He rubbed his hands together, before returning to David with a grin. “I just love fresh berries. And cream.”

Watching Naftali was almost like watching a show. Unpredictable, but in the most charming way.

The server took their menus. “I’ll be back in a minute with your coffee.”

Naftali thanked him, then leaned closer. “This place looks amazing. Perfect choice.”

“It’s one of m-m-my favorites.” Alright, so David’s stutter wasn’t too bad right now. Maybe because Naftali had seemed so worried about being late. Or maybe because Naftali was so visibly pleased to see him.

Though that made another sobering thought cross his mind. Was Naftali faking his interest just because David was taking him on a trip? He knew it happened. People who were... less able to find dates, paid attractive, confident people to go with them on trips, right? And those attractive, confident people made sure their dates felt good about themselves?

That was pretty much what David had arranged... But if that was Naftali’s position, David at least wanted to know. He’d rather have Naftali be genuinely lukewarm than fake an attraction he didn’t feel.

David was trying to work out some way to politely bring it up, but Naftali was clearly on a different path. His eyes shone as he looked around the room and then returned to David.

“Do they really have green eggs here? I should have kept the menu.”

David was so surprised that he just answered honestly. “I don’t th-think so. It’s just the n-name of the cafe. Isn’t it from a k-kid’s book?”

“Yeah. *Green Eggs and Ham*. Dr. Seuss. I don’t read it to kids, though, because it doesn’t model consent culture.” Naftali’s face grew serious.

“Yeah?” David found himself intrigued, as much by the topic as Naftali’s passion for it.

“The basic plot is that one guy is pressuring another guy to try green eggs and ham. The entire text is him suggesting different weird places to eat this food after the second guy has already given a clear, firm no.”

“That’s... I kind of remember the b-book now, but I didn’t think of it that way.”

“People use it sometimes to get kids to taste new foods—like the moral is that the guy likes this weird green ham once he tries it. But that doesn’t justify the harassment and pressure that comes first. No means no.”

“Would you ban the book, then?” David was playing devil’s advocate. But he found he really liked this side of Naftali, too. Not flirtatious at all. More like he was ready to take on the world.

“Maybe? Or maybe not. Everything has a lesson in it. Kids, adults... Changing culture around something like this comes from having conversations about it. Who do we want to be in the world? How can we get there? What do we need to confront in ourselves and what do we want to nurture?” He shrugged. “This is kind of what I do.”

Like it wasn’t a big deal. Naftali was inspiring when he spoke, whether it was in front of a class, or with an audience of one. “So you teach kids?”

“Yep. Torah school and some other stuff. Some tutoring. Workshops. Adult classes.”

“Wow. I’d n-never be able to.” But he could see how Naftali did it. He was like a star, always burning brightly. “What’s Torah school?”

“Oh, uh, Jewish education. Reading Hebrew. Learning the parts of the service, also in Hebrew. Life cycle events, culture stuff, community service, social justice and activism. Reading the Torah and teaching them how to argue about interpretations and make sense of the crappy parts, like good

little Jews. It meets after school on Wednesdays, plus Sunday afternoons.”

David had gone to youth group at his church as a kid, but it didn't sound anything like that. There wasn't any arguing, for one. And definitely no activism. “That sounds am-m-mazing.”

“What do you do?” Somehow, Naftali had banked the flirtation, while still managing to be completely focused on David. “Something related to taxes?”

“Oh, uh, kind of. Ac-c-c-c-counting and financial projections. For a large company. Pretty b-boring.” People made jokes about accountants. And with David's lack of social skills, they were pretty accurate. “We d-d-d-don't have to t-t-talk about it.”

“Why not?” Naftali looked perplexed. “Do you find it boring? Or do you just think I will?”

“Um... No. I actually like it.”

“What do you like about it?”

“I find it... It's soothing, sometimes, g-g-getting all of the numbers in the right places. But also, when you write something like a budget—that document has the whole vision for your p-p-p-project or department r-right there. Everything you want to d-do. It shows up in the budget first. There's a lot of p-p-projecting, so you have to know how all of the departments and pieces work together, how p-prices are changing in the outside world, t-trends in m-m-m-marketing, interest rate projections, all s-s-sorts of things.”

His stutter had gotten worse by the end. It probably sounded dumb to talk about it.

Naftali beamed at him. “That sounds fascinating. Tell me about a cool project you've worked on.”

David hadn't expected that at all. Somehow, he'd assumed that this would all be Naftali flirting. Or talking about the logistics of the trip. But Naftali seemed genuinely engaged.

So David launched into an explanation of the budgeting for a new project launch, and how it started two years before

anything actually reached the public. He kept checking to see if Naftali was still interested—because he knew that he could talk for far too long once he got started—but Naftali kept nodding and asking questions to get him to explain more.

He wasn't even sure if he'd explained this much of his work to Mike, and they'd lived together.

There was something about having Naftali's attention that was addicting. Usually David didn't know what to talk about, but with Naftali, everything just flowed.

They were interrupted when their food arrived. Naftali's plate was a sheer mountain of French toast—four giant triangles topped with an impossible amount of creme fraiche, berries, syrup, and who knew what else. Something crunchy.

“Ooooh! That looks so good. Want to share?”

David looked down at his neatly wrapped—but still very large—breakfast burrito with its two neat scoops of guacamole and sour cream. He kind of did. But would that be odd on a first date-like-thing? On the other hand, Naftali had suggested it.

Then he remembered something else. “It has m-meat in it. Um, pork. Sorry if th-that's offensive.” Pork was supposed to be unclean. Or at least by what he'd heard.

Naftali didn't seem fazed. “Oh, no worries. I don't keep kosher. I mean, my housemates do, so I'm kosher/vegetarian at home, but really, I'll eat anything. It looks great.”

Huh. That was interesting. David didn't know anything about kosher food. Well, the basics like you shouldn't mix milk and meat. And that you could buy kosher pickles. But he'd always thought that people who were really Jewish, the ones who did things like turn off their phones on Saturday and teach Torah school, kept kosher.

Either way, it would make things a bit easier for them traveling together. David cut his burrito in half and put his portion on the saucer from his coffee mug. He gave Naftali the big plate.

Naftali took his first bite with a moan. “Oh... This is *soooo* good. What do they even put in here?” He licked a drop off his finger. “Wow.” He took another bite.

All David could do was watch him. He was gorgeous. Not just his brown eyes and tousled hair, but the way he enjoyed everything so thoroughly. The way that he moaned over his next bite, just like David imagined he might moan if someone were touching him.

If David were touching him.

Suddenly, it was very hard to think. He could feel his cheeks going red.

“So, tell me more about this trip,” Naftali suggested, as he took his next bite, pink tongue darting out to catch all the dripping sauce.

“Oh, uh... You saw the lodge? Where we’re s-s-s-staying.” Where the room he’d reserved only had one king bed. “We already t-t-talked about skiing.”

“And the snow shoeing!” Naftali enthused. “I always imagine it like that little penguin waddling across the north pole with tennis rackets on his feet. Can we go?”

“Sure.” It was so easy to promise Naftali anything. “I’ve been a few times, and I love being out in the mountains.”

“Me too.” Naftali grinned at him.

David’s whole chest felt fluttery. He still couldn’t believe that Naftali was actually interested in *him*. And somehow, he hadn’t blown it yet.

He knew it was silly, because thousands of people enjoyed the mountains, but it still felt like something precious and secret that they shared.

“We could also go into Portland if you want to see anything there.”

“I bet you know all the best places.”

David tilted his head back and forth. “Not really. I grew up in the suburbs, where it was basically golf clubs, church, and

shopping. Then I went away for college and haven't gone back. There was a train I could take into the city, but I don't know if you'd want to hang out anywhere that I thought was cool when I was seventeen."

Naftali laughed, delighted. "I would *love* to see what you thought was cool when you were seventeen. But really, if you get me some trees, I'll be happy."

"I can guarantee you trees." David was smiling back at him now. He couldn't even remember the last time he'd smiled so much. With Naftali, everything was just... fun. Easy.

"So, tell me about your family, then."

"Yeah." That wasn't as fun. "It's just my mom and dad. One brother and his wife and kids. And I'm expecting some aunts and uncles to show up for the anniversary thing, but I think it'll also b-be co-workers. So hopefully they'll deflect some of my mother's attention."

"You don't get along then?"

David picked up his burrito with both hands, even though he wasn't eating. This was easier when he could busy his fingers with food. Otherwise he'd start tapping them or something. "We don't *not* get along. My m-m-m-mother is just... She's intense."

"Okay?"

"I love her. She's not mean. She's just very forceful. She's not very-very-very v-very good at recognizing situations with multiple perspectives."

"Ah. Alright. I can work with that."

"You can?" David snorted. "Because I'm not sure that I can."

Naftali shrugged. "I've got you. How about your dad?"

"He just stays out of the way. He's kind of quiet. Like me."

"So there was nobody to stand up for you?"

How did he figure that out so quickly? "Uhhhh... Not really."

“I’m sorry. That sucks. Your brother?”

“He’s six years older so we were never that close as kids. Sometimes a parental figure. S-S-S-Sometimes an ally. Sometimes an enemy. He m-moved out when I was twelve and d-didn’t come back often.”

“Because of your mother.”

“Yeah.” Somehow, Naftali had gotten the whole picture instantly.

“He’s got a wife and two kids n-now. They live in Albuquerque. I s-saw them last year for a day when they were in New York.”

“What can I do to support you? When we’re at the party?”

“Ummm... just, uh, be there. Don’t argue with my mother. And, uh, if she deadnames me, just let it go.” David paused, waiting to see how this would go over.

Maybe he was weak for not forcing the issue. But it really just wasn’t worth the fall-out that would happen. Or the way that his mother would steamroll over the attempt until everyone else in the room was upset.

David hoped Naftali wouldn’t judge him for this. Mike had always told him he should give his mother an ultimatum—get his name right or never talk to him again.

But it was more complicated than that. He still loved his family, even if he didn’t want to be around them much. He could handle the dysphoria for a day.

“I can still call you by your name though, right? When I talk with her?”

“Yeah. It’ll just be, like, really weird. My brother and his wife use my name with her, so it just sounds like they’re in the twilight zone and talking about two different people at the same time. I don’t know what my extended f-f-family will do.”

“Are you coming out to them now?”

“Uh... maybe? I think they m-mostly know. They might not know that I’m g-gay. M-my cousins have seen pictures of me with my ex, th-though.”

Naftali reached for his hand. He’d been tapping it on the table without even realizing it. One finger at a time, left to right, right to left.

Their fingers met. “You just let me know what you need.” Naftali looked so sincere. “I’ll make sure to tell them how awesome you are.”

David raised one eyebrow. He was pretty comfortable with himself. At least in his usual situations. But he couldn’t imagine what someone like Naftali would find awesome about him.

Naftali squeezed his hand. “Don’t worry. Parents like me.”

Now that, David could believe.

Naftali popped the last bite of burrito into his mouth, then looked at the confectionary mountain on the other plate. “French toast time! Have you tried it?”

David shook his head. They were still holding hands, which was occupying all of his attention. Maybe Naftali had forgotten, but every nerve in David’s fingers was attuned to the rough-smooth touch of Naftali’s skin. He had guitar calluses on his fingertips, and every little movement sent sizzles of awareness up his spine.

Naftali pulled the towering plate toward himself and picked up a cream-covered triangle dripping with syrup and a teetering sprinkle of berries. “Mmmmmmm...” He closed his eyes to savor it. “You have to taste this.”

Then he was holding it out to David, in all of its gooey glory. David reached for it with his other hand... though he really didn’t want to touch it. It wasn’t possible to come within feet of it without getting sticky.

“Nuh-uh.” Naftali shook his head. He brought the triangle to David’s lips. Right where he’d just tasted it.

David took a bite. It was delicious.

Even more, it was intimate. His heart fluttered in his chest.

“Is this alright?” Naftali asked quietly.

David nodded, lost for words again.

“I figured if we’re going to sell your parents on this boyfriend thing, we should get used to touching each other.”

Something touched David’s leg, confusing him until he realized it was Naftali’s ankle, rubbing against the back of his calf. The simple contact burned through his body.

David didn’t point out that his parents wouldn’t see them playing footsie. Or that eating food from Naftali’s hand wasn’t the same as touching.

“Anyway,” Naftali added, voice husky, “we’ll be sharing a bed together, right?”

David nodded again. He was under Naftali’s spell. He still couldn’t understand how Naftali was a sub, because it was clear who was in charge of this diner-table seduction, and it wasn’t David.

A blueberry dropped from Naftali’s French toast, followed by a glob of cream with a raspberry inside.

Naftali looked down in dismay, then gave a sheepish smile. “I supposed we should eat, though.”

“Yeah,” David breathed. But he waited until Naftali untangled their hands.

He felt like he’d been hit by a hurricane. Hurricane Naftali.

NAFTALI

Naftali's backpack weighed on his shoulders as he climbed the subway steps and headed toward Rittenhouse Square. He was going to meet David—in his home—and his body tingled with a sort of nervous excitement. Even if they were just doing taxes, he was looking forward to seeing David again.

Of course, his fantasy was that David would take one look at him, rip his clothes from his body, and tell him, between passionate kisses, that he should just forget about taxes for the rest of his life.

Realistically, he knew his nervous baby Dom needed some time to get to know him. But he could work with that.

They'd texted a bit over the past week. David hadn't said that it was because of his stutter, but Naftali figured he was more comfortable that way.

Whatever the reason, he got a thrill each time his phone chimed. It had been soooo difficult not to check it on Shabbat—which usually wasn't a problem for him—but now it was Sunday again and David was just a few blocks away.

Naftali hadn't realized until he was right at the tall, elegant apartment building that David lived *on* Rittenhouse Square—basically the definition of affluence if you wanted to live in Philadelphia instead of moving out to the 'burbs. Naftali couldn't even imagine what the rent would be.

He supposed that shouldn't surprise him. David was paying for his whole trip to Portland, and had already extended

the trip to encompass the Cuffd Kinkmas event at the pricey-looking B&B.

Only now was Naftali really starting to feel uneasy about this. When he'd met David at the workshop, he'd just seemed like another guy. A guy who wanted some support with his family, and who would hopefully want to tie him up and do naughty things.

Now he was wondering if David had so much money that this trip was his idea of a date.

This might be the worst idea for a second date ever.

Naftali rode the antique elevator to the fifteenth floor, pushing those thoughts behind him. He had a mission: seducing a sexy baby Dom.

He rang the bell.

David answered it so quickly that Naftali was sure he'd been standing right behind the door. And he was even hotter than Naftali remembered.

He was wearing another button-down shirt with dark jeans. Yum.

His feet were bare, and there was something Naftali just loved about bare feet. It reminded him of walking around in the grass in the summertime. Inside, it always felt intimate.

"Hey, sexy," Naftali greeted him.

David blinked, then looked away, his cheeks pinking up. The man was just too, too adorable.

And it was kind of flattering seeing the effect that Naftali had on him. He made David *speechless*.

But he didn't want to make him uncomfortable. "Should I take off my shoes?"

"If you w-w-wouldn't m-m-mind." David looked at him again, then looked away. Was he extra nervous, or did he always stutter so much? It had seemed to come and go last week at the restaurant, but Naftali figured David had been nervous then, too.

Naftali rested his salt-encrusted winter boots next to David's much cleaner pair, leaving his socks on. They were in a small corridor with a glossy, wooden side table and a row of shoes. Naftali couldn't see the rest of the apartment yet, but even this small area felt pristine and expensive.

Naftali turned on his brightest grin. "Thanks for inviting me over. I'm happy to see you, even if it means suffering through my taxes."

To his delight, David answered with a shy smile. "Uh, hey. Um... I'm happy to s-s-see you, too. And I like figuring out taxes."

"Better you than me." Naftali joked. Then, because he couldn't help it, he lowered his eyes and looked up suggestively. "Let me know if there's *anything* I can do to thank you..."

David's mouth dropped open, stunned. And maybe worried.

"That was a joke," Naftali put in gently. "I'm attracted to you, and I'm looking forward to spending time with you. But there isn't any obligation on either side. I appreciate you helping me with my taxes, and I'm here for you when you visit your family. If you want to play 'poor submissive boy thanking his accountant for his help,' then I'm for it. But I'm flirting for fun, not to pressure you. Like I said, we can just see where it goes."

"Okay. Um... You're m-much more out-g-g-going than I am."

"There's no one right way to be." Naftali told this to his students all the time. Most of the time he believed it about himself, too. But he definitely wasn't concerned that David was more introverted.

That earned him another sweetly shy smile.

Naftali slung his backpack off, surprised when David took it from him. It didn't feel pushy or demeaning though. More like he was trying to make things easier. The pampering thing?

As soon as he took off his scarf and coat, David took those as well, hanging them in the closet. Naftali could tell already that David was a bit particular about his space. He followed him back quietly.

The rest of the apartment wasn't anything like he'd expected from the exterior. He'd imagined lots of white, and expensive furnishings. Like Noah's place. Things that he'd get dirty, or would make him feel like he didn't fit in.

Instead, the furniture was cozy and warm—a soft, brown couch with a fuzzy blanket folded over the back, a patterned armchair, and a modestly-sized television. It was meticulously clean, but not imposing. It looked like a good place to cuddle on the couch and watch a movie.

The living room opened into an open-plan kitchen with a cheerful red tea kettle on the stove and worn wooden implements in a pottery canister. It looked like a home. A very clean and organized home, but a home.

The kitchen was flanked by a balcony overlooking Rittenhouse Square, and Naftali drifted there first. His immediate thought was that the balcony probably cost more than his monthly income. Followed immediately by where that thought had come from.

Noah's family was rich, and it had impacted their relationship in all sorts of ways Naftali never would have expected.

Honestly, if Naftali weren't in David's apartment for a quasi-dating reason *and* because he was about to share his tax information, he probably would have just enjoyed the view.

It truly was beautiful, the park serene with bare-branched trees strung with holiday lights.

And he'd much rather focus on making his sexy new Dom feel comfortable than his own inadequacies.

He continued his exploration. He *loved* looking at people's stuff. Especially their bookshelves—and David had a huge one, stretching across the room. “A mystery fan!” he announced. David had to love them, because they took up half

of the space, some dog-eared and well loved, some boxed sets aligned so their covers created a complete image. A quick check told him they were even alphabetized.

“D-D-Do you-you-you read them?” David asked from the doorway.

“Occasionally. I’m more of a sci-fi/fantasy nerd. But I’ll dig into them once in a while. I’m all for a good paranormal mystery, though.”

David finally broke into a real smile. That was what Naftali had been waiting for. “I-I-I have some of those. Some with-with-with queer characters.”

“Those are the best!” Naftali agreed. “Maybe we can trade sometime.” He loved the idea. Maybe they could even read together.

He usually wouldn’t have thought about that with a hook up. But with a whole week together, maybe that would be part of it. It gave him a cozy glow.

Naftali continued with his survey of the space. There were a bunch of textbooks and references on accounting and business-y stuff. Then a mix of non-fiction titles that edged a bit more toward history and pop psychology, including a whole shelf about autism.

Around the end of the bookshelf was an electronic keyboard, leaning diagonally against the side. Naftali fought the urge to pull it out and plug it in. “Do you play?”

“I got it last year because-because-because I wanted to learn, but I was never any g-good.”

“Playing an instrument just takes time and practice,” Naftali assured him. Then he offered, “I could teach you.”

Why he said it he still wasn’t sure. Just that David was still standing awkwardly by the door, and he wanted to see him relax. Maybe, Naftali thought wildly, even if that took months.

He *knew* what David could be like when he got more comfortable. The man who’d reeled Naftali in by those ropes

around his wrists was still lurking beneath the surface somewhere.

Not that Naftali was looking for a boyfriend or anything. But... piano lessons with benefits?

“Yeah?” David asked, sounding hopeful. The spark between them was definitely beginning to come back. Naftali hadn’t imagined it after all.

Naftali grinned. “Absolutely.”

David was watching him, eyes wide and lips parted, like Naftali was the best thing he’d seen all day. This was the look that had reeled Naftali in from the beginning.

He wanted to positively bask in it.

He gazed back, letting David see all of his desire. The way that he wanted to submit. The way that he wanted to make David feel good. The possibility of everything that could happen between them on the trip.

Or today. Naftali would be a big fan of today.

David swallowed hard and looked away. “Did you want anything to d-d-d-d... to d-d-drink. Or-or-or eat?”

Naftali didn’t think he’d seen anything more adorable than a flustered Dom. “What do you have?” Naftali returned, letting the insinuations drip from his voice.

David sucked in a gasp. He might be nervous now, but somewhere in there was the man who wanted Naftali on his knees.

David moved to the kitchen, breaking the contact between them. “C-c-coffee? OJ? Soda?”

Naftali let the intensity fade. As long as David knew that he was interested, he wasn’t going to push *too* much. “Coffee would be amazing.”

While David got things out, Naftali prowled around the kitchen. The refrigerator had the usual random magnets. Beneath one was the invitation to David’s parents’ anniversary

party. The cream-colored paper was fancy enough to be a wedding invitation.

Lower down was a hand-drawn picture. Two smiley faces, a big one and a little one, were holding hands with their stick-figure arms. Naftali pointed to it. “Who’s this from?”

“Uh, my ex-boyfriend’s niece. I don’t know w-w-why I put it back up when I moved.”

That was actually really sweet. They hadn’t talked about kids at all—it wasn’t like they were planning on more than a week together. But Naftali liked knowing that David enjoyed kids. “It sounds like she was important to you.”

David gave another soft smile. “Yeah. I’ve known her for a-for a while. We, uh, would have spent Christmas together.”

God. That had to suck. He knew David wasn’t close to his own family, but it sounded like the ex’s family had been different. He wondered how long they’d been together. And why they broke up.

It gave Naftali a newfound determination to make this trip special for David. To make Christmas as special for him as it would have been.

David didn’t elaborate, and Naftali didn’t want to push him. Exes could be dangerous territory, and he didn’t want to bring up his own.

This was supposed to be fun. Light. He returned to the picture. “I take it that one’s you?” He indicated the larger, blue, Mr. Potato Head-looking figure. It had three eyes.

“Apparently.”

“An excellent likeness,” he reported.

David laughed, like Naftali was hoping he would. It was beautiful seeing him laugh.

The rich aroma of coffee started to fill the kitchen. David crossed to the fridge. “I got some th-th-. I got some things for us to snack on, too. If you’re interested.” He pulled out a bowl of fruit salad, at least half of it berries, and presented it with a hopeful smile.

“Ooh! I love berries.”

David beamed. “I know. There’s c-cream, too. And honey.” He put them both on the counter. A little bowl of freshly whipped cream, and a plastic bottle of honey. David arranged them all in a row, then his eyes darted up, like he was searching Naftali’s face for approval.

It took Naftali a moment to figure it out, and then he remembered his cafe order. Which meant that... David got this just for him. This was his own brand of flirting.

The fruit pieces were all irregular sizes, and there were fresh chopped mint leaves sprinkled throughout. David hadn’t picked this up at the store—he’d spent time making it.

Total heart-eyes moment.

Naftali wasn’t sure if this was part of the Daddy Dom pampering thing, or just David paying attention. But either way, it felt special. “Thank you. This is perfect.”

“Oh, good. Shall I do the h-honors?” He got out two forks, along with a spoon to dump the cream over the fruit. Naftali noticed he was barely stuttering any more either.

“Yes. Thank you.”

When the confection was complete, Naftali speared a few blueberries and a piece of mango, then took a bite, letting the flavors burst on his tongue. David was watching him closely, so he made sure to vocalize his enjoyment. Attraction hummed in the air between them.

It was just a bowl of fruit, but it felt like more. Like Naftali was going to end up besotted with David... or going crazy with repressed lust... or both... before they even got to the trip.

“We should probably look at your taxes.”

Naftali wrinkled his nose, his mood plummeting. He’d almost managed to forget. “Do we *have* to?”

David’s eyes sparkled. “Yes.”

“Oooooohhh... Your Dom voice makes me all shivery.” Well, it was true. And he kind of wanted to provoke a reaction.

David looked like that was the last thing he'd expected.

Naftali stroked one hand across his shoulder. His warm, broad shoulder. “Believe me. You've got it.”

Though David didn't seem to have any words now. He still looked nervous, but it was mingled with a heady desire.

“Feel free to kiss me any time,” Naftali suggested.

David opened his mouth.

Please, please, please....

“Taxes first.”

Naftali wrinkled his nose. “You're not fun at all,” he complained. Though actually he was having a great deal of fun.

David led the way to the living room.

Alright, maybe Naftali could do this. Since he had berries with cream and honey. And his Dom told him to.

Reluctantly, he followed David to the couch. There was a shiny, slim AirBook on the coffee table. The rest was empty except for a yellow legal pad and a pen, both aligned precisely perpendicular to the edge.

Naftali's stomach started to churn unpleasantly.

Better to get this over with. Naftali slouched down, dragging the matted pile of folders and papers out of his backpack. His chunky old laptop was sandwiched somewhere in the middle.

“Sorry,” Naftali said before David could comment. “I know it's a bit of a mess. Should I take out my laptop?” He rushed on. “I'll need to plug it in because the battery's busted.”

“There's an outlet over there.”

“Cool.” When he got back from plugging it in, David had arranged the folders into a neat stack, but he hadn't opened anything.

“May I?”

“Please do.” Naftali sat down, then realized that he’d stupidly sat too far away. He wanted to feel their arms brush together. To maybe get some comfort, or a tingle of possibility.

He took another bite of berries instead, but he barely registered the taste.

This was a dumb second meeting. They should have left this till February and gone out for a hike or leather night at a bar, like normal people.

He felt... naked. Vulnerable.

And not in a sexy, fun way.

This was far worse than just taking off his clothes.

He looked longingly at the keyboard. Music—whether he was playing or listening to it—always helped him relax.

David thumbed through papers, starting to sort things into piles. “How many jobs have you had over the past three years?”

Naftali told himself to be brave. That David didn’t have any position to judge. He tried to present the information confidently, like it was no big deal. Like it was the life he wanted to be living because it *was*.

“Two regular jobs. The Torah school and the urban Jewish farming initiative. But organizations who pay me? I couldn’t even begin to count. I lead services or music for a few different synagogues and Jewish organizations, and it pays well hourly, but it’s only a few hours at a time, which doesn’t include the travel and prep. And I teach a ton of classes and workshops for different organizations. And substitute teach, when I’m available. Sometimes I do short-term projects for people when they call me up. Like, conferences? Oh, and I have an album on SoundCloud that gets some royalties, I guess. I don’t know how much those are.”

Noah called that *scrabbling*, like a chicken scrabbling after seeds. Naftali called it doing what he loved. But there weren’t

that many thirty-two-year-olds with master's degrees who couldn't always pay their rent on a bedroom in a shared house.

David whistled. "No wonder you haven't wanted to file your taxes. I get frustrated just submitting my receipts after a business trip." He was still sorting.

"Really?" As Naftali said it, he remembered there was still more in his backpack. He pulled out the flattened paper bag. It had more papers in it, but he wasn't sure if any of them were useful.

He started taking things out and piling them up, but he wasn't really looking. He was waiting for David's answer.

"Yeah. I always put it off until the end of the m-month. It's stressful and feels like a waste of t-time."

That was encouraging. "I um, I always mean to do stuff like this. But it's like there's this huge block. And the more stressed I am, the harder it is to get started. And then I just get distracted until the next time, and then the guilt is even worse. After I missed the deadline the first year, it was like I couldn't even think about it without freaking out." Kind of like he was now.

It had been even worse because he couldn't admit any of it to Noah. He'd intended to fix it for himself. To get an extension and just finish it up. Easy peasy.

But it... kind of hadn't happened. Twice.

And then other things happened, and it was just one more stressful thing to push to the back of his mind. But this year, he'd really, really had meant to hire someone and get them done.

"Is there anything that would h-h-help you to get ahead of it?"

"Not from a Dom," Naftali snapped. Not from anybody. He'd tried folders and bins and online systems and reminders on his phone. If there was a thing to do, he was already doing it.

David held up his hands, looking worried. “I apologize. I wasn’t s-s-suggesting anything, just asking if there was anything I c-c-could do to support you. You’re going to be d-d-dealing with my family after all.”

Right. Naftali was overreacting. David wasn’t Noah.

“I’m sorry, too. That was just... It’s a sensitive subject for me. Money’s difficult for me. And organization. And being late. So, uh, more apologies in advance.” He shuffled the papers through his hands again.

David nodded his head. Then nodded again, like he was having a conversation with himself. “Okay. I think... Okay. Th-th-th-thank you for t-t-telling me. I won’t-I won’t-I won’t bring it u-u-up again. And it w-w-won’t b-bother me now that I’m exp-p-p-pecting it.”

If only that were true. “Sorry again,” Naftali apologized. He felt horrible for the way he’d lashed out. Everything had just become too much, but none of it was David’s fault.

David finally looked up. Naftali was expecting exasperation. Pity. Annoyance.

All he found was kindness. David took the papers from him and rested his hand on his knee. “Relax.” His voice was smooth and full. It was the same command he’d given during the workshop.

Naftali was in a completely different headspace now, but he tried to relax anyway. David didn’t add anything, but he didn’t look away either. He just waited patiently for Naftali to follow instructions.

Naftali closed his eyes and pulled in a deep breath. David’s hand was warm. Solid. Dominant in the best way. The way that calmed everything inside, because he was giving over control.

“Very good,” David whispered.

Naftali didn’t want to feel so pleased by his praise, but he was. Maybe that was the thing, most of all, that made him let go.

Naftali opened his eyes to find David still watching him. Not impatiently, but like Naftali was something precious. He felt it down to his toes. There was something about David that projected safety and comfort.

This was... This was something real.

Naftali looked up into David's dark eyes. He leaned forward. Maybe because he wanted David to hold him, and maybe because he'd been thinking about kissing David all morning. All week. All month.

Naftali parted his lips.

David looked mesmerized, eyes darting down to Naftali's mouth, then back up to his eyes. His wide hand still burned on Naftali's knee.

Naftali licked his bottom lip, rewarded by the way David's eyes widened. They'd been so close to kissing in the kitchen. Maybe he just needed a little nudge.

DAVID

David could practically see the tension vibrating through Naftali. He shuffled his paperwork with jerky motions as he explained his jobs and his stress about filing his taxes. Before that, he'd been wringing his hands. David didn't think he was even aware that he was doing it.

Naftali's voice came out at a higher pitch, and he was talking fast while his eyes darted all over the place. Mostly to the keyboard leaning against the bookshelf.

And then those words. *Not from a Dom.*

They'd hurt. More than David could say.

All of David's instincts were at war with each other. He wanted to massage Naftali's shoulders or just pull him into his lap.

Was that the same as helping Naftali get organized or the opposite?

There was a push and pull with Naftali today that David couldn't quite understand. When Naftali had first waltzed into his apartment, light and free and flirty, David had been enamored and a little awed, stumbling over his thoughts and fumbling every erotic advance that Naftali made.

Then Naftali had complained about doing his taxes... but when David had insisted on getting started, he'd been complimented on his Dom voice.

He couldn't believe that *he* had a Dom voice.

Mike had always just told him that he was too bossy.

Not to mention his stutter.

Maybe Naftali really did just want a Dom for some casual, kinky fun—nothing that would spill over into filing taxes and easing those wrinkles from his brow.

And yet, Naftali was still sitting there, radiating anxiety, as he shuffled through the papers without ever making them straight. David knew all too well what that felt like.

He wanted more than anything to fix it, but he felt horribly out of his depth. As a Dom, wasn't he supposed to know what to do?

His instincts told him to step in and take charge right now. To soothe all that anxiety with soft words and softer touches. But was that what Naftali wanted? Mike wouldn't have... but was it different with a sub?

David tried the simplest thing he knew and placed a hand on Naftali's knee. "Relax," he said, with as much calm authority as he could muster.

Naftali froze at first, then closed his eyes and took a big breath. The stress seemed to leave his body as he exhaled.

It was... Wow. It was a rush. Not as much as having the rope around Naftali's wrists, but a close second.

Because Naftali didn't just relax. He *obeyed*.

David could feel it viscerally. "Very good," he said softly.

A gentle smile fluttered across Naftali's lips.

There was a long beat, where all David could do was watch him.

Then Naftali opened his eyes and stared back with a vulnerability that made David want to lean in and kiss him.

He knew that he could. Naftali had made that abundantly clear. Only... David was worried that if he kissed Naftali once, he'd never stop.

The need burned his chest from the inside out. He would get to taste those full lips. Pin Naftali to the couch and rut up against him. Devour every inch of his skin.

Take over every little thing that was upsetting him and tell him that he'd never have to worry about it again.

But there was part of him that still wasn't sure he knew how to do it right. Naftali was expecting whips and bondage and all of those enticing things that David had read about but never done.

What if he did it wrong? Or just lost confidence in the middle? What if he made a fool of himself?

Naftali's eyes begged as his pink tongue glided over the tempting expanse of his bottom lip. David knew it was a calculated move, designed to entice him.

It was working.

Only, only... there was something not quite right about the whole thing. Maybe that David suspected Naftali of using his sex appeal to escape whatever had him so worried about his financial statements.

Or maybe that right now, Naftali was still the one running the show.

It hit David like lightning. That was the problem. He was almost sure of it. Somewhere in between being too bossy and letting Naftali be in charge, there had to be a middle ground where David took control.

So he took a risk, heart thudding in his chest.

He pressed a finger to Naftali's lips. They were endlessly soft. "Nice try. But we're going to get your taxes d-d-done today." Stupid stutter. He'd almost made it through that whole thing with his *Dom voice*. Or at least what he hoped was his Dom voice. "But once we get things set up, I'll take care of everything."

Naftali swayed against him. "Okay." His voice came out quiet. Almost awed.

This was the thing that David had craved. This thing right here.

Unfortunately, now that he'd said they were going to deal with paperwork, he actually had to follow through with it.

He reluctantly withdrew his hands from Naftali's warm body and went back to sorting through the tangle of papers. He didn't even know what he was looking at, except to notice that only about a third of them had anything to do with Naftali's finances.

He found song lyrics in Hebrew and English, flyers for past events, a handout showing safe parts of the body to hit during impact play that David was tempted to keep, and endless illegible notes in Naftali's chicken-scratch handwriting. Most of it was folded or tattered, like it had been scrunched to the bottom of a kindergartener's backpack.

All of that meant that David wasn't close to knowing what to ask, but he wanted to keep Naftali talking. "Tell me about your work. It seems like it's mostly focused on music?"

Naftali already seemed more relaxed as he answered, even though he shook his head. "I think even that's too specific. I love music. I love teaching. I love being outdoors. I love getting people excited about things like sustainability or ancient texts. Or kink." His smile grew more confident at the mention of kink. "Really, I just love people and getting them to be part of something bigger. I like it when I can combine all of those things in different ways."

So all of the different jobs made sense, then. Maybe this was why Naftali seemed so vibrant and alive. He followed his passions—all of them.

"Of course, I make less money than a fast-food worker," Naftali added. "And I know I'm not on a standard career trajectory or successful or whatever."

"What do you mean you aren't successful?" It bothered David to hear him say something like that. "It's hard to make money as a m-musician. That's not your fault, it's just p-part of the profession. And you make such a difference in your community. You bring people together. You make them feel m-more comfortable in their own skin."

That last part was probably a little too personal. He'd helped David feel more comfortable with being a Dom. But people flocked to Naftali. It was clear that he made them feel

good. Couldn't he see that about himself? How could someone so full of life and passion truly think of himself as a failure?

He wasn't seeing himself clearly.

"Thank you," Naftali replied. "I mean, it's nice to hear you say that." His voice was soft. Almost like the praise made him feel a little shy.

This whole morning had shown David a side of Naftali that he wasn't expecting. It seemed like Naftali had everything put together, but clearly, he had his own issues too.

If anything, it made David like him more. He was human. He was imperfect.

And it seemed like there was something that David could give him. Maybe even something Naftali *needed*.

Even if David was imperfect, too.

David still had a huge stack of papers to sort through, but he was becoming increasingly convinced that they wouldn't really help him. It would be like an archeologist trying to reconstruct a water-proof jug from a handful of shards. There would be too many gaps if he relied on printed records.

The most important thing was making Naftali feel comfortable.

Then an idea came to him. "I-I-I-I saw you looking at the keyboard. Do you w-want to play?" Damned stutter.

Naftali didn't seem to notice though. "Are you sure?" His eyes were practically begging for permission to go to it. Or at least to get out of doing his taxes.

David grinned, and actually threw some innuendo into his voice. Or at least he hoped he did. "You said you wanted to thank me..."

He could see that it took Naftali a moment to realize he was actually joking. Then he threw his head back and laughed. "Alright! Okay, if that's the payment you want..."

"It is. Listen, if you trust me, just log into your bank account so I can download all of your statements and send

them to myself. I'll f-f-figure it out from there and let you know when I need you to answer questions. Eventually, you'll need to login to each paycheck system to download your tax forms, but let's see what we're working with first."

"Wow. Um, thanks! You're amazing." His smile was blinding. Just knowing that he'd made Naftali this happy made David feel all tingly inside.

"No problem."

Once Naftali logged in, he practically bounced over to the keyboard. David told him where to set it up on the desk, but he wasn't even sure that Naftali heard all the instructions, he was so eager.

He fiddled with the knobs and settings for a few moments, then ran his hands over the keys, producing a glimmering arpeggio.

He could play. *Really* play. It wasn't any song that David knew, but it was rich and orchestral, the lower notes rumbling like waves in the ocean while the higher ones danced above. It morphed into something lighter and fun, and then changed into something stormy and seductive.

David wasn't certain, but he suspected that Naftali was just doing this on the fly. Making things up.

David could have listened to him for hours.

And watched him even longer. He swayed gently as he played, his body following his hands. Everything about him looked at peace.

That same peace crept over David. He got everything exported into spreadsheets, where he could start categorizing income. It would be an interesting problem to solve. But most of his attention was still on Naftali.

They were separate, but together. David was supporting Naftali, and Naftali was... just being happy. If this was what it was like to be a Daddy Dom, David didn't want to let it go.

He didn't want to let *Naftali* go.

It was ridiculous, because they barely knew each other. Naftali had offered him a fling, nothing more. He'd very clearly marked that he wasn't interested in anything long term, and David wanted a partner.

It was just that Naftali had so much joy and charisma all wrapped in a handsome package. And David knew he was nothing but a dry, conflicted introvert. If he shone, it was like the moon—reflecting the light of Naftali's sun.

David would just have to absorb as much of it as he could.

In three more days, they'd be getting on a plane together.

NAFTALI

“And you’re *sure* you know this guy well enough to spend a whole week with him?” Zeev was leaning over the kitchen counter where they had their phone propped up to do their makeup. They were wearing slinky maroon pajama pants and a fuzzy pink bathrobe that revealed their ample chest hair.

“Yes, mom.” Naftali rolled his eyes in between stirring the two different pans on the stove and finding all the ingredients he needed in the fridge. “He made me a *fruit salad* because I said I liked berries.”

“I know. With cream. You’ve said that so many times that it sounds like a euphemism for something else. *Ooh, David. Give me your berries with cream....*”

Naftali flicked their shoulder. “I wish. He’s a sweetie. It’s just a week of fun.”

A week of fun that he hadn’t been able to stop thinking about. Or talking about. Or just... sitting in his room and grinning to himself about.

Zeev interrupted his thoughts. “And hanging out with his transphobic family.”

Naftali sprinkled some nutritional yeast over the scramble. “For a few hours. And you would support a friend in that situation, too. Zeev, he’s taking me *skiing*. And did I show you the hotel yet? I bet he’ll order room service. And, I don’t know... champagne bubble baths or something. But, like, without the champagne.” Naftali wrinkled his nose. “Those

bubbles always make me sneeze. Hey, do you think that's why they always do that in the movies? Bubbles with bubbles?"

"Only you, Nafti."

Before Naftali could respond, the doorbell rang, loud and shrill. Everyone hated it and he kept meaning to replace it, but he never had.

"Shit!" Naftali looked around. "What time is it?" He stirred each of the pans in front of him, then killed the heat. He'd thought he had so much more time. The last hour had just disappeared.

He raced over to the door, already smiling before he had it open. "Hey! You're here!"

David was standing there, looking all professional with his wool coat and a small rolling suitcase with a matching carry on. "Good morning." His beard was neatly trimmed, and all Naftali could think about was what it would feel like if they kissed.

"We're going to Portland!" Naftali announced, too excited to keep it inside. He hoped there would be kissing, too.

David raised one eyebrow, but he was smiling. "Yes, we are. Are you ready?"

Naftali looked down to discover he was still wearing his flannel pajama pants and an old t-shirt. Oops. "No. I'm really sorry. I promise I can get ready in five minutes. Do we have five minutes? I just need to get my stuff and get dressed. But I packed it last night. I did! And I made us breakfast sandwiches. I thought that would be better than airport food, right? I can put them together so fast."

He walked backward as he talked, ushering David in the door. "I still need to get my toothbrush and my deodorant. And my keys."

He had a long mental list in his head. Except now he couldn't remember all the things, only that they were important. "Oh! I need to take out the compost, but someone else can do it if we're really late." That was the least important one, and he wasn't sure why he was telling David except to aid

his own memory. He was *also* hoping that knowing there were six items would help him remember them. Only it wasn't working. Obviously.

Maybe Zeev would know.

David closed the door, then put his hands on both of Naftali's shoulders. "Relax."

Naftali must have been used to him saying it by now, because he flopped like a puppet with his strings cut. All the tension just ran out of him.

"Very good." David's voice was deep and slow. Naftali was so aware of his nearness, of the cold, fresh air falling from his coat and the knowledge that he could just step a little closer and be in his arms. He bet that would be even more relaxing. "I thought it might take you a little while, so I gave us twenty extra minutes."

"Oh." He'd already tried using that trick this morning, but it clearly hadn't been successful. The unexpected extra time now felt like a gift. There was no censure or disappointment. "Thank you."

"It sounds like you have a ch-checklist. Do you want to do that first or handle breakfast?" David's hands were still on Naftali's shoulders, grounding him.

He still needed to remember those last three things, but he had time now. That would make it much easier. David was magical.

"Breakfast. It's really almost done. And I made a tofu scramble for my housemates along with our egg sandwiches. It's not even my turn to cook—we just share meals for dinner—but I figured it wouldn't take any more time, and Zeev woke up early. Oh! And I was going to get airplane snacks, so I can do that at the same time." One more thing off the list!

"Alright, show me to the kitchen."

When they got there it looked like... Well, Naftali wouldn't quite say that it looked like a tornado hit. It looked like he'd used every available flat surface for cooking, but since he hadn't unloaded the dishwasher first, the sink was still

full of last night's dishes, and everything had just snowballed from there. So, kind of a snowball-tornado.

"Oops. I need to do the dishes, too. I promise I'm not always this messy." He never strove to be perfectly clean and organized, but he knew David was tidy and he wanted to impress him.

Zeev turned around. "Hi, Naftali's sugar daddy!"

"H-h-hello." David took a moment to look over Zeev in all of their glory. Their eyes were now painted a luminous blue, but their hair was still messy from sleep. "You m-must be Zeev."

Zeev curtsied. "In the flesh!"

Naftali poked Zeev in the side. "He's not my sugar daddy."

Zeev retaliated by hugging Naftali from behind and resting their chin on top of his head. They knew that he loved the snuggles, but didn't like the teasing about his height. "He's totally your sugar daddy. What were you just telling me? He's going to get you..."

Naftali whirled around and covered Zeev's mouth with both hands. "Shut up. No talking."

Zeev pulled his wrists away. "...room service." They looked over Naftali's head at David. "Naftali's never gotten room service before."

"Zeev! Stop it!"

"And bubble baths. But not with champagne because it makes you sneeze."

"No! Noooooo!" Stupid Zeev being so much taller and stronger that he couldn't cover their mouth again.

"And farmer's markets. You wanted to know if there were farmer's markets in Portland in the winter."

David finally spoke up, though Naftali was still wrestling with Zeev and couldn't see him. "I th-think they do. There's a Christmas m-market, at least. Like, a c-craft fair."

“Take him to that,” Zeev advised. “And you have to bring him hot chocolate. With marshmallows. Or whipped cream.” They pondered. “Or just whips. He likes those, too.”

“Aaaaaaah. Kill me now.” Naftali collapsed into Zeev’s arms. Then he looked up with a scowl. “This is why you woke up so early, isn’t it?”

Zeev shrugged. “I’m looking out for you. I had to make sure you got your marshmallows. And whippings.”

Naftali huffed, then disengaged. “I can ask for my *own* marshmallows.” He turned to David, intentionally not mentioning the whipping part. They hadn’t agreed to that. “Sorry. Just ignore them.”

“Oh, I’m finding this qu-qu-qu-uite u-u-useful. C-continue, Zeev.” David looked unexpectedly delighted.

“Well, next you’ll need a latex bodysuit.”

Naftali slapped Zeev’s arm. “Don’t say that!” He turned to David. “They just made that up. It’s not on my kink list. Or not really.” And then back to Zeev. “You’re going to scare him away!”

“What? You said you didn’t *not* like it. Maybe he’s into it.”

“You’re fired as my best friend. David’s new. We have to *cultivate* sexy new Doms.” David’s eyes were darting back and forth between them.

Zeev didn’t pause though. “So, not starting with the ball crushing yet?”

“I don’t even have balls.” Naftali rolled his eyes.

“Yes, which is why you were sad that they couldn’t be crushed.”

“I didn’t say that! I wanted a cock cage.”

David finally spoke up again. Probably because it was hard to get a word in between the two of them. “Do I w-want to know what that is?”

“Yes,” they answered together, though probably for different reasons. Zeev was just trying to be difficult.

“It’s like a little jail for your dick,” Zeev explained helpfully.

“Yeah, works better with a dick.” Naftali shrugged. “Still hot, though.”

David’s eyes were wide, but he still glanced at his watch. “As m-much as I’m enjoying this, and b-b-believe me I am, we should start g-getting ready. W-what do you still need to d-do?”

Naftali looked around mournfully at the kitchen, then made puppy eyes at Zeev. “Could you...”

David stepped in. “How about I take c-c-care of the dishes, Zeev puts things away, and you get the food.”

“Oh. You don’t have to. You’re a guest.” Except that if David didn’t help, they’d probably really be late. Or he’d just leave on a week-long trip with dishes piled up everywhere for Zeev and his other housemates to deal with.

David took hold of his arm, and the touch warmed his whole body. “I recall that our plan was for me to pamper you on this trip. So I think that s-s-starts now. I’ve got the dishes.”

Total swoon.

Naftali didn’t know why the words pulled at him so hard, but right now, the whole week felt like some kind of fantasy. He wouldn’t have normally been comfortable with someone just stepping in and taking over shit he should have gotten done himself. But if it was a *kink*... well, that was different. Like an extended role play.

Though Naftali would have given anything to stop Zeev from saying it out loud, he still had soft, hazy visions of David checking on everything that he needed and giving him little unexpected presents. Naftali hoped that was what he meant too. And right now, washing the dishes felt like a perfect gift.

For a little while, they all scurried around the kitchen. Naftali couldn’t help being hyper-aware of where David was at every moment. He kind of made it his mission to pass by him as many times as possible, because each time he got a sweet smile in return.

Naftali finished making up their breakfast sandwiches and slipped them into plastic zipper bags. He hated using them because of the waste, but he couldn't exactly carry empty food containers around for a week.

When he finished, Zeev was diligently putting things in the communal fridge, while David moved from loading the dishwasher to rinsing bowls and cutting boards.

Naftali had even remembered two things on his list. Headphones and a book! He was totally on top of this.

“Do you need any help with...” Naftali started.

“Go upstairs and get your things,” David instructed gently. Somehow, all Dom-like with none of the sternness. “I’ll finish cleaning up.”

“Yes...” he trailed off, wanting to drop in an honorific, but not sure which one. It was just an automatic reaction to David being all Dom-y.

He tried again. “Okay. Be right back.” He flashed David a wicked grin and practically bounced up the stairs. He was about to go on vacation with a hot Dom who’d just *washed his dishes* because he wanted to pamper him. If that wasn’t sexy, he didn’t know what was.

He raced through getting his stuff together. His room was messy, but he usually knew where everything was. It was mostly bathroom things that he needed to grab. He checked that he had his wallet, keys, and phone three times. And his charger. He owned eight of them, scattered between his bedroom, the living room, two backpacks, and his desk at the synagogue office, but he still felt like he should get a medal for remembering it.

He added the book he’d been reading last night and wondered if they’d read in bed together.

He knew there wasn’t any promise of sex or kink, but maybe he could request that. Just cuddling up before they went to sleep? That would be heavenly.

Naftali’s phone rang. He dragged it from his pocket and saw that it was David.

“Hey, Naftali. Zeev told me what snacks to pack. How are you doing?”

He looked at the clock and groaned. He’d just spent five frantic minutes getting dressed and packing, then another five minutes holding a book and wondering about snuggling. “Ummm... almost ready. I’ll be right down.”

“Want me to help with anything else? I took the compost bucket out.” That was amazing. It also made it clear that David was checking on him without checking on him. Naftali got that half-annoyed, half-relieved feeling, like he sometimes did with Zeev. He didn’t want David to have to remind him that he was taking too long, but he also really appreciated that David wasn’t making a big deal out of it.

“Thank you. And I think that’s it.” He looked around the room. He had the nagging feeling that he’d forgotten something, but then again, he *always* had that feeling when he left for a trip or something important because it was inevitably true. His entire existence was creating lists and then making do when he forgot what was on them.

Naftali rushed down the stairs with his luggage, then ran back upstairs for his coat. When he finally made it back down, David and Zeev were whispering suspiciously together in the corner.

Naftali barged in. “I knew I shouldn’t have left you two alone!”

Zeev put a hand to their chest. “Whyever not?”

David just said, “Ready?”

“I hope so!” Naftali checked his pockets. “Wallet. Keys. Phone.”

“Handcuffs,” Zeev added.

Naftali rolled his eyes. “Have you ever taken handcuffs through security? Those are in my checked luggage.”

He could tell that David wasn’t sure if he was kidding or not. So he gave him a wink and a dazzling smile.

They were really doing this. He was going on a trip with a guy he barely knew who'd looked at his bank statements, cleaned his kitchen, and still had him burning with the memory of his ropes around his wrists.

His life was pretty awesome.

David tapped a button on his phone. "The Lyft will be here in three minutes. I think we can bring our stuff outside now."

Naftali gave Zeev a hug, then headed outside while David handled their luggage.

They slid into the car, not touching, but still going on this grand adventure together. Naftali struck up a conversation with the driver. He was Pakistani and Naftali liked his music.

About halfway there, Naftali crashed his head back on the seat. "Dammit."

David looked over at him.

"I knew I was forgetting something. I don't have my headphones." That was going to suck for the trip. He'd been looking forward to talking with David, but their total trip time was supposed to be something like eight hours with a layover.

David put a comforting hand on his knee. "Airports are known for selling headphones."

He was right. Naftali just didn't want to spend money on new ones when he had perfectly good ones at home. Or at least good ones that still worked with some tape. But he figured he could buy some cheap, crappy ones for the trip. "Good point."

They reached the airport without too much traffic, though the security lines were ridiculous.

Naftali pulled up his luggage to stand beside David. "I forgot what it was like flying before the biggest American holiday of the year. This place is a zoo!"

David looked around, then stared at the floor. His shoulders were a little hunched. "I usually do the-do the-do the TSAPreCheck."

They moved up a few feet, and then settled again. Obviously, nobody enjoyed security lines, but David seemed more uncomfortable than most, bringing his head up and then snapping it back down again.

“Is this bothering you?” Naftali asked. “You could go through PreCheck, and we can meet on the other side.”

David shook his head quickly. “That would be so much worse. I’d spend the whole time worrying that we’d never meet up again.” He blew out a long breath. “The line isn’t so bad, though. It’s less overstimulating when everyone’s moving in the direction that I expect them to go.” He looked at his watch. “And if I don’t have to freak out about getting there on time. Which I am a little bit.”

They actually still had over an hour to reach their gate, but Naftali didn’t mention that. “We’re moving pretty quickly.” Naftali pulled his luggage up again. It sounded like the other side of security, when people *weren’t* moving in predictable ways, could be better or worse. “Would it help to take out the breakfast sandwiches now?”

David looked around again and gave him a wan smile. “It couldn’t hurt.”

Naftali pulled them out of his backpack and handed one over to David. The steam had condensed in the plastic bags, but they were still a bit warm.

David took a bite. “Mmmmmm... This is really good. Wow. I was expecting... well, nothing this good.”

Naftali knew he was beaming. He couldn’t help it. “I made the challah and the pesto myself. The eggs and cheese are from our farm share—I think the dairy farm is in New Jersey, but the eggs are from Lancaster. And the tomatoes are from the Co-op, but probably locally grown in a hot house.”

“You really think about your food, don’t you?” David smiled as he said this, as if he found Naftali’s obsession with what he ate endearing. Or maybe he was just glad to have something else to focus on.

Naftali finished chewing his own first bite before answering. It really *was* good. “Yeah. I think of it as... Food is this fundamental language for communicating with people. It can be a show of love. It’s been a symbol of friendship since the beginning of time. It’s not an accident that so many Jewish rituals revolve around food, and the most important one is sharing the simplicity of bread and wine. But that’s true in all cultures of the world, really.”

“Tell me more a-a-a-about it,” David requested.

Not a problem. He could talk about this for hours. He still loved that David was interested in it.

“If I’m making food for someone, I want it to be meaningful. That means knowing that the food is grown or raised with respect toward the Earth and the animals. That the farmers and packagers and everyone along the chain is paid well and respected for their work. I have a lot of respect for food cultures that look different—even if it’s buying your kids off-brand Doritos because it’s a special night and that’s how you show your love. But for me, I can show my care for the Earth and the people in it by how I shop.”

David smiled. “Um... I think I can taste all that in here. I mean, it f-f-f-f-feels meaningful. Thank you for making it.” He took another bite, savoring it.

“Good distraction?” Naftali asked.

“Yeah.” David moved forward another six feet. “Do you know about stimming?”

“I think so. It’s like... uncontrollable movements that feel relaxing?” That was the best he understood it from working with autistic kids and adults here and there.

“Yeah, but sometimes they’re more controllable. Or you can choose which one to use. At any rate, good food can be, like, a mouth stim.”

“So concentrating on eating it feels relaxing?”

“Something like that.” He paused before speaking again. “I used to think I had, I don’t know, some sort of eating disorder

in high school. My mother certainly thought I did. But now I know that the stress eating was stimming.”

“Huh. I didn’t know about any of that.” And that must have been really shitty for David as a teenager. “Thank you for telling me.”

David took another bite, clearly pausing to enjoy the flavors. “I should mention that I also have misophonia.”

“Now that one I don’t know about.”

“I get irrationally upset at the sound of people chewing. My brain feels like it’s being attacked. Though other people get triggered by humming or tapping or typing. Any-any-any repetitive human sounds.”

“So food can help you relax, but not if you have to listen to chewing?”

“Or spoons. Spoons are...” He shuddered.

Got it. Well, Naftali wasn’t really sure how spoons could make a bad sound that was different from, say, forks... But he got the important parts. “You can’t hear any chewing now though, right?”

David’s lips quirked up. “Small blessings.”

“Does anything else help? When you’re feeling overwhelmed?”

“Noise-canceling headphones and moving away are the best. Or just planning not to be somewhere.”

They started snaking through the line, finally close enough to at least see the security screening equipment. Naftali didn’t speak for a while, letting David just focus on his mouth stims. He looked a little calmer at least.

They reached the front of the line, and of course, Naftali had to go through his usual airport routine of chugging down half of his metal water bottle at the last minute because he’d forgotten to empty it at home. David put his backpack on the belt just as he dashed back over.

Luckily, they both got the metal detector line, not the annoying whole-body scan where you had to explain to the TSA agents why the bits between your legs didn't match what they expected when they programmed the machine.

Naftali didn't mind telling the whole damn line that he was trans—he figured it was good education all around—but he wondered if David might have been anxious about that, too.

So aside from hopping around on one foot while he put on his shoes, security was relatively easy. Naftali had packed everything fun in his checked luggage, anyway.

“Let's go get you those headphones,” David suggested as soon as they emerged. There was a huge airport store in front of them with a full window display. “And I want to get a puzzle book and some gum.”

“Good idea.”

Naftali headed immediately to the electronics section. Everything was crazy expensive, and he felt the familiar mix of frustration and insecurity. He didn't *need* pricey headphones, but he also couldn't afford them even if he wanted them. It was hard to justify even the crappier ones.

He stooped to check the bottom row under the chargers and things because sometimes that's where the cheapest ones were. Nope.

David drifted over with a magazine under one arm. He picked up a set of really nice headphones. Like, the really, really good ones with Bluetooth and the puffy ring to cancel out ambient noise. Even the box was matte and smooth, the kind that made you want to run your fingers over it. Then he pulled out a pair of fancy earbuds from the same company. “What d-do you think of these?”

“They look good,” Naftali answered noncommittally. “Getting some for yourself?”

David turned toward him. “Nope, these are for you. Headset or earbuds?”

Naftali balked. Maybe he hadn't thought this thing through all the way. He was imagining David buying him a gold-plated

toothbrush when he realized he'd forgotten his, or taking him out for a thousand-dollar dinner.

“Um... OK, wow. So...” He wasn't sure how to say all this. “I know you're going to buy me stuff on this trip. Like, that was the agreement. And I know you can probably afford this without even thinking about it. But I was thinking you would pay for fun things to do together. Like the skiing? Things that you were going to do, too. Not like this. I don't know if I feel comfortable with you buying something this expensive for me. I was going to buy those.” He pointed toward the cheapest ones he'd found so far. A thin hoop of metal with two hard-looking disks barely covered by foam. Still overpriced at the airport. “That's all I need. And I can buy them.”

The more Naftali talked, the more he realized that David had seen his bank statements. David might be thinking that he couldn't afford them on his own. He didn't want him to think that he wasn't self-sufficient.

David looked crestfallen. “I'm s-s-sorry if I overs-s-s-s-stepped.” He set both boxes on the shelf. “You really like m-m-music, so I thought you'd enjoy the n-n-nicer headphones. I just... I thought the plane r-r-r-ride could be the beginning of, you know, the trip. Where I get to take care of you? And m-maybe you could sh-sh-share the album you said you made if we got a splitter?” He was still looking at the boxes like he wasn't ready to leave them yet.

Naftali could feel his cheeks heating. He'd totally misread the situation, and now he'd made David doubt himself. It was evident with the way his stutter had come back. Naftali felt horrible.

And there was one word that kept sticking in his head. David said that he would *get* to take care of him. Like it was something he was looking forward to. Maybe he wanted to be a sugar daddy. Or at least live out the fantasy of it for a week. That's how it had sounded.

Naftali wondered if this was getting into some of the kinks David wanted to explore. And if it was, that really changed

everything. One of the things Naftali had learned was that money was never *about* money. For him it was about self-worth, or at least that was what it had become over the last few years. He wondered what it was for David.

Naftali bumped David's shoulder with his own. "That's really sweet. I don't think anyone's ever thought that much about what's important to me. I'd love to listen to music together on the plane."

"Yeah?" David's smile was a burst of sunshine.

"Yeah. I'm sorry I didn't understand. I have a lot of issues about some things, but I'm trying to let them go."

David set down the magazine and put his hands on Naftali's shoulders, heavy and warm. God, if Naftali could bottle that feeling, he'd make a fortune.

"So it's OK if I b-b-b-b— If I b-buy you things as long as they're thoughtful and we d-do them together?"

Naftali nodded. "And maybe not too, *too* expensive?"

David chuckled. "So you want a sugar daddy on a budget."

Naftali laughed aloud. David was funny when he least expected it. "I don't really want a sugar daddy at all. I just had this idea of a fun trip. I'm not actually expecting champagne bubble baths and hot air balloons. I'd be happy with some good food, being in the mountains, and a few evenings sharing something you enjoy."

"That sounds good to me. But you want to be pampered?" He was asking an important question here. Naftali could see it in his face.

Naftali didn't know why he was suddenly so shy and hopeful about admitting it. He'd already asked the man to tie him up, and brought it up whenever he was feeling flirtatious. "Yes?" But this felt... all squirmy and exciting and scary, making his belly clench and his heart beat too fast.

Naftali waited for David's response. Despite the fact that they'd agreed to take things slowly, it felt like they'd already begun that dance of dominance and submission.

David stepped closer, so that they were almost touching. “I want to buy you those headphones. Be-Be-Because I want to see you enjoy them.” His breath was warm against Naftali’s ear, shooting tingles through his body. “Is that alright, Naftali?”

He nodded and their cheeks touched. Naftali felt shimmery and light everywhere, heat searing through him where their skin met. This was him giving consent. “I’d like that. Thank you.”

David pulled Naftali into his arms. It was the first time their whole bodies had touched.

David was strong, both with the solidness of his body and the way that he was taking charge in little ways, but without being overbearing. Naftali couldn’t get enough of his scent either, that complex, woody smell that he just wanted to bury his face in.

He really, *really* liked this guy.

“Thank you.” David rumbled in a soft voice, just for Naftali to hear. He rubbed his chin across Naftali’s cheek, a glorious contrast of rough beard and soft lips that felt almost like a kiss.

Naftali was so turned on he could explode, especially when David nuzzled in a little closer. “What if I wanted to kiss you?”

Naftali didn’t seem to be capable of articulating how much he wanted that too. Finally! He was almost dizzy with sensation. So he just nodded.

David gripped the back of his head as he pulled him in for a burning kiss. There was no hesitation now, just raw need as David devoured his mouth. Naftali’s scalp stung where David pulled his hair, amplifying that heady sense of dominance. He could revel in this forever.

Unfortunately, David cast him loose, long before he was ready to let go. Naftali chased after him with his mouth, but David shook his head in a gentle rebuke and stepped back. “G-g-g-g-go f-f-fill your water b-b-bottle. Our-our-our flight

leaves s-soon. I'm g-g-going to check out." He took another step, setting a clear distance between them.

His eyes darted away. Then, back to Naftali quickly before staring intently at the shelves.

Was the stutter from nerves again? Had Naftali messed something up?

"David?" Naftali wasn't sure what was going on, but he wanted the confident man who'd just claimed his mouth to return.

"It's n-n-nothing. Headphones or earb-b-buds?" He picked up both boxes again.

So apparently, they were going to pretend that they hadn't just shared a kiss that was so hot, Naftali could jerk off to the memory of it.

"Earbuds." He kept his tone warm. He didn't know what was going on in David's head, but he knew the man wasn't trying to jerk him around. He was just trying to figure things out.

David nodded and walked toward the cash register.

DAVID

As David paid for the earbuds, he replayed the moment in his head. The way Naftali had melted into him as they kissed, the way his head tilted back ever-so-slightly when David pulled his hair. It had been the softest, sweetest surrender, and it wasn't some demonstration for a kink class. Naftali hadn't been performing. It was real.

David gathered his bags, then paused. What was he supposed to do now? He knew what Naftali wanted... mostly... except for all the confusing parts.

The easy part was that Naftali wanted sex. And bondage. Impact play and all of that other stuff on the list.

Buying him things was what *David* wanted. He just wasn't sure how to separate one from the other.

One of them felt as natural as breathing, while the other one created a sharp yearning in his chest. It also felt like embarrassment waiting to happen.

David shook his head. Naftali *said* it was alright to take care of him on the trip. Right? And Zeev had confirmed it.

Ugh. Why couldn't people be more like numbers? Although numbers got funny too, when people were using them.

He was still going over everything that Zeev had disclosed during his don't-hurt-my-best-friend speech in the hallway.

I don't know what Naftali's told you, but he's more excited about this trip than he wants you to know. I know this is mostly

about your family thing and having a ski buddy, but just remember that Naftali's pretty fragile. He got out of a long-term relationship last summer, and it wasn't good for him.

That was information that David hadn't known. The only thing he could think to ask was how to support Naftali.

Just don't try to change him. He practically made himself sick trying to do it before, and he just can't. He's scatterbrained and late for everything, but when he's doing something he's committed to, he's on point and he gives it his all. You just have to honor that.

It had hurt David to hear the words, but he'd promised to follow Zeev's advice. If that was what it took to be with Naftali, it didn't seem like a big ask at all. Then, Zeev had given him one more valuable suggestion.

You don't need to spend a lot of money on him. In fact, I think he'll be more impressed if you don't. He likes... I don't know. Feathers and funny shaped rocks. Things like that. But if you can make him feel like he's... the prince of the Motel 6 or something for a week, that's what he's not going to tell you that he's hoping for.

In other words, Zeev had already told him what to do. David just hadn't realized how important it was. Though he really should have put two and two together. Naftali felt insecure about money. And he wanted to be pampered without David spending too much.

Hopefully that was a tightrope that David could manage to walk. He could still find ways to treat him like a prince. And hopefully not hurt him.

That was the most important. More important than his own embarrassment, for sure.

David left the shop and followed the signs for the water fountain until he spotted a familiar figure.

Naftali was juggling his backpack and water bottle along with a book that he'd managed to wedge under his chin. David could only watch helplessly as he let go of it to screw the lid on, only to have the rest of his backpack split open, top to

bottom, weighed down by his sweatshirt latched on to the outside.

A pair of socks and a few pens bounced across the floor. Another book hit the ground along with some granola bars. Crumpled pieces of paper flew in the other direction, along with a pair of underwear. And that was just the things that he could identify quickly.

Naftali crouched to pick things up and David bent to help him, reaching for the underwear first. They were boxer briefs, slinky and black. Just by feel, he knew there was a layer with a hole in it, designed to accommodate a packer.

David tried not to rub the soft material between his fingers as he picked up a few pens, a tube of chapstick, and a guitar pick. He found a rock with a tree painted on it, and added it to the collection in his hands. He hadn't seen it fall, but he knew without a doubt who it belonged to.

They stood at the same time, and Naftali gave a bashful smile. "Thank you." Then he saw what David was holding and grabbed for the pile. "Oh, I'm so sorry. It's just sometimes checked baggage gets lost. You're supposed to pack enough stuff in your carry-on to get you through a few days. This happened to me before, and since I usually have to shop in the boys section, I ended up wearing Spiderman underwear all week."

David let out a much-needed laugh. "That w-would have been cute."

"Well, I do still have them. It's just harder to find sexy boxer briefs in my size if I want to... do stuff with hot guys." He started shoving everything back into his backpack.

To David's surprise, there was a blush growing on Naftali's cheeks. It made him wonder if Naftali wasn't all confidence in the bedroom after all. In his head, he'd built him up as this guy who knew everything about sex and never got embarrassed about things like underwear.

Though at this point, David was probably blushing, too. Naftali always left him flustered with his ongoing and

impossible flirting. If he'd understood it correctly, Naftali had just called him a hot guy and implied that he'd brought sexy underwear just for him.

David was definitely *not* ready to talk about underwear. He held out the bag with the headphones once Naftali finished the untidy process of making everything fit. "Here."

Naftali hugged it to his chest. "Thank you. I'm sorry I didn't understand earlier. This means a lot to me." Then he stood on his tiptoes and planted a chaste kiss on David's cheek.

Even after he stepped away, David felt the butterfly press of his soft lips.

"Off to our gate?" Naftali was already moving, bouncing along.

David caught up, then sped up a little more when he found the right signs. He hated the press of the airport. All of those people rushing in different directions.

And he still couldn't quite believe that he and Naftali were going to spend a whole week together. That they'd kissed. That... he could maybe kiss Naftali again, and do so much more, if he ever got comfortable enough.

"David!" Naftali's voice cut through his thoughts. "Sorry. Can we slow down?" He gestured downward. "Short legs."

David had somehow forgotten that Naftali was so short, but he didn't feel small. His personality was so big, he was like an optical illusion.

Now David felt terrible. He'd thought that Naftali was just behind him. "Of c-c-course. I j-j-j—. I j-just don't l-like all the p-people around."

Naftali came up beside him, linking their arms together. It was awkward with their backpacks and carry-ons, but perfect, too. "Am I people?" he asked brightly.

"N-no." Naftali just made him feel warm. Like they were in their own little bubble. David was still a little overwhelmed by all the visual and auditory distractions—the stress of

avoiding so many collision paths—but Naftali made it easier to tune them all out.

Naftali beamed, taking that for the compliment that it was. David noticed that he was subtly steering them, too. Avoiding the larger clumps of people and moving easily through the throng with occasional *excuse me's* and adorable waves at small children.

David felt like this shouldn't be their roles... he was supposed to be the one in charge. The one taking care of Naftali. But having him step up to handle the hassle of the airport hallways was such a pleasant relief.

That and the touch of their bodies together, even with the layers of sweaters between them.

“I used to hate being short,” Naftali remarked casually, as they waited for a tangle of teenagers to pass them by.

“Yeah?” David asked, though he figured he knew all the reasons. Taller men got hired, promoted, and paid more. They were more attractive to potential dates. They got more respect. And transmen tended to be on the shorter end of the curve, as Naftali was.

David had always been beyond grateful that he'd gotten his father's height and build. Even before he transitioned, he'd appreciated being able to look other men directly in the eye—it made them take him more seriously. As a man, he was still tall enough to match the height of the men he'd dated, something that had been affirming in all sorts of subtle ways.

What would it have been like for Naftali, though, who wasn't even as tall as many women? Was that something that ate at him? An insecurity that he'd had to work through, when it was already difficult enough figuring out gender and culture and everything else involved with being trans?

But Naftali just laughed as he continued guiding them down the corridor. “Yeah. My sister was always taller than me, and I hated that. Zeev still teases me, but that just means that it's their job whenever I need to get something up high.”

It was amazing watching Naftali make light of even the hardest things. David still worried, though. There were so many layers to Naftali, and he was just beginning to see beneath them. “Does it still b-bother you, then?”

They reached their gate, and Naftali pulled them into a quiet space along the wall. “Nah, I’ve made peace with my height. It means I usually get to be the little spoon. And snuggling’s *always* better for the little spoon.”

Naftali smiled up so brightly that David could only think about kissing him again. Holding him in their bed together. The little spoon.

David had always enjoyed being the big spoon—almost entirely because it made him feel more masculine. Protective. Larger. Mike had accepted it with his usual good nature. To him it didn’t matter.

But Naftali’s masculinity was clearly expansive enough to encompass his smaller size and his submission. David had to imagine that he enjoyed being the one who was protected and comforted. Maybe even feeling small and helpless.

David’s heart felt like it was beating out of his ribs, just imagining the possibilities.

Naftali took a step closer. And another step, until they were almost touching, and his breath teased the shell of his ear. “Will you be my big spoon, David?”

David’s mind was spinning. He could hardly think. “Uh... y-yeah.” That wasn’t promising too much, was it? To hold Naftali so close against him every night. And wake up together in the mornings...

“Oh, good.” Naftali’s whisper was sweeter than a caress.

David still hadn’t moved a few beats later when Naftali tugged at his arm. “Let’s get a seat by the window so we can watch the planes.”



David discovered, over the course of the day, that Naftali was a delightful travel companion.

Not that he'd expected anything less.

Naftali oohed and aahed when he unwrapped the new earbuds, then made David wear one so they could listen to music together. Sometimes he sang softly or told stories about what they were listening to. Other times he just snuggled against David's chest and quietly hummed.

Naftali was just... happy. A little ball of portable sunshine.

Naftali let David buy him pizza and smoothies at the Denver airport during their layover. David wasn't quite sure how he was supposed to balance pampering him and not spending too much, but he figured that some sort of food was necessary on a nine-hour trip. The pizza wasn't the best, which was why he insisted on the smoothies.

He was worried that Naftali would balk at the expense, but he'd only checked the first time about splitting the cost. The next time, he bumped David's shoulder when the cashier turned away and whispered, "Thank you, Sugar Daddy." Then he winked.

They were somewhere in between silly flirting and real flirting, where David knew Naftali was teasing him about spending the money, but it was also clear how much he was enjoying it.

So David got to watch him savor his meal. The way his lips wrapped around the straw. His little hums of enjoyment around a mouthful of veggie pizza. David tried not to be too obvious about watching him, but there's a naughty glint in his eyes when he slowly licked his fingers to catch the extra sauce.

David looked away. Everything about Naftali made him want to pull him into his lap and kiss him. No, not just kiss him. Devour him.

Which he knew Naftali would be more than ready for.

David was the one holding back.

Awkward, awkward, awkward.

On the second flight, Naftali eagerly watched the plane take off, nose pressed to the window. He said he flew two or three times a year, but his excitement over watching it apparently never waned. He brought that same childlike wonder to everything he did.

Once they were in the air, Naftali lifted the armrest between them and, without any hesitation, nuzzled into David's chest. After a few quiet murmurs and twitches to feel comfortable, he fell asleep, soft exhalations falling on David's neck.

It felt magical.

This was... God, it was what David had been missing all along.

He couldn't even put words to how he was feeling. Protective? Adoring? Maybe even honored.

It wasn't just that they were cuddling, though Naftali was clearly very cuddly. It was more that Naftali needed something from him. Or maybe that Naftali was willing to depend on him. The little spoon.

The flight gave him plenty of time to revel in the moment. And to think it over.

He knew that he had the perfect situation here. There was literally no one better to experiment with. Naftali taught *classes* in the stuff that David wanted to try. He was patient and caring, and wouldn't laugh if David made a mistake. He was also trans, which alleviated a whole different set of David's fears.

So maybe he could just... try things out. Experiment. Test out all the things he'd ever wanted, because Naftali wanted them too. At the very worst, if Naftali didn't like something, he would just say it.

David brushed his cheek across Naftali's head, letting his beard tangle in the strands of Naftali's soft hair.

It was one of those moments, like the first time he'd put on a suit and tie. He'd stood there forever before picking up the garments, not because he was afraid to wear them, but because he was terrified that he'd never want to take them off. And that would mean that everything had to change.

This was a moment just like that. If he let himself be Naftali's Daddy Dom... If he gave into that craving, and it was everything he wanted... If it was *who he was*...

He wouldn't be able to go back.

On the other hand, just like that moment when he stood in front of his friend's mirror, suit and tie hanging on the door, it was probably inevitable.

If not now, then he would keep thinking about it. Wondering. Longing.

And he was about to spend a week in a romantic, kinky B&B with a sexy sub who made outrageously seductive proposals and then curled up in his lap.

Inevitable.

When they touched down in Portland, it was, oddly, just past one o'clock—four in Philadelphia. The plane stopped, and the people around them were unbuckling their seatbelts and preparing to leave. But Naftali was still sleeping peacefully, and David wasn't ready for him to wake up yet.

When someone opened the overhead compartment just above them and pulled down a suitcase, Naftali finally stirred. "David?"

"We're here."

"Oh, I..." He dragged his hand through his messy hair, looking deliciously bedraggled and sleepy. "Thank you. Last night I didn't sleep very well because I was so excited."

David felt an overwhelming desire to kiss his forehead and say something like, "Anytime." Because what else was he supposed to do with someone so precious? But this was still just for a week.

Instead he managed to flash a teasing smile. “You were excited, huh?”

Naftali yawned. “Yeah. I get to spend a week on vacation with my new...” His eyes scrunched up in confusion, and David really wished he knew how he was going to finish the sentence. “Uhhh...” Naftali started to look distressed now, like he’d made a mistake, even if it wasn’t verbalized.

David couldn’t help himself. He pressed his thumb to Naftali’s parted lips to silence him. Naftali’s eyes drifted closed again, but it was in pleasure now, not exhaustion.

He made no effort to move away. One finger was all it took for David to control his actions, and it was clear that he’d wait as long as David wanted him to.

One of the babies on the plane started crying and the kids in front of them whined that they were hungry. People were moving all around them, and David didn’t care. Naftali had that soft, submissive look on his face, and David couldn’t see anyone but him.

They stayed like that for an embarrassingly long time, until David realized that the plane was emptying. He gathered his stuff, while Naftali did the same. David let him walk ahead, surreptitiously making sure that he had all of his belongings and his backpack was zipped.

Naftali would hopefully never know that he’d checked, but it made David feel good. Like he was looking after him.

That was when David decided he was going to do this. He was all in.

Hopefully he wouldn’t screw it up.

DAVID

“Ooh! Is that it?” Naftali, the little chatterbox, strained at his seatbelt to see the lodge through the slow swish of the windshield wipers.

“Looks like it.” David turned into the parking lot. It should have been a miserable afternoon, between the extended wait at the airport for their car to be ready and the freezing drizzle as they hugged the slippery mountainous curves leading to Mount Hood.

Instead, David was feeling relaxed. Even playful.

Naftali had been excited about every landmark or beautiful bit of scenery. David had had to admit that, growing up in the suburbs, he didn't know as much about Portland neighborhoods and locations as he wished he did.

So Naftali had ventured onto the internet to discover quirky facts and interesting tidbits as they drove. In between, or perhaps all the time, Naftali sang. He'd belted out the lyrics to his favorite pop songs, or gently harmonized to some of David's old favorites when he didn't know them. He'd even encouraged David to sing, and he had—joining in softly under his breath.

David knew his voice wasn't the greatest, but Naftali beamed at him every time he tried.

There was something about Naftali that made David feel invincible.

And soon, they'd be together in a warm cozy room, overlooking the gorge. David was already imagining what they

could do. He wasn't quite sure how to start a... scene.

But he could get Naftali hot chocolate from the lobby. And order dinner from one of the restaurants that delivered to the lodge. It wasn't quite the same as room service, but he was sure Naftali would enjoy it.

Then, well, maybe if he was feeling brave, he could take out the rope he'd brought. He'd ordered with express shipping, not even considering any other brand than the one Naftali had mentioned during the workshop. The crimson-died hemp rope had come in a "curiosity kit" with a two-hour video, and he'd watched it twice while he practiced on a chair.

With anyone other than Naftali, he probably would have been too nervous to try. He hadn't even told Naftali he'd brought it, in case he chickened out.

But Naftali made him feel comfortable in a way he never had before. He could already imagine the rope running over the planes of Naftali's chest and around his wrists. The way that he would hum with pleasure. How his eyes would shine.

"Should we grab all of our stuff now, or just make a run for it and come back for the rest when the rain stops?"

"Uh..." David shook himself. He felt embarrassed just thinking about the rope that was waiting in his suitcase in the trunk. "Let's b-b-b-bring it a-a-a-a... All in." Now he sounded ridiculous.

Naftali just grinned, like they were sharing a secret. "Good idea. Let me zip my coat. Then if you pop the trunk before we get out, we can grab our stuff and go."

David nodded. That was safer than having his horrible stutter come back.

The twenty feet from the car to the lodge was a scramble, but then they were inside, and only slightly soaked.

David took a minute to look around. The atrium of the Meadowlark Lodge was a tangle of natural stone and live plants, making the clusters of couches and low tables feel like they were growing out of a landscape. The two-story panes of

glass along the front streamed with the rain, making the streetlights twinkle against the backdrop of the mountain.

Naftali pressed against his side, linking their arms together. “David! This place is beautiful! Thank you!”

“Uh, you’re welcome.”

“I was worried about skiing with the rain, but I think I could stay here for a day, just looking out the windows.”

“Good. I wouldn’t w-want you to be disappointed.”

Naftali nuzzled against his jacket, curls of wet hair brushing against his cheek. “Never. Even if it rains all week.” Then he leaned up to whisper seductively against David’s ear. “I’m sure the dungeon is nice and dry.”

David froze, even though that was what he wanted more than anything.

And that made Naftali pull away. “I mean... Sorry. Not trying to push you or anything. Dungeon or no dungeon. I would enjoy going to museums or whatever with you, too.”

Hopefully not art museums. David hadn’t quite worked out how to respond—that he *was* interested in trying something kinky, but he might need some coaching—when they were interrupted.

“Hey! Welcome to the Meadowlark! I’m Jamie and I can check you in whenever you’re ready.”

Jamie had frosted blond hair and big blue eyes that made David almost certain that he was wearing mascara. It was subtle, but definitely there. He was standing behind a reception desk full of cute little wood carvings, mountain climbing quips, and yet more plants.

There wasn’t anything else for David to do than to head over. He pulled out his wallet on the way.

“Hello. I’m David Wisener. We’ve got a reservation for...”

“Oh, I know who you are!” Jamie looked over the counter with a mischievous grin. “You’re staying for Kinkmas.”

“Uh, y-y-yes.” David looked frantically around the room. There didn’t seem to be anyone else there, so at least no one overheard.

“You’re the only guests staying over the whole week. Usually we close the lodge to do Christmas as a family thing and then open it up for a day afterward for a kinky gathering with our friends. It’ll be different this year with the Cuffed tie-in, but I think you two are the only ones from out of town.”

David hadn’t quite been prepared for talking about everything so openly. Especially where anyone could hear. “I d-d-d-didn’t... I didn’t know you were usually c-c-closed for Christmas. Are we intruding?”

Jamie shrugged. “If you’re kinky, you’re family.”

Naftali laughed. “I love it. I want that on a t-shirt. Or maybe some shorts. Right across the ass.”

Jamie squealed. “Now I know what I want Daddy and Neil to get me for Christmas. Except with panties.” He turned around, shaking a tight little ass that popped in his painted-on jeans. “Right here.”

It was only then that David realized that Jamie only had one leg. The other was a curved black prosthetic. It didn’t detract anything from his attractiveness—not that David was looking.

Naftali was still laughing when Jamie added, “You should tell your D-type to get you some, too. We could be twinsies for Christmas.”

“Ooohhh... I would so do it. Though for me it would be a Hanukkah present. I’m Jewish. But if that’s what Christmas is like around here, I’m in. Can we strut around in our undies?”

Jamie waved his hand to cool his face. “Yes, please.” He gave Naftali a thorough eye-fuck. “Any time. And once the last vanilla guests check out at noon on Christmas eve, the dungeon is open any time. Well, unless we’re using it. Although... if you’re into watching... or joining in... the more the merrier.”

Every muscle in David's body went rigid. Was Jamie just... hitting on Naftali right in front of him?

And Naftali didn't seem to think this was weird at all. "Yeah?" If anything, he looked intrigued.

"Absolutely. Only Daddy touches Neil, but Daddy's open to scenes with friends, and they both like watching me play."

"Neil's a sub, too? I saw you guys on Cuffd, but I don't remember the details." Naftali was looking right into Jamie's bright blue eyes.

"Yeah, Neil's Daddy's good boy, and as you might have guessed..."

"You're the brat." Naftali filled in with a cheeky grin. "I noticed."

God, they didn't need David here at all. He could have just... stayed home. Or... well, pretty much anything other than standing here being ignored while the guy he'd thought he was half in love with made a plan to hook up with another guy. Another guy *and* his Daddy Dom.

David suddenly felt intensely foolish about the long skeins of rope he'd so carefully packed in his luggage. What would Naftali really want with some awkward, stuttering newbie who'd learned his techniques from a DVD?

Suddenly Naftali's arm came up around his waist. With both of their coats in the way, it was more of a heavy weight on his spine than an embrace. "David? Are you okay?"

Great. Now Naftali was worried about him. Visibly. In front of Jamie. Was he just supposed to be fine with all of this?

Jamie apparently picked up on the mood. "I'll just get you guys checked in." There was a long pause while he typed a few things on the computer, then fit their keycards into their little sleeves. "Here we go. Take a left at the top of the stairs, or you can grab the elevator over there." He looked up at David. "I was able to swap your room for the one with the bathtub for the whole stay. I hope you two enjoy it."

“I’m sure we will,” Naftali answered graciously as he accepted the pile from Jamie, including David’s credit card and ID. David unfroze to take them back from him.

“Elevator?” Naftali asked.

“Sure.”

They were silent as the elevator slowly ascended, then dinged on the second floor. Their room, when they got inside, was gorgeous. With the colorful quilt, woodcarvings, marble bathroom fixtures, and gleaming floors, it was both luxurious and homey. The immense claw-footed bathtub that David had requested sat right by the full-length windows.

David set his luggage down just inside the door. He didn’t know what else to do. He knew that Naftali was watching him, but he couldn’t bring himself to look up. He’d gotten this all wrong.

Everything he was imagining about this trip? It was wrong.

“David?” Naftali asked quietly. “Did I...” Naftali exhaled a slow breath. “Sorry. I think you’re upset about something, but I don’t know what it is. I did make sure there wasn’t anyone else around while we were talking about kink, and...”

David cut him off. “Do you e-e-e-e-e... Do you e-e-e-e-e-e-even want me h-h-h-here?”

Naftali’s face clouded, and then cleared. “Of course. I’m looking forward to spending time together.”

David shook his head. “And for that... K-K-K-K-K-Kinkmas thing?” Even the name sounded stupid. Good, God.

“It’s still up to you. I think it would be fun for both of us, but it’s fine if we just hang out and ski.”

He’d said *we*. Like if David didn’t go, he wouldn’t either. Or at least that was how it sounded. “W-What about J-J-Jamie?”

Naftali looked puzzled now. “He seems like a good host. It looks like they’ve got a good set-up for the kink events and maintaining a safe space.”

“But w-w-were you f-f-f-f... f-f-flirting with him?”

Naftali’s mouth rounded to a surprised O. “No. I mean, I was being nice. But I wasn’t... Well, I guess he did proposition me. Us. That offer was for both of us.” He shrugged. “But no, that wasn’t flirting. Just sharing information.”

God. Was that what had happened? Looking back, maybe it was. David tried to smile, but he wasn’t sure it worked.

Naftali stepped a little closer. He looked concerned, but not upset or pitying over explaining this to an autistic newbie who’d basically just accused him of... cheating or something.

“Listen, it’s a whole new culture with different rules. And we haven’t talked about our interests and limits yet because we weren’t sure if this was going to be more than a platonic trip. Though I hope to get some snuggling in.” He gave a little shimmy. “If you have limits around anything with other people—group scenes, voyeurism, sharing, even watching a demonstration—that’s all you have to say. If you want to try something, just say that, too. But we’re here *together*.”

“Ok-k-kay.” David sighed. That was good to hear—amazing even—but the embarrassment was going to live with him for days.

He still wanted to be clear. To make sure there was no future space for confusion. “I c-c-could w-watch, but I think-I think-I think I d-don’t want to sh-sh-sh-share you.” If that was even his right to request. He’d offered to take Naftali on a trip, not purchased exclusive rights to his body. Or even his time.

Hell, he hadn’t even committed to anything more than *seeing where things went*.

But Naftali just gave him a sunny smile. “Sounds good to me! You’re *my* vacation Dom, so I’m not sharing you, either.”

“Y-yeah?”

“Of course. I mean, again, we can do workshops or even join a group scene together if you’re interested. But I’m here to spend time with *you*. Kinky or not. Wasn’t that the deal?”

David nodded. It was like his lungs could inflate again.

And then Naftali was snuggling into his arms, damp winter coat and all. “Oh, good. So we’re okay now?”

“Yeah.” He still felt a little sensitive—not jealous or worried, but foolish for misunderstanding the situation. This was going to loop in his head for years to come, at all the worst times.

Naftali’s head against his chest did a lot to help with that, though. He still couldn’t understand *why* Naftali would want him when he could have anybody else. Someone who wasn’t so hopelessly naive and confused. But he was willing to take Naftali’s word for it.

Naftali nuzzled into his neck. He didn’t seem to be in any hurry to let him go. And David didn’t want him to leave. Just holding him still felt like a miracle.

Until Naftali’s stomach rumbled. “Oops!” he laughed.

“W-We should get some dinner, yeah?”

“Or lunch. Whatever time it is here. Three? That could be dinner.” Naftali stepped back, but not far enough to leave the circle of David’s arms. “So, a restaurant, then?”

David felt his forehead wrinkle. “Would you mind if we ordered in?” In his mind he’d been thinking of this like room service, something special from the list Zeev had so generously shared with him. But now everything just felt a little overwhelming.

“Good idea. It’s still wet out there.”

“It’s more that I’ve just h-had enough people for today. I’m... I’m more of an introvert.”

Naftali finally moved away. “Do you want me to give you some space? I could hang out downstairs if you need some alone time. Or... I mean, would it bother you if I just stayed in here and read a book or something?” He looked so hopeful.

Honestly, David hadn’t even thought about sending him away. And that was strange, because usually if he’d spent

twelve hours with *anyone*, he needed a break. He wanted quiet, but he didn't want Naftali to *leave*.

It was like he'd said at the airport. Naftali, somehow, wasn't "people."

"You can stay. It's your r-room t-t-too. No—" He shook his head at Naftali's worried face. "—I mean I want you to stay. You don't mind reading?"

"I've got two books I'm in the middle of. And my tablet with my sexy new earbuds."

"Okay." David looked around. In his mind, he'd planned all of this Dom-y stuff, where he would be in charge. He'd wanted to give Naftali a bath and tie him up. But now he wasn't even sure where he was going to sit. The bed? The couch? The armchair? What would Naftali think of his choice?

But Naftali was already rooting through his backpack, leaving a haphazard circle of objects on the floor around him. Right by the door, where they'd be stepped on. Once he found his tablet and book, he looked up with a smile. "Hey! What if we put on our PJs and have a cozy rainy day reading party?"

Or maybe David didn't have to decide anything at all. Naftali's suggestion sounded... really cute. Nothing that Mike would have ever suggested. Even if they'd done the same things, his ex would never have called it a party.

With Naftali, everything just had an extra bit of fun. A little sparkle. Like it was unfettered from the rules of the mundane world. "I could work with that."

"Oh, goodie!" Naftali went for his suitcase, and David had a suspicion about what was going to happen next.

"Let me find the luggage stand for you," he offered. There had to be one in the closet.

"Luggage stand?"

"Yeah." He found it and pulled it out. The two wooden beams settled into their X shape with the rows of black straps stretched across the top. Taking Naftali's suitcase from him, David rested it on top.

“Dude! I had no idea what that was for. Or why hotels always had them in the closet. Thank you!” Apparently, that earned him another hug.

“You’re welcome.”

“I’m so into this pampering thing.”

David hid a chuckle. He’d been thinking of grand gestures, but Naftali seemed to be impressed by every little thing he did. “No problem. Do you want to get changed while I order dinner?”

“Sure. You know I eat anything.” Naftali rooted through his suitcase. As David had expected, nothing inside was folded, though socks at least seemed to be matched together. When Naftali found his pajamas, he held them up triumphantly. “Ah ha!”

Naftali came out of the bathroom a few minutes later in plaid flannel pants, a faded t-shirt with a row of holes along the bottom, and fluffy pink socks. It wasn’t exactly sexy, but it was adorable. He wasn’t trying to prove anything or show off. He wanted a reading party.

David watched with amusement as he moved the couch until it faced the window, then rooted around in the closet for an extra blanket. He gave David a little glare. “No one’s allowed in the reading fort without PJs.”

David raised his eyebrows, feeling daring. “What if I said I slept n-naked?”

“Oooh! Naked reading party!” Naftali started to slip off his shirt.

“Uh, no. Sorry. I was joking. I have-I have-I h-have PJs. I just want to get the food first.”

“That was a mean trick. Well, I guess you’re still allowed in.” Naftali hopped onto the couch, then lifted the blanket in invitation.

David didn’t even have his book yet, but he slid under it. He could look at something on his phone.

Only when Naftali snuggled up against his chest, he didn't even get that out. He just sat there and held him as soft flurries of snow started to fall over the trees and into the gorge below.

“Mmmm...” Naftali hummed after a little while. “This is perfect.”

It really was.

NAFTALI

Naftali flew down the slope, a spray of snow arcing behind him. His fingers were half frozen, but he wasn't going to stop for anything. He curved around a tree, then picked up speed as the slope tilted sharply for the last mad descent.

He was laughing as he came to a slow stop. David pulled up beside him a minute later.

"That was *amazing*. Let's do it again."

David shook his head fondly. His cheeks shone pink from the wind and the cold. "You're a madman."

Naftali might have forgotten to mention that he'd only been skiing twice before, once in high school and once again in college. He'd started the morning with an official lesson on the bunny hills, but now he was apparently doing wedge Christie turns—which was a weird name—and flinging himself down the blue-level slopes faster than David.

"Do you think I can do jumps?" He looked longingly up at the one ski lift that they hadn't been on yet. The one that led to the black diamonds.

"I'm sure *you* could. But I couldn't teach you. I just... know how to do some things. And I-I-I don't think I'm much better than you are right now. Maybe we should take the class together."

"Oh, could we?"

"Sure. We can check out the options." David turned toward the line for the ski lift, and Naftali shuffled along beside him.

They waited a moment for the next few people to go, and then fell into the seat together. The world fell away below them, just gravity, air, and the treetops around them. Naftali loved everything about it.

“This should probably be our last run,” David commented. “It’s getting dark.”

“Don’t they have lights? The sign said night skiing.”

“They do...” David hazarded. “But aren’t you tired? And cold?”

“Only a liiiiiittle bit.” Actually, his nose was super cold, one knee kind of hurt, and his muscles *were* starting to ache from the unusual strain... but that was just details.

David chuckled. “It’s been almost eight hours. And it’s past dinner time back home.”

“But I still have so much energy. Although—” He turned to David, dropping his voice to a seductive whisper. “I have some ideas about how we could warm up.”

David’s eyes widened. “H-H-Handwarmers?”

Naftali loved that David was starting to joke back. He’d been flirting outrageously all day, and David was visibly growing more comfortable with him. A steady thrum of expectation hung between them.

Even if it just led to more kisses like the first one... hopefully a lot more kisses... he’d take it.

“No...” He stretched out the word. “I was thinking of something else.”

“Hot chocolate?”

“Whipped cream?” Naftali countered, making it sound dirty.

David sucked in a breath, then announced, “I could g-g-g-give you a b-b-b-bath.” He looked as terrified as he was excited.

Naftali found his own breath catching in his throat. Because bath’s meant naked skin, and touching, and...

pampering. Either kink or sex, but David's hands were going to be on his body. "Really?" He asked, still astounded that it was happening. "Now?"

"Well, when we get b-back to our r-r-rrroom."

"And is this a bath with... benefits?"

"What k-k-kind of b-benefits?" David's lips smiled, but his eyes were tight with worry.

Naftali was enjoying the flirting. The possibilities that hung between them. He knew that David was nervous, and he didn't want to push too hard. "Kisses?"

"Th-th-th-there c-c-c-c-could be kisses."

Fuck, yes. He hadn't been able to get their first kiss yesterday out of his mind. And slippery bodies and kisses could lead to all sorts of intriguing possibilities.

Naftali leaned forward, like he was going to leap from the lift in mid-air. "Okay, last run. How long do you think it'll take us to get back?"

David burst out laughing, like Naftali had intended. Kink was supposed to be fun. And even if David had a few beginners' stumbles, he knew this was going to be electric.

"If I had known it w-would be this easy to get you off the slopes..." David trailed off, looking more relaxed.

Naftali grinned. "I'm easily influenced by rewards. Or maybe I'm just easy."

This time David laughed along with him. Then he pulled him back against the seat. "You're not easy, N-Naftali. You just l-love everything that you do. You're c-c-complex and b-b-b-beautiful and imp-p-p-portant."

Naftali knew he had to be blushing, but fortunately it was hidden under his ski mask and hat. David didn't so much flirt as just... say these jaw-dropping things that made him all tingly inside. All tingly everywhere.

Naftali had plenty of people in his life who supported him, but it was different hearing it from... well, a Dom who was

spending a special week with him. No, it was different hearing it from David, who was so hopelessly sincere.

The lift delivered them to the top of the slope a moment later, so he didn't have to answer back. "Race you down!" he shouted, already pushing off. He could hear David laughing right behind him.

When they got to the bottom—Naftali winning by a spray of snow, he stuck close. David showed him how to pop his skis off with his poles, and then led him to a bench inside to remove his boots.

They weren't doing anything differently now, but it felt different. Naftali kept stealing little glances at David, only to find him watching right back. Fondly, sometimes. Or with that same mingled look of excitement and trepidation. He was sure there was a lot going on in David's head.

Naftali was just excited. In the car, Naftali warmed up his hands and chattered—well, flirted really—until his stomach decided to rumble.

"Pretend you didn't hear that!" he said, brightly.

David looked away from the wheel to glare at him with narrowed eyes. "Hear what?"

"Nothing! We didn't hear anything."

"Naftali..." His voice was teasing, but it promised consequences.

Pleasure shivered down Naftali's spine. "Good Dom voice, Sir." The Sir part just slipped out because David was being so... Dom-y. Handling his inherent brattiness in a way that made his stomach clench in the best possible way.

David looked surprised for a second. Like he maybe hadn't even realized what he was doing. But he followed up. "Thank you. Now what was it that we d-didn't hear?"

He was caught. And he loved it. "Just my stomach rumbling."

"We're stopping for dinner on the way back."

“But, but, but... my bath!”

David chuckled darkly. “Your bath will be waiting for you.”

Oh, fuck. When David brought all of that Dom energy, he really brought it. And while the last thing Naftali wanted was someone micromanaging all of his actions, this was completely different. Another form of flirting. Slipping into their roles.

“I’ve already got a place chosen,” David added. “It’s just up ahead.”

Naftali pouted. Then, since David was watching the wheel and couldn’t see him, he pouted *louder*. With the folded arms and everything.

“I see you, boy.”

Why was David so *good* at this? So of course, Naftali had to push harder. “It’s not fair. You’re being all... sexy and Dom-y and now I have to wait.”

David raised one eyebrow. “I c-c-can make you wait longer...”

“No Sir. Uh, sorry, Sir. Ummm.... Can I call you Sir?” God, they hadn’t discussed interests or limits or anything.

David had to turn into the parking lot, so he didn’t answer for a moment. Then he stopped the car, the engine still running to keep the heat on. The silence stretched out, crackling with anticipation.

“Sir?” Naftali asked again, more quietly. “Is that what you want to be called?”

“I think that w-w-works.” David darted a glance at him, but then looked forward. He was back to being nervous again.

“Is there something you’d prefer?” Naftali asked the question, then realized that he already knew the answer. Too late now.

“Is *D-Daddy* t-t-t-too weird for you? You d-d-d-d-don’t have to.”

Naftali leaned in close. He wanted to bring back all of that excitement between them. “I’ve called D-types all sorts of things. Chief. Captain. Dame. Lord. Mx. Sire. Teacher. If Daddy’s right for you, then you’re Daddy.”

Now David finally turned to look at him. “You don’t like it, though.”

“I... I have a lot of thoughts about it.” He wasn’t even sure what they all were.

And then his stomach rumbled again.

“Let’s get you some food. Then you can tell me about it.”

The restaurant was even cuter inside than he’d expected. Actually, not just cute. Romantic. It was a little Italian place with white tablecloths and candles in curved red cups on each table. Their server lit theirs as soon as they were seated, then turned over their wine glasses. Small plates and napkins were already laid out with their silverware.

Naftali took his menu, but he wasn’t really looking at it. He played with the gold trim that ran along the edges.

“May I order for you?” David asked quietly.

“Yes...” Naftali tripped over the word. After it was where an honorific would have fallen. “Yes. Thank you.”

Their server returned shortly, and David reeled off an order. Mediterranean salad, bruschetta, chicken parmesan, eggplant rollatini, and a single glass of wine for each of them.

Everything sounded good, but even more... This was part of the kink. Letting his Dom, no, his Daddy, order for him. His brain still tripped over the word, but he wasn’t sure why.

“We’ll share them,” David told him quietly.

He nodded. Of course David would think of that. They’d shared their first meal together, too. Maybe David had even figured out that he preferred it.

David looked around, carefully. They were so early that they had the whole corner of the restaurant to themselves. It

was cozy and intimate. “Do you want to continue our conversation from the car?”

“Yes. Um...” Naftali twirled the stem of his empty wine glass. His brain was going in loops. Loops that kept including Noah, which really wasn’t where he wanted the evening to go. “Sorry, I’m not really sure where to start.”

“Take your t-time.”

“It’s a very...” No. He was going to say something about how it was a gendered term. But that wasn’t the issue. Especially not with a transmasculine partner like David. And maybe not at all. It wasn’t any more gendered than Sir, really.

He squeezed his eyes shut. Maybe he should just say it. “There was this guy. Noah.”

David watched him carefully, not pressuring him.

“And by this guy I mean... he was my Dom. We lived together for about a year and a half. And we dated for about a year before that.” He blew out a breath, rolling the bottom of the wine glass along the tablecloth. “We tried to do a, well, not a twenty-four/seven thing, but we were leaning that way. Trying it, you know?”

David took the glass from his hand and covered it with his warm fingers. Just soothing him. Just being there.

“And it... It didn’t work. By which I mean... I wasn’t very good at it. I *wanted* to be good at it. But I wasn’t.” His free hand drummed along the table.

David caught that, too, cradling his hands together in a little cave of warmth. “I can’t imagine you being bad at anything. It sounds like you just didn’t fit.”

Naftali laughed, but it wasn’t funny. “Oh, I’m bad at a *lot* of things. But you’re right. We didn’t fit. I thought I wanted something that was more full-time. Kink outside of the bedroom. Kind of like this.” He jerked his chin, indicating the restaurant. David. Maybe the whole trip. Everything. “But I didn’t.” He shrugged. “Sometimes you try a kink and it’s not for you.”

“Maybe he wasn’t a good Dom.”

It was sweet that David had so much confidence in him. “No, I think he really was. He wanted what was best for me. We agreed on everything together. Goals I set, you know?”

David’s thumbs stroked softly over his knuckles. God, did that feel good. Any touch from David felt good.

“So what I was saying in the car, about eating dinner before we went back, was that triggering for you? Was it taking things... too far outside the bedroom?”

Naftali shook his head, glad to be back to a more pleasant topic. “No, that was fun. That was playing. I was acting up, and you were setting a limit.”

David took a while to absorb that. “How about ordering your food?”

“Bring it on!” He laughed. “I hate choosing food at restaurants. I get the worst FOMO.” Seriously. He could debate forever, and then as soon as he ordered, he’d wish he’d gotten something else.

“And paying for your food?”

Yeah, that was where it was. “I guess I’m still struggling with it. But I get the sense that buying me things is *your* kink?” He watched David, who gave a confused sort of head jerk that seemed to mean *yes*. “Well, that makes it fun and sexy. So, uh, since it’s a vacation thing, I guess I’ve been thinking of this whole week like one extended scene. I want to throw myself into this and—” He had to pause before he could say the last part. “—let you take care of me.”

“So you’re enjoying it because it’s important to me, and because you know there’s an end d-date.”

“Yeah.” That was as close as he could come.

“It’s not real?” David asked, hesitantly.

“No, I mean...” Naftali squeezed David’s fingers. Damn, did he want those broad, warm hands all over him. “It’s real. It’s important. It’s a real kink and a real connection. It’s just...”

this is a fantasy, too. A good fantasy. A vacation from everything difficult where I just get to enjoy it.”

“But it has to end.”

“Yeah.” Naftali nodded. “That’s what makes it safe. I promised myself that I’d take a long break before dating again. At least a year. I think I need to figure some things out for myself first.”

David nodded, but he didn’t speak for a long time. There wasn’t any tension, though. With David, it was easy to be quiet.

A few minutes later, their appetizers appeared, and David had to let go of his hands. They put both plates in the middle, so that their forks danced around each other in the salad.

Finally, David spoke. “Then you should c-c-call me something that makes you feel safe. That’s what’s important.”

For some reason, that was the assurance that Naftali needed. “No, I think I’m comfortable with it now. You’re my vacation Daddy.” As long as the title still had the modifier, it was fine.

There was also the fact that David was trans and wandering through this pathway of becoming the man he wanted to be. That changed a lot for Naftali, even if he couldn’t put it all into words. Daddy was something quintessentially masculine, and he felt a rush of affection for helping David step into that role.

“Are you sure?” David asked.

Naftali tangled their feet together. He was more than ready to quiet all of those nasty voices in his head and get back to enjoying his date with a sexy Dom. “Yes, Daddy.”

He could see the effect that the words had on David. How much he’d wanted them.

How well it fit him.

David would be an amazing Daddy for a very lucky boy someday.

David picked up the lighter mood. “Does that make you my vacation boy?” he rumbled out.

“Yes, please. I’ll answer to boy, or pretty much any other nickname that respects my gender identity.”

“Are there any nicknames you like? Or is there a short form of Naftali?”

“A lot of people use Nati as a nickname for Nataniel.” He gave both the Hebrew pronunciation—Nataniel had four separate syllables, and the *t* was really a *t*, not a *th*. “So I thought about that, but then Zeev started calling me Nafti, and I kind of like that.”

“Nafti,” David repeated. “I like it. Can I call you that, too?”

“Sure. You and Zeev will be the only ones.” The thought made his insides warm.

“Where’s your name from? If it’s alright to ask.”

“Totally. I guess it starts with my deadname, which I actually felt a little bad about giving up. It was Naomi, which I kind of loved, in the abstract, because Ruth and Naomi are one of the two queer couples in the Torah. I love reading their story every Shavuot.”

“Sorry, what’s Shavuot?”

“Um... it’s this combo of celebrating the day God gave Moses the Torah on Mount Sinai, and this pagan harvest festival of when the wheat was ready to pick, and the grazing animals all gave birth so you could collect milk. To celebrate, you stay up all night studying Torah, and eating ice cream and cheese blintzes.”

David blinked. Which was about what Naftali expected. Explaining Jewish holidays to non-Jews was hilarious.

Still... there was this little worry inside him. It wasn’t like he was going to be dating David after this, but Judaism was *important* to him. If David couldn’t accept that about him, it would be a rejection of a huge part of himself. And this was the first time they’d really talked about religion.

“Is it a big holiday?” David asked. “I looked up Hanukkah, but that’s the main one I-I-I knew about. And I’ve heard people talk about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the fall, but those sounded smaller.”

Naftali shook his head. “No, the Days of Awe are the biggest ones of the whole year. Hanukkah is a tiny little holiday that got popularized in the seventies to compete with the commercialism of Christmas. And Shavuot is kind of between them in importance. But I used to get so excited as a kid when we were reading the story with my name.”

“And it’s queer? You said... I mean, I didn’t pay a lot of attention in church as a kid, but I don’t remember any lesbians in the Bible.”

“Book of Ruth. She says to Naomi, who’s her mother-in-law, and at this point her only family, ‘Don’t ask me to leave you. Where you go, I will go. And where you live, I will live. Your people are my people, and your God is my God. Where you die, I will be buried. And may God punish me if anything but death separates you and me.’”

“That sounds tragic and... kind of beautiful, too.”

“A lot of the Bible is like that. The two of them stay together, even though Ruth ends up marrying a man, and then there’s a whole story about that. But I like to think of them as a queer couple. At any rate, I chose Naftali because it sounds similar, but also it means *struggle*, which I like for a lot of reasons: struggling for justice, struggling with the Torah... they’re woven together. Plus, I just liked the way it sounds.” He laughed. “Or maybe I’m just like every other Jew-y trans guy out there and wanted a totally old-school religious name.”

“That’s a thing?”

“Oh, it’s definitely a thing. A lot of Jews today name their kids things like Adam or Daniel. Trans guys call themselves things like Eliyahu or Mordechai.”

“Naftali is a lovely name. It sounds m-musical. Like you.”

“Thank you.”

“My name doesn’t mean much of anything. I, uh, kept the first letter of my deadname.” David looked like he was about to share it, and he didn’t want to.

Naftali held up a finger. “Don’t tell me. It sounds like I’ll hear it from your mother eventually, but I don’t need to hear it now.”

“Thanks. But, yeah. I just liked how it sounded.”

“If it helps, Jonathan and David are the other queer couple in the Torah. I’m actually writing a song about them. Yehonatan and Doveed.” He said their names in Hebrew, where the accent was on the last syllable.

“Sorry. Like... David and Goliath? That’s the only David I remember. Uh... I really don’t know much about Judaism. Or Christianity. My church as a kid was mostly about believing in Jesus.”

“Do you mind learning?”

“No. I’m kind of fascinated now. Maybe if I knew there were queers in the Bible, I would have been more interested.”

That was a surprisingly comforting answer. A lot of people who weren’t religious could be contemptuous of those who were. David was leaning into it, though. Not, Naftali reminded himself, that it mattered since this was just for a week. Still, it felt good that he didn’t have to censor himself or worry about what David thought.

“Right, so it’s the same David who killed Goliath with the slingshot. He grows up and becomes a king. Then he gets this cute boyfriend Jonathan, who also happens to be the previous king’s son.”

“And that’s definitely in the Bible? That they were gay?”

“Oh, they were *so* gay. I mean, King David is kind of poly/bi and his whole life is kind of a tragedy, but he and Jonathan had some beautiful scenes together. I have this melody in my head for when they’re kissing in the cave.”

“Hang on. What cave?” David wasn’t skeptical. He was hanging on every word.

“They were hiding out from King Saul, who’s Jonathan’s dad, because he’s trying to kill David. But while they were in there, Jonathan ‘took great delight in David,’ which isn’t even a subtle euphemism. And there’s this lovely part that says, ‘The soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul’ that I’m going to use for the chorus. When Jonathan dies, David mourns because Jonathan’s love for him ‘surpassed that of his love for women.’”

“Wow. Just... wow. I’m convinced. And you’re writing a song about it?”

“Yeah, or at least the good parts. David’s story is too tragic, so I just want the moment where they’re young and in love.”

“So we both have queer biblical names.” David was smiling, and Naftali felt a very different affection toward him.

It wasn’t that he wanted David to become Jewish or anything like that—Judaism wasn’t about converting people, and there were plenty of interfaith couples in his shul. But taking interest in something that he cared about? That meant a lot.

“Do you know what your name means?” Naftali asked.

“No. I never looked it up. I just picked something masculine that started with a D. I guess I liked the sound of it, with the V sound in the middle. I know it’s kind of boring and common.”

“No, that’s not true. It’s a very sweet name. It means *beloved*.”

“Really?”

“Yep. The same spelling is also pronounced *dod*. Like *ani l’dodi v’dodi li*. I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine. It’s in a lot of wedding vows and songs.”

They both sat for a moment with their own thoughts, eating the last of the bruschetta. It was weird to drop words like love and marriage into a conversation, even indirectly.

David wasn't Naftali's beloved, but the possibility was surprisingly enticing.

Knowing that David was spending the whole week just taking care of him? That felt special.

It again struck him how good David would be at being someone's Daddy. How lucky that boy would be.

But it wasn't for him. He needed his autonomy.

Still, he wouldn't think of David's name any more without also thinking *beloved*.

"Are there any nicknames for it?" David finally asked. "I really hate Dave, and I never thought of any others."

"Dov is common." He pronounced it to rhyme with *grove*. "It's one of my favorite nicknames and it means bear." He grinned up at David. "And *you're* kind of a bear."

"I don't know if I'm quite..."

"Oh, you are. At least a bear cub. All that hair..." He looked David up and down, taking in his beard and imagining the mat of fur that hopefully lurked under his sweater.

David rolled his eyes, but he seemed pleased just the same. Naftali knew just what it was like to have your gender confirmed that way, to have finally made it into that indefinable club of gay men.

"Dov sounds nice."

"So I can call you Dov-Dov?" Naftali batted his eyes. "*Daddy* Dov-Dov?" Daddy bear. Daddy beloved.

David snorted, but there was a hint of merriment. "You're pushing it, kid."

"It was worth a try."

David just raised one eyebrow, his warning promising all sorts of delightful things.

God, Naftali could so easily fall for someone like this. Someone who enjoyed his bratting and asked questions about

things he cared about. Someone who took him skiing and snuggled him while they read on the couch.

Someone who, when their main course arrived, divided their meals and then gave him the best half of each one.

DAVID

David found himself laughing when Naftali tried to rest his head on his shoulder on the drive back to the lodge. With the cup holders and gear shift between them, there was no way it was going to work, but that didn't stop him from trying, twisting his knees up onto the seat. It had to be uncomfortable, but Naftali just proclaimed that it was another benefit of being pint-sized.

He saw, more than felt, Naftali kiss his shoulder through his heavy coat.

“Sit down,” he scolded, less because it was dangerous and more because he could.

“I'm still wearing my seatbelt.”

“What happens if you bump my arm and I c-crash into a tree?”

“Fine.” Naftali pouted. “Meanie. See if I give you kisses later.”

David had to hold back the laughter, but he was pretty sure that he was still smiling. Everything about Naftali made him smile. Because he *was* going to get those kisses later.

He almost couldn't believe it was happening. Like everything with Naftali, it just felt so easy. So instinctual. So right.

And so much fun. He couldn't ever remember laughing this much with a boyfriend. With anyone.

“I look forward to c-claiming those kisses.” He rested one of his hands on Naftali’s knee, feeling the warmth through the denim.

Naftali’s hand landed on his, sending another pulse of arousal through him. “HMMMMM...”

The lodge was only a few minutes away, but the drive felt too long. The moment they parked, Naftali darted outside the car, coming around to David’s door while he was still gathering some of their things. Such as Naftali’s hat. It was kind of cute how he left things everywhere.

Because that meant David could take care of him, without even needing to say anything.

David opened his door, and Naftali backed up only enough to let him out. “Yes?” David asked cautiously.

Naftali burrowed into his arms, lifting his face until their mouths almost touched. “I changed my mind.”

“Oh? About what?” David knew exactly what he was asking for, but it was fun to tease.

All of David’s life he’d had a reputation of being serious, even dour or boring. Definitely never playful or funny. But with Naftali, it just happened.

“Kisses. You said when we got back to the lodge.”

“I think I said when you were taking a bath.” He couldn’t really remember now. It didn’t matter.

“No, you definitely said at the lodge. Which is where we are.”

David made a show of looking around, like the snow-covered highway and glowing windows of the lodge could somehow be more important than the man in his arms. “Don’t you want to go inside where it’s warm?”

Chestnut curls bounced as Naftali shook his head. “Nope. Don’t care.”

“Well, then...” David lowered his head, intending this to be quick. But it was what he’d been imagining since the

airport gift shop yesterday. Maybe for the past month.

And Naftali's eyes were such a beautiful blue, beseeching him with so much joy and want.

David pressed their lips together, and Naftali melted into his arms.

There was no way he could rush through learning the texture of Naftali's soft lips. The way that he hummed with pleasure. The way that he gasped when David gave him a gentle nip before soothing it with his tongue.

David pulled away panting, to find Naftali looking up at him with dazed eyes.

David had never made anyone lose themselves like that.

He'd also never been the type to make out in a public parking lot. This was what Naftali did to him.

Feeling incredibly daring, David swatted his ass. "Get inside."

Naftali giggled but obeyed, shaking his butt as he walked away, even though it was mostly hidden under his thick coat.

Inside the lodge, Naftali waved to the desk attendant—a younger guy with blue hair—but fortunately led them to the elevator without stopping to chat. He was already stripping off all of his winter gear, so David followed suit.

They ended at the door, each with a pile of coats and scarves and sweaters over their arms.

Naftali started patting down his pockets in search of his key card, but David found his first—in his back pocket, where he always put things like this.

They went in together, and that was when it suddenly got very real.

The white-clawed bathtub seemed to have a spotlight shining on it, the focal point of the room, though it was more in an alcove to the side.

Still, it wasn't hidden with the shower and toilet where it was supposed to be, but in front of the huge windows on its

own section of tile. With its huge sloping sides, it was a bathtub for luxuriating and pampering.

Or maybe even a photoshoot, with the model draped all over it and rose petals everywhere.

David was sure that Naftali would enjoy it, but the way that it was on display made this little thing that he'd suggested feel like something much bigger.

He was supposed to know what to do right now. To be the Dom and take charge. To... give Naftali a bath. Which was what he'd promised.

Was he allowed to change his mind now and do something else? How did someone just go about giving someone else a bath?

With Mike he would have just filled up the bathtub, told him it was ready, and maybe checked in to see if he needed anything.

But not at the beginning. With Mike, they'd been friends for a year first. There had been two months between the first kiss and removing clothes. Another month before sex. In between, there'd been a lot of talking. Whole paragraphs and essays about what they each wanted in a relationship and what David felt comfortable with physically.

David glanced at his backpack. His notebook had an extensive list of questions. His laptop had a spreadsheet with a checklist of kinky possibilities, though he'd downloaded the Cuffd Communicator app in case Naftali wanted to use that instead. He knew this was a big part of the kink scene.

But was now the right time? It was just a bath, right?

It shouldn't be this complicated.

He knew what he wanted. He was pretty sure he knew what Naftali wanted. But how did he just... get from here to there?

Naftali tossed his bundle of damp winter clothes onto the bed. Hopefully, he wouldn't mind if David hung them up for him.

And now his mind was kind of scattering in all directions because he wasn't sure what to do. Would Naftali want David to wash him? Could he wash Naftali's hair? And what about afterward? When Naftali was all wet and naked, looking at him with those begging eyes and saying the dirtiest things...

What if he couldn't figure out the Dom thing? What if, when it came down to it, he just got so overwhelmed with Naftali's nakedness that he froze? Or did something stupid? Or tried to take control, but did it in the wrong way?

He found his voice, though it came out quieter than he wanted it to. "I, uh, uh, uh, asked th-th-the hotel for s-s-some b-b-b-b-bubble bath and b-bath s-s-s-s-salts." Fucking stutter. But at least he was starting somewhere, right?

Naftali turned and nuzzled into his chest. Warm and solid and sweet. "Of course you did. Because you're magical."

He sure didn't feel that way. He felt hopelessly out of his depth.

"And you got them to give us the gorgeous bathtub room, didn't you?" Naftali continued. "I heard that when we checked in."

David just might have called the B&B from the airport, the first time Naftali headed to the restroom. "Zeev s-s-said you liked bubble baths."

"I love them! And this place is perfect. We can even watch the falling snow."

Naftali's approval helped to sooth a few of his frazzled nerves.

"Don't you want to c-close the window? For p-privacy?" He pulled Naftali a little closer. If Naftali was naked, David wasn't sharing.

"And miss this view? Anyway, there's basically a cliff below us. Maybe someone might see from the little cabin over there, but people don't look up."

"Okay." Naftali was braver than he was. Though it would be an amazing view. "Shall I draw up a bath for you, then?"

“Oh, yes. Pretty please. Does that mean you’ll join me?” Naftali’s lips pressed against his jaw. Not quite a kiss, but a butterfly sensation that made everything tingle.

David wanted to. Desperately. But it seemed like there were so many steps to go through first. If they were really going to do this, he had a whole list of things he needed to share, too. On top of the list in his backpack. “Um, maybe we should talk first? We could do that while you’re in the tub.”

“Whatever speed you want to go at,” Naftali replied without missing a beat. “But, in case this is a factor, you could keep your underwear on.”

That was a factor. A big one. And somehow Naftali had already known. Dating another transman was inexplicably freeing. There were so many things he didn’t have to explain.

He buried his face in Naftali’s hair, soaking in his closeness. Reminding himself that he was unlikely to do this wrong, and that if he did, Naftali would let him know gently. “I brought some swim trunks,” he finally answered.

“Great.” Naftali stood on tiptoe to brush their lips together. The sensation was electric. All he could think about was seeing Naftali naked. Or maybe Naftali would wear his underwear, like he suggested for David. Still, seeing Naftali without a shirt would be so distracting, he wasn’t sure how much talking would happen or if he’d be able to focus.

David tried to step back. “Let me g-g-go get r-ready.”

Naftali kissed down his jaw. “Hurry back, Daddy.”

Fuck. Just hearing the word left him floating. And feeling a little more confident. Now he just had to follow through.

It was only slightly awkward as he grabbed his things and slipped into the bathroom. He undressed, folding his clothes carefully on the counter. Then he slipped on his trunks and transferred his packer to the flap inside.

David looked down at himself and, well, he was pretty happy with the overall effect. His belly was on the thick side, but he liked how it looked—his weight was distributed in the right places, so he felt strong and solid.

His cock pressed up against his body through the fabric, a comforting weight that felt right and made a slight but unmistakable bulge from the outside.

Hopefully Naftali would like what he saw.

David dragged his jeans back on. He wasn't quite ready to go back out there wearing less, but he felt daring enough to leave his shirt off. He was asking Naftali to get naked, so it seemed like the right step.

David could hear him shuffling around in the bedroom and he wondered what he was doing. Getting undressed? Changing into his own swimsuit?

David wandered out to find him lying on the bed, fully dressed, and thumbing through something on his phone. The sounds had been Naftali hanging their winter things over the couch to dry out.

He sat up at the sound of the bathroom door. "Mmmm.... Papa Bear."

David flushed at the compliment. Naftali had a way of saying things that boosted his confidence. David wouldn't mind being his Papa Bear at all.

"Ready for th-that b-bath?"

"Yes, please." He looked at David adoringly, but didn't make a move on his own.

God, it was only everything that David had ever wanted. He just had to get it right.

He handed Naftali the little basket of bath salts. "I asked for them to find n-natural ones, if they c-could." The result was a trio of brown bags that looked very hand-made, with uneven lettering and cutesy stickers. The basket was white, with lavender tissue inside and a pink ribbon around the edge. Maybe not the most masculine bathing experience, especially for a trans guy who might not always be secure in how people perceived his gender.

David had briefly considered taking the stickers off, but then he figured it wouldn't matter, once he poured them into

the tub. Now he was rethinking it. He could have left the basket in the bathroom, too.

But Naftali's eyes lit up, and he pulled the whole thing to his nose, only to immediately begin sneezing.

"I don't think you're s-supposed to inhale them."

Naftali held them away from his nose, laughing. "Maybe not. But they have kitties!" They did. Fat, grumpy kitties sitting in coffee cups.

David was so glad that he'd left the stickers on now. Somehow it didn't surprise him that what he'd thought might be too girly was exactly what Naftali adored. His sense of masculinity was wide enough to encompass things like that.

Naftali peeled one of the stickers off and pressed it to the back of his phone, then slid it shyly into his pocket.

David didn't know if he just liked cats or stickers, but it felt monumental. Like this moment was as special to Naftali as it was to him.

With nothing else to do, David started filling the tub. When he was satisfied with the temperature, he added the bath salts. The fresh, herbal scent filled the room. He even discovered that a little switch would bring up a panel to cover the lower half of the windows. Now they could still see out, but no one below could see in.

David looked around, trying to figure out how to orchestrate the next part. He wanted Naftali to go from being dressed to being naked and relaxed in the bathtub, but how?

David was desperate to touch him. He wanted to gently strip away each article of clothing and uncover his skin. He also wanted to have a conversation about interests and limits before they did anything sexual. Should he leave the room and let Naftali undress?

Naftali had come up to stand beside him, watching the bathtub fill with apparent delight, but not making any move to disrobe. His hair was adorably mussed from wearing a hat all day, and one of his socks had a hole in the toe. That must have made him even colder out there while they were skiing.

Tomorrow, David would have to make sure that he had better socks. Preferably two pairs.

The thought filled him with warmth, and maybe that was what he needed to break through his paralysis of anxiety. This wasn't about *him*. This was about what Naftali needed.

And when he asked himself whether Naftali would rather undress alone or have him help...

The answer was easy. "C-C-C-Can I t-t-take off your clothes?"

"Yes, Daddy." Naftali's voice was as soft and sweet as honey.

David couldn't say precisely what it was, but he knew that Naftali was submitting right now. It filled him with a wild sort of power.

David was almost afraid to touch him, though they'd already shared two kisses and snuggled all afternoon together, plus innocently sharing the bed last night.

He just wanted so desperately to get this right. David ran his hands down Naftali's sides, then slid them under his sweater and shirt, thrilling at the first touch of his skin. He was so warm.

Touching the soft sides of his belly felt like a miracle.

"Mmmmm... That's nice." Naftali closed his eyes as David stroked up his ribs. When David tugged his shirt up, he raised his arms, making it easy to pull the layers of fabric over his head.

David was reminded of the photo in Naftali's profile. His chest and arms were even more striking in person—elegant and fine-boned, with a hint of long, lean muscle that was thicker along his shoulders. Wisps of brown hair curled around flat, pink nipples. David could see why the photographer was inspired by Naftali's body. He was delicately masculine, but not in a fragile way.

And he was letting David touch him. No, not just touch him, but dominate him.

David reached for the zipper of his jeans and then paused. Just because Naftali had agreed to being undressed didn't mean he wanted everything to come off. Or that David would know where and how it was acceptable to touch him. The need for conversation had just become more urgent. He shifted his hands back to Naftali's hips. "Tell me about your body."

Naftali knew exactly what he was asking. "I use masculine language for my body parts, and you can touch me anywhere. I'll let you discover where I'm most sensitive." He winked, his upbeat brand of seduction fully engaged. "I'm open to blow jobs and penetrative sex, either hole, and giving or receiving. I'm on PrEP, I've been tested recently, and I'm negative for everything."

He was so relaxed about all of this. Naftali probably did this all the time, but David still couldn't get over the idea of stripping him bare. Giving him a blow job. Fucking deep into his body.

"And you?" Naftali asked, eyes full of hunger.

"I'm n-n-n-negative for everything, too. I, uh, I only t-t-t-top in t-t-terms of, uh, penetration." He felt vulnerable revealing all of this, but he wanted to be clear now so there wasn't any disappointment or misunderstanding later. "And I u-usually keep, usually keep at least some c-clothes on."

"Perfect. Thank you for telling me." Naftali stood on his tiptoes to steal a soft kiss. A bit of stress that David hadn't even realized he was holding melted away. He didn't need to explain anything, and he trusted that Naftali wouldn't have a problem with it later.

Naftali leaned a little closer, whispering up to his ear. "As for me, think of my body as your personal playground. I want it all."

God, what an idea. David's hands clenched around his waist. "Anything else?"

He was expecting maybe another comment about his body, but Naftali was ready with a whole kinky list. David tried to commit each one to memory.

“I have an old knee injury that was starting to act up on the slopes this morning before I figured out the turns. So I’d prefer not to have any stress positions on my knees for a few days, either kneeling too long or in bondage.”

God. That meant Naftali could be kneeling—or something close to it because David didn’t want him to hurt his knees. And he was going to let David tie him up. That had always been the offer, but David’s pulse still raced.

“I have hard limits around pain play beyond a certain threshold, breath play without substantial training, anything that results in a permanent mark, degradation, and being ignored as part of a scene.”

The first set sounded pretty typical, and nothing that David wanted anyway. From the way he said it, though, the last one seemed like something really personal. “Understood. And I would never ignore you.” He said it as a promise. He didn’t think he could ever ignore Naftali—it just wasn’t possible.

“Thank you. For safewords, I just use the traffic light system. Red for stop, yellow for approaching a limit, and green for go. As for what I enjoy, pretty much anything that gets your hands on my body, moderate impact and pain play, bondage, primal play, and sexy guys taking off my clothes.” He gave a little wiggle under David’s hands.

Even after reading Naftali’s Cuffd profile, it was different hearing it on his lips. It was a wealth of information. A dazzling array of opportunities.

“Anything else I sh-should know?” David asked one more time. He hadn’t needed his spreadsheet after all. Naftali had just answered everything.

Naftali swayed a little closer. “Just that I’m dying to touch you. But being naked while you’re fully clothed is hot, too. I have whole fantasies about that.”

David swallowed, imagining it. Naftali had just transformed something he’d been nervous about into something sexy.

David ran his fingers along Naftali's abs and found the button on his jeans. With a few movements, he pushed them down his hips. Naftali stepped out and toed off his socks. Now he was just wearing a pair of shimmery blue boxer briefs that hid nothing of his lean muscles, or the flat panel in the front. David wanted to touch him everywhere.

"No Spiderman today," he joked.

"No," David agreed, running reverent hands down his hips. "You're gorgeous."

David almost asked if I could take Naftali's underwear off, but he'd already given his permission. David pushed them down, letting gravity pull them to the floor. He tried not to look too much, when really, he wanted to devour Naftali with his eyes.

David felt suddenly shy about Naftali's nudity. About how he might feel about what was—or wasn't—between his legs.

"You can look at me." Naftali's voice was warm and seductive. He struck a bodybuilder pose. He was probably trying to be silly, but David felt his breath catch.

Naftali's chest sparkled with curled brown hair, and David traced it downward with his eyes. As he'd expected, Naftali's groin was covered by another patch of hair that hid his cock and anything else. Yet he was undeniably, sensuously male.

And unafraid.

David leaned forward and kissed him, intending it to be quick. But just like in the parking lot, stealing just one quick kiss was impossible.

The rough brush of Naftali's stubble scratched the edge of his lip, so different from the soft openness of his mouth. David didn't know why that was so hot, but he kissed and teased all around his lips, tasting the contrast.

Naftali's arms came up around him, and he could feel another contrast vividly. Naftali was naked, exposed and open to anywhere David's hands wanted to roam. He ran one hand down to cup Naftali's muscular ass, while the other swept up to tangle in his tousled hair.

It was a wealth of hot, naked skin. A fortune.

David deepened the kiss, rewarded when Naftali started to rub against his jeans, an urgency to his hips and subtle parting of his knees. Soft whimpers fell from his lips.

David drifted away from his mouth, imagining the taste of more skin.

Like before, Naftali chased after him, impatient for more. But David's hand tightened instinctively in his hair, pinning him in place.

That was when Naftali really started to moan.

Desire struck like lightning. David could feel it, that sense of power he'd been seeking. He was untouchable. In control. He had access to all of Naftali's body, but Naftali would only get what he wanted to give him.

David deepened the kiss, which Naftali returned hungrily. But when David turned Naftali's head away to kiss down his neck, he just shivered and whimpered, letting David take the lead. After that, David could move him wherever he wanted.

It was intoxicating.

Naftali had even stopped rutting against his jeans, his muscles bunched and trembling with desire, but his movements pliant and lax.

David had read about kink, but he hadn't understood until just this moment how much dominance and submission was a two-way street. He wasn't taking anything from Naftali. Naftali was giving it to him.

David knew right then that he could do *anything* with Naftali. Send him to his knees. Push him down onto the bed. But that wasn't the plan for tonight. He'd already made a promise.

"Get in the bath." David couldn't have said where that rough, commanding voice came from. Without a stutter, too. But just like the first time he'd worn a men's shirt and shoved a pair of rolled up socks down the front of his pants, it felt instantly right.

This was who he was.

Naftali complied, putting on a show. Fuck. His ass. His shoulders. Even his bare feet and the muscles flexing in his calves. The pause as he bent over the deep tub was another invitation. Naftali would let David take him like this, and suddenly he wanted to. He wanted to plunge into Naftali's welcoming body. To capture and subdue him.

Naftali settled into the water, one knee partially bent as he eased back with a moan of pleasure. Then, with that goofy, seductive smile, he stretched his arms over his head and crossed them at the wrists.

The message couldn't be clearer. David didn't need to capture and subdue him, because Naftali was already his.

And that was why David didn't lean down and claim his mouth, or drag him, sopping wet, over to the bed. Naftali wasn't just his to fuck. He was David's to take care of, too.

He just had to take the next step.

NAFTALI

Naftali relaxed into the extravagant tub, the warm water lapping around his waist. He settled back, humming at the heat caressing his skin. Just that, by itself, would have been amazing. The bathtub had to be twice the size of his one at home, and the bath salts made the whole room smell of lavender and honey.

But that dimmed in comparison to the man watching him.

Naftali knew that David was nervous. It showed, sometimes, in the way his eyes tightened, and especially when his stutter got more pronounced.

It made Naftali feel protective of this amazing man who *wanted* so hard, and just needed to break through whatever was holding him back.

Naftali didn't know him well enough to understand all of his worries. But he did know that behind them was a man who could devour him like a ravenous beast, or stroke his hair while he slept. Naftali hadn't actually been sleeping the *whole* time on the plane.

So now, he just needed to get the confident David—the one who'd growled at him to get into the bath and slapped his ass in the parking lot—to come back out to play.

Naftali stretched his arms out luxuriously over his head, then crossed them at the wrists.

David's eyes, which had already been sweeping over him hungrily, widened further.

But he looked frozen in place. Torn between his desires and whatever was holding him back. It was a dance of advance and retreat.

Naftali felt like he was coaxing a shy animal to eat from his hand... only his offerings were outrageous flirting and reading parties.

So maybe it was time to slow things down. Give some options and reminders.

Naftali settled his hands behind his neck, still offering the full view of his body, but more casually instead of wantonly.

“This is all your show,” Naftali remarked gently. “We go at your pace. Believe me, I want your hands on me any way I can get them. But we can get each other clean, then cuddle in the bathtub. If you want, we can even sit at opposite ends and chat.” He wiggled his toes. “Maybe some foot massages?”

He watched David’s shoulders subtly fall. That invitation was what he needed.

“I’ll g-g-go get the s-soap.”

“Mmmmm... Thank you, Daddy.”

He could see the way the word hit him. Soft and hard and beautiful all at once. He absolutely glowed as he went off to find the soap.

Naftali wasn’t quite ready to recognize everything that the word did inside his own head. How different could it really be having a Daddy than a Dom?

David went into the bathroom for a moment, but then he dug out his own shampoo and soap, not the little hotel bottles like Naftali had expected. “Are these alright?”

Naftali always bought the cheap stuff, and he figured that anything David had would be better than that. Plus, he liked the idea of sharing. “I’m going to smell like you.”

“Yes,” David answered quietly, but his pleasure at the idea clearly matched Naftali’s.

There was a long pause before he unzipped his jeans, then pulled them down in one swift motion.

Naftali made another approving hum. “God, you’re just... biteable.”

He truly was, his thick thighs and belly wrapped around hard muscle. His shoulders were truly stunning. Naftali already wanted to run his fingers through the dark, coiled hair on his chest. And then there was the way that his swim trunks clung to his skin, the bulge in the front promising all sorts of exciting rewards.

“You d-don’t have to s-s-say that.” Even as he said it, though, he was smiling.

“Oh, I’m not just saying that. Just so we’re clear, I want to worship your body. I want to run my tongue over every inch. You just tell me when.”

David was blushing again, but he just said, “Move forward.”

Naftali wanted to cheer. David’s inner Dom was coming to the surface.

Naftali scooted forward and David eased in behind him. The water rose to the top of his chest, and there was nowhere else for David’s feet to go, except to rest on his thighs.

“Oh, this is n-nice,” David exhaled.

“It’s amazing.” Naftali looked out over the snow-covered trees. He was buzzing with need, but he was honest that anything they did together would be perfect.

“Hold still,” David commanded.

“Yes, Daddy.” He didn’t need to say it, but he knew exactly what effect it would have, even if he couldn’t see it.

Warm hands caressed his back. Up over his shoulders.

“Close your eyes,” David whispered.

Warm water poured over his head and down his neck where David’s other hand held him gently. Then another cupful. And another.

It was beyond relaxing. Intimate in a way that Naftali rarely got to experience with play partners. Maybe for aftercare, sometimes. But not as foreplay. And never as the whole event.

Since he wasn't necessarily expecting anything more, he just let himself relax and enjoy it.

Soon the stream of water was replaced by the click of a cap. David's fingers descended into his hair, massaging and caressing.

Naftali moaned, holding nothing back. "God. That's so good."

"Yeah?" David asked, a naive eagerness in his voice.

"It's heaven. Please don't ever stop." Naftali was going to melt into the bath. Just become one with the soothing warmth of the water.

David chuckled softly, his hands still working their magic. "I have to stop at some point."

Naftali whined.

"There's s-still conditioner."

"I guess I'll allow it, then."

But those kneading fingers didn't stop. Or at least not for a long time, until Naftali was a boneless puddle.

"Close your eyes again," David warned, before repeating the process with the pouring water.

"They were already closed," Naftali remarked lazily. "Can't keep them open."

"You're very s-sensual," David observed.

"You don't know the half of it. If you didn't stop touching me the whole week, I would be very happy."

"Yeah?" David asked again, but with more confidence this time.

"Please."

There was another click of a cap, and then David's hands were back in his hair.

Naftali moaned.

"It's r-really that good?"

"I don't think I have any bones left."

David pulled him back, closing the foot or so of space between them until Naftali was resting against his chest. "The conditioner needs some time to work," he whispered.

"That's good," Naftali murmured, "because I'm never moving again."

David rinsed his hands under the water, but Naftali couldn't complain, because now they were skin-to-skin, and David's arms came to rest gently around his chest. He could feel David's cock, soft but with the potential for more, pressing against the base of his spine.

David nuzzled against his cheek, his beard rough against Naftali's cheek. "You're r-really not just s-saying that to make me f-feel better?"

"I'm more thinking about begging you to do this every night."

David raised one of his arms, and Naftali reached after it.

"You're grabby," David commented, sounding amused. "I was just getting the s-soap."

"I kind of... go with my instincts," he replied honestly. "Especially when I'm this relaxed. I didn't want you moving away." Then because his instincts usually told him to push a little, he added, "If you don't want me to grab, all you have to do is tie me up."

The hand on Naftali's belly tightened, and he could hear David's sudden intake of breath. "N-not tonight, b-baby b-b-b-baby. Tonight D-Daddy's g-g-g-giving you a b-bath."

Naftali made some sort of whimpering, needy sound. Fuck. He didn't know why those words hit him so hard.

Maybe that they just promised so much sensual pleasure in ways that he hadn't even known he wanted.

Maybe because they sounded so dirty and innocent, all at the same time.

David passed the soap between his two hands, lathering them up, before replacing the bar on the shelf. He started at Naftali's neck, above the water, then slowly slid them down to his pecs. Everything was silky smooth.

David reached his nipples, each of his fingers running individually over the small buds.

"Ahhhhh..." Naftali exhaled, nerves tingling and chest arching up despite his best efforts. "Uh, mmmm..., uh, if you don't want me to be turned on, maybe you should..."

David cut him off. "Maybe I do." He brushed back over them again. "You're sensitive here."

"Yeah. It took about a year after top surgery, but... oh..."

David was pinching both sides with his slippery fingers. Words were overrated.

"I think I found one of your sensitive spots." David pinched harder, digging in the edge of his nails.

Naftali just about arched up out of his skin. It was too sharp. Too intense. Too... "More," he gasped.

David delivered, pinching until it hurt, like fiery shards of pleasure, lancing through him.

Naftali pulled back instinctively, which only gave him more beautiful pain. He cried aloud, fingers clenching on David's submerged knees, hips bucking up, then grinding back against David's cock.

David released, rubbing over the sensitive tissue. "God, Naftali, you're amazing."

And David didn't stutter when he was feeling confident and turned on. Good to know.

"That wasn't too much?" David checked.

“That was perfect. That was... Mmmmmm...”

David seemed to have found his new favorite toy. Naftali's, too. He kept alternating soft touches with painful twists, playing Naftali like an instrument.

“How much c-can you take?” David asked at the next gentle break. Spoken like a true Dom.

The thought sent a delicious thrill through him. “You're welcome to push me up to yellow and find out.”

David bit the place where his neck met his shoulder. Not gently, either.

Naftali arched up again, sucking in air in needy little gasps.

“M-m-m-maybe when I know your body a l-little better,” David answered, voice thick and dark. “There's still so much more to explore.”

One hand stayed at Naftali's nipple, gently teasing, while the other drifted down his chest. Over his belly. Playing with the curls of his treasure trail as they danced beneath the water.

Then, back up to his ribs.

Naftali whimpered.

David didn't seem to be in any hurry, though, planting lazy, open-mouthed kisses on his shoulder and stroking his belly to the quiet splashes of water. Each time getting a little closer to where Naftali wanted him.

God, it was beautiful. Sinfully good.

But not quite enough.

“David!” he finally cried out. And then, when that didn't work, “Daddy!”

David's hands tightened everywhere. “What do you want b-b-baby boy?”

“Touch me.” He wanted it. He needed it so badly.

“Are you in charge?”

“No, Daddy.” Which was even better.

David's hands wandered down his belly again, then slowly, slowly, meandered further still.

"Please, Daddy."

David moaned against his throat. "I love hearing you beg."

Naftali would beg all night long. He wanted to feel lost in this, and David was giving it to him. "Please touch me. I'm so hard for you. I'm so..."

And then his words got lost because David was stroking his cock, pulling it roughly with two fingers and his thumb in the glide of the water.

"Like that?" David panted.

"Mmmmm-hmmm... yeah... You can..." Fuck. Words. "You can dig into the base more. I like it hard at the top."

"Like *this*?"

And then Naftali screamed, because David was pinching the top of his dick, digging right in with his fingernails while he stroked with two fingers of his other hand. Naftali thrashed, his whole body turning inside out.

He needed to get away. He needed more.

And then David's calves, which had been floating above Naftali's thighs, pinned him down hard.

He *couldn't* move. He was pinned in place, spread open for David's touch.

"Daaaaaddyyy! Daaa..." Naftali turned his head, needing... he didn't know what. Until David claimed his mouth, devouring him in a kiss.

His hands were free, but all he could do was cling to David's thighs. Those thick, hairy thighs that were holding him captive while David ground and stroked and...

Naftali thought it couldn't get any better, but it did. Oh, it *did*. Because David found some way to pinch at the head and twist at the same time, rubbing the pad of his thumb over the top so roughly that he was... "Gonna come!" he gasped out.

“Don’t,” David snarled. “Don’t come.” Then his mouth was on Naftali’s again. Fucking into him with his tongue. Owning every bit of his body.

Pleasure was coursing through him. Running through like rivers of fire with nowhere to go.

Don’t come, don’t come, don’t come, he chanted inside his head.

It was just... David’s mouth. His rough hands on Naftali’s cock, jerking it *exactly* the right way. Rougher than he even was on himself. He could never quite straddle the edge of ecstasy and pain and *too much* this way, where he was just shaking apart.

“Please, Daddy?” He was whimpering and panting. He didn’t even know where the words were coming from. Just that he needed Daddy to tell him.

“Come, boy.”

The room swirled around him in an explosion of pleasure. Air and water and skin. David’s thick, perfect body all around him, taking him apart.

David kept stroking him, gently now, as he rang out the last drops of sensual need. Naftali collapsed back, boneless again in David’s arms.

When David’s limbs loosened their hold, Naftali squirmed around until his legs were bent to the side like a mermaid. It took a moment to rearrange, so that he had one arm behind David, with their chests pressed together and his cheek on David’s shoulder. He just wanted to be *closer*.

David closed his arms around him and kissed his forehead. It was just... so heartbreakingly tender. Maybe aftercare, but much more, too.

With David, they were just starting to dive into kink, but there had been intimacy from the beginning.

Naftali kissed him back, little soft kisses along his chin, or wherever he could reach without moving.

Water rippled around them, soothing and warm, like he could just float away with David stroking his arm. Rubbing one slow thumb over his hip bone.

When their shared breathing had slowed, David spoke into the quiet. “Was that okay?”

“Mmmmm... That was *amazing*. Perfection.” Naftali traced lazy circles on David’s other shoulder. Sometime, when he wasn’t so fucked out and boneless, he wanted to lick every inch of that chest.

“Yeah? Even the...” David didn’t seem to know how to finish the sentence.

God, he was sweet. Such a confident Dom one minute, and so insecure the next, but so eager to get it right for Naftali.

“Even aaaallll of it,” Naftali confirmed. “The constraint. The pain. The handjob. The edging. And the hair washing, too.” He grinned up at him. “It was like you had a manual for my body.”

“I just wanted to make you feel good.”

Naftali kissed down his neck, pleased when he heard David’s breath hitch. “You did, Daddy. Now, what I want to know is how I can make *you* feel good.”

David froze. There was a long beat, and then Naftali felt the effort it took him to unclench his muscles. So, something was difficult, but Naftali didn’t know what. Body image? Gender dysphoria? Sex? David had mentioned that he didn’t always get undressed, but Naftali still didn’t understand how far that went.

But now wasn’t the time. Now was the time to be close.

Naftali intentionally didn’t change his position, or his seductive tone. “That can be anything you want, Daddy. I’d love to wash every bit of you. Or I could just kiss you right here while you touch yourself. If you want, we could do more... you could fuck my throat.” He gave a little wiggle, pressing on David’s cock.

“I c-c-c— C-can’t...” David started. “Why w-w-would I...”

“Oh, I assure you, you *can*.” He traced a sensual line down David’s chest. “And you *would*, because you could put me on my knees, and I’d take your cock in me any way you want it. Doesn’t matter what it’s made of—just how you use it.” He waited a beat, to let that settle in. “Or we can snuggle here and watch the snow. It’s all up to you.”

“You’re n-not even watching the snow,” David commented, taking the way out that Naftali had left him.

“I don’t need to. I’m happy right here. Just don’t let me go.”

He could hear the smile in David’s teasing response. “So you’re going to s-stay here all night?” He was calmer now. Happy. And that made Naftali happy, too.

Naftali nuzzled in. “Sounds good to me.”

“The water’s getting colder. And the bath s—s-salts are still on your skin. There’s conditioner in your hair.”

This seemed to be leading somewhere. So Naftali leaned into the role play. This luxurious pampering that he was somehow, miraculously, the recipient of for an entire week. “Will you take care of me, Daddy?”

Fuck. Why was that so hot? Even when they weren’t talking about sex?

Naftali didn’t feel younger asking it so much as... small. Dependent. And conversely, absolutely secure, wrapped in the certainty that Daddy would take care of him.

He would need to come back to this. Maybe after this, he could even find someone to... No. He wasn’t sure he could ever manufacture this sensual closeness.

He would just revel in everything he could get from David this week.

This was David’s kink, after all. Not his.

At least not all the time, like this. But damn was it heavenly while he had it.

“You need a shower, baby boy.”

“Okay, Daddy. You’re going to wash me?”

“Yep. Get up.”

David dried them enough that they weren’t dripping water all over the floor to the bathroom, and then proceeded to treat Naftali to a long, relaxing scrub from his head to his toes.

It wasn’t even sexual, beyond the fact that any time David was touching him, he was aroused. And David added a soft kiss after he’d washed each spot.

Naftali didn’t do anything. He just stood there and... let himself be worshiped. Cocooned in warmth and adoration.

Kind of drifting, and thinking about how lovely it all was.

It completely flipped the script on most of the kink he’d explored, because he was serving his Dom... by letting himself be served.

He kept connecting it with all of his favorite parts of really good aftercare. The focused attention of a Dom. The gentle touches. The soft words, telling him to turn around or lift his leg.

Only it wasn’t aftercare.

Well, maybe it kind of was, in this instance, since he’d just come his brains out and his nipple still stung from the rough treatment.

But at the same time, *this was the scene*. Out of all the things Naftali had suggested, *this* was what David’s delightfully kinky little brain wanted—to give him a shower.

David quickly washed his own body, then dried Naftali off with another soft towel.

“W-w-where are your pajamas?”

“On top of my suitcase.” Thank goodness because the inside was a mess.

“Wait here a moment.” David kissed his forehead again.

Naftali wasn't sure he'd ever had anyone help him *into* his clothes before. Or at least not since he was a child.

But when David came back and held out the pants for him to step into, there was nothing childlike about it, no sense that he wasn't capable.

David pulled the soft t-shirt over his head and then smoothed it down his belly, ending with a kiss to his shoulder.

It was more a feeling of being precious. Of being so valuable that he was worth taking care of.

Even if it was just to fulfill a kink.

David disappeared for a moment to put his own PJs on, then asked “hot chocolate?”

Naftali considered it. It would be a perfect cozy end to a perfect cozy night.

But there was something he wanted even more. “Would it be weird if I asked to light Hanukkah candles instead? Or first. Either one. I mean, you don't have to do it with me. It's pretty quick.”

David gave him a careful look. “Would you l-l-like me to light them with you?”

“Yeah? I mean, if you don't mind.”

“Then I will. And you can have the hot ch-ch-ch- ch-chocolate, too. You don't have to choose.”

Naftali had to give him a kiss for that. Actually, a dozen kisses all over his face.

David's expression—surprised and pleased—was priceless.

Naftali dashed over to his suitcase. “I'll go set them up.” The giant bay window, with the curtains pulled back out of the way, was ideal.

David came up beside him. “It's the fourth night, right?”

“Wow! I wasn't expecting you to keep track.”

“I looked it up. Hanukkah’s late this year, right? It overlaps with Christmas.”

“Yeah. Christmukkah.”

“I’m sorry I’m making you miss spending it with your family.”

Naftali shook his head. “It’s not that kind of holiday. It’s more of a *host a party one night and hang out at your friend’s party the next*, kind of deal. By the end of it, everyone is sick of the obligatory fried food, and almost everyone has skipped a night of candles because they were busy.”

“But you still like lighting the candles.” David slipped his arms around Naftali, holding him from behind. It was cozy. Boyfriend-y.

“Yeah. I mean, it’s a mitzvah, which is this untranslatable word that incorporates doing good deeds and fulfilling the requirements of Jewish law. And it’s just... it’s beautiful seeing them. It’s a spiritual practice that can be as meaningful as you make it.”

He’d finished setting up the four candles, along with the helper candle, the shamash, in its elevated pedestal at the end. The simple, golden menorah that he used for traveling was more sturdy than attractive, but it would still be beautiful with the candles lit.

He drew in a slow breath, centering himself in the moment. In this lovely space, with David behind him. Then he sang, all three brachot, the blessings, with only a small pause between them.

“What did that mean?”

“More or less, thanks Holy One for telling us to light candles. That’s the first one. Then, thanks Holy One who performed miracles back in the day. The last one, I didn’t technically have to add since it’s not the first night. But it’s the shehechyanu. You say it when you want to recognize something special and new. To make an everyday occurrence into something more. It says, thanks Holy One, for giving us

life, sustaining us, and letting us be in this special moment right now.”

“So this is a special m-m-m-moment?”

That’s what Naftali had been thinking, when he added it. Because he was feeling so joyful and relaxed, for the first time in a long time. Because David, who wasn’t even religious, wanted to share it because it mattered to him. “Yes. Would you like to light the candles?”

“Am I, uh, allowed to?”

Naftali shrugged. “If you want. No one’s gatekeeping. Or asking you to commit to any religious beliefs. It’s just a fun thing to share.”

“Sure.”

“I’ll light this one, and then you use it to light the rest.”

The match flared on the second try, and Naftali lit the shamash. “Go ahead. Left to right.”

And for a long time after that, they watched the candles glow, wrapped in each other’s arms.

DAVID

David woke up to a tickle of kisses under his jaw, and a warm body pressed against his side.

For a long moment, he didn't move, feigning that he was still asleep. The moment was too precious to disrupt.

Perhaps Naftali was trying to wake him up, but the heavy weight of his head on David's shoulder suggested that he was just kissing him because he could.

Not for passion but for... affection?

Naftali gave one last butterfly kiss, turned a bit to move his knee, nuzzled into David's neck again, and then fell quiet. Awake, presumably, but happy to stay there, cuddling.

David wasn't sure how he'd been given such a gift.

The kink he'd expected—though acting on it had been better than he'd even imagined.

The joy of sharing the ski slopes with an avid companion had also been part of his plan.

Even the thrill of buying Naftali a hot chocolate at the ski lodge or giving him a shower had been part of their agreement.

What he hadn't expected was just how affectionate Naftali would be. The way he'd smile up at David while they cuddled on the couch. The way he'd turn David's permission to kiss into the sleepy secret touch of lips on David's skin to begin the day.

It was inconceivable to David how he could just do that with a virtual stranger.

David more or less understood the motivation to hook-up, though he'd never managed to feel comfortable baring his body and his sexual responses to a stranger. But, conceptually, he could comprehend the desire for an orgasm without strings attached.

What baffled him was how comfortable Naftali was with lacing their fingers together while they walked, or murmuring quiet words to each other while they watched the Hanukkah candles burn down in the dark window that framed the night.

It felt like something that David would expect to do with someone who he'd been dating for months. Once they'd gotten comfortable with each other, and shared their mundane interests along with their secret desires and fears. Once they'd made a commitment to sharing much more than a single week.

Yet David had fallen into that easy rhythm, too. Sliding a hand down Naftali's back, or pulling him into a kiss. That wasn't like him at all.

There must be something about Naftali— his happy-go-lucky outgoing nature, or maybe just his endless capacity to express affection and intimacy, that made this all possible.

Whatever it was, he was going to enjoy it for all that it was worth.

Naftali stirred at his side, and then sat up, hopping out of bed in a tangle of blankets before David could even think of coaxing him back.

“Good morning,” David told him, voice still thick from sleep.

“Oh! You're awake!” Naftali bounced back into the bed to pepper David's face with kisses, nosing into his shoulders and cheeks with aggressive delight.

David was laughing too much to even try to kiss him back. “I feel like I'm being mauled. Do I even get to wake up first?”

“Nope! Kisses!”

David reached up to grip Naftali's sides, still marveling that such a joyous being was his to hold. Naftali was still wearing a thin t-shirt, but David could feel the warmth of his solid body and the expansion of his ribs.

He was real.

The crazy little monster.

David slid one hand up to grip his hair and the other to circle the back of his neck, forcing him into place so he could, finally, steal a kiss.

Naftali fought back against him... and then collapsed onto his body with an open-mouthed moan that turned into a dirty, perfect kiss.

David moaned back, not loosening his grip at all. Naftali was going to *stay* where he put him. Because he was in charge. And it was the hottest kiss in his life.

Naftali seemed to think so, too, because he was already rutting against David's leg, making soft whimpers every time David thrust his tongue inside or twisted his hand in Naftali's hair to get him right where he wanted him.

Fuck. He was addictive.

At last, David let him go. Naftali pulled back, panting. Their bodies were still pressed together with the blankets between, and David couldn't get enough of his weight above him.

"Damn," Naftali swore. "You should come with a warning label."

"Me? I believe I was the w-w-w-one who was assaulted." That was another thing... with Naftali around, David was almost even *funny*. Or at least able to joke. And at the right time, too.

"I meant for your Dominess."

David tried to frown. "I'm sure that's not a word." Inside, though, he was floating. Even if Naftali was making up terms, David's instinctive reactions were right. The way that he'd

wanted to hold Naftali... the things that he wanted to do... they were right.

“Well, you have it anyway. By the way, big fan of hair pulling. Gets me hard in a second.”

That put all sorts of wicked thoughts in David’s head. And a worry. “Ummm... Should I have a-a-a-a-asked first?”

Naftali shook his head. “You’re doing fine. Checking in is good, but you know my limits, and I could tell you were watching my signals. You tested it out, saw my response, and then increased the force. Would you have stopped if I seemed uncomfortable or used a safeword?”

“Of course!” The very thought of harming him was unthinkable.

“Then there you go. Part of the fun of kink is being spontaneous. Or keeping the sub guessing.”

David frowned. “I’m not usually a spontaneous person. In fact, I’m kind of the opposite of spontaneous.”

Naftali nuzzled his cheek, then planted a kiss in the same spot. “No one’s asking you to be anything that you’re not. Some Doms go with the flow. Some plan everything out for even straightforward scenes. There’s a beauty in both. The point is that our joint list of interests is like a menu. If you know what’s on the menu, you can choose from it.”

“Would you... Do you have it written down anywhere? That would still help me.”

“Absolutely. We’ll sit down sometime today and go over everything. I would have suggested it for today anyway, and you did the right thing to ask.”

A dozen little worries dropped away, which led him to thinking again about Naftali’s body on top of his.

Until David’s phone alarm sounded.

David reached back under his pillow to pull it out. “We should go down for breakfast.”

“Or we could stay up here and go to the later one...” Naftali suggested, a sparkle in his deep brown eyes.

“Nope.” David slapped his ass. He still couldn’t quite believe that he was bold enough to do that. Or how good it felt.

Naftali giggled. “Daddy! If you’re trying to get me out of bed, that’s not going to work at all.”

Fuck. Everything inside him grew warm at that word. Was he still Daddy in the morning? Even when they weren’t doing a scene? Or, well, he supposed that if he was pulling Naftali’s hair and slapping his ass, maybe they *were* still in a scene. He’d need to ask later.

But right now... “Up. You wanted skiing lessons today.”

Naftali looked petulant. “We could do that later too...”

“Up!”

With some adorable grumbling from Naftali, and a couple gentle reminders about the time, they both managed to get through their morning routines and down to breakfast.

The dining room had two long, elegant tables for all of the guests at the lodge, and seemed to serve the same thing each morning. It was all delicious, though, so David wasn’t going to complain.

They found seats at the end and dug into the homemade muffins and breads in the basket, still hot from the oven. Someone came around with coffee, and a report that their eggs and potatoes would be out in a few minutes.

In the middle of that, Naftali pulled his phone from his pocket, started a quiet, orchestral piece playing, and set it on the table. David thought there was a slight hum behind it.

David gave him an odd look. Playing your music out loud in public wasn’t socially acceptable. That was what headphones were for. Was this some other form of teasing?

Naftali shrugged. “People are chewing. I figured we could have our own restaurant music, with a little white noise.”

David blinked. That was just... Wow. He'd never thought of it at all. It seemed forbidden. Pushy. Like he was inflicting his issues on other people. Taking up space.

But then, couldn't he take up space sometimes? He'd been working on not masking his stims. He was allowed to have them. They were his. They helped him feel better and they didn't harm anyone.

This wouldn't harm anyone either.

"Maybe j-just the white noise?"

Naftali flipped his phone over and changed it. It was that easy. The damn coffee spoons kind of... faded into the background. The little irritations that had been creeping at the edge of his mind just disappeared.

Naftali gave him a warm smile and bit into his muffin, crumbs scattering across his shirt. He'd just changed David's life, and he didn't seem to have a care in the world.

David would have preferred to have a table for just the two of them, but naturally Naftali was already in conversation with a crowd of people that were slowly filling in the other half of the table. They were a family group and would be checking out in a few hours—beyond that, David stopped listening.

He just liked watching Naftali. He spoke with his hands. His expressive face. His whole body, really.

Just as their breakfast arrived, someone plopped into the seat right next to David. He steeled himself, since he knew there would be other people around, but he'd hoped they wouldn't be so close.

Then he looked up and realized it was the guy who'd checked them in and flirted with Naftali the first day. Except that David hadn't understood it correctly. His embarrassment burned.

Now he *really* wished they were alone.

"Hi, Jamie!" Naftali said brightly.

"Hey! How's it going?"

“Skiing yesterday was amazing. And we went to dinner at this cute little Italian place.”

That launched the two of them into a chat about local attractions that David felt pretty comfortable listening to. They were both such extroverts, gabbing with a comfortable ease that David never had. They didn’t even seem to notice that he wasn’t participating, both of them laughing over little details and gesturing with their forks.

Then Naftali slipped a hand down to David’s knee. It was such a small move, but David appreciated it immensely. He’d still be thinking about his mistaken assumptions and whether Naftali might really be better off with someone more like himself. But there was Naftali’s hand, gently stroking over his jeans.

“Have you tried out the bathtub yet?” Jamie asked, all eager excitement.

Naftali rolled his eyes back in pleasure. “Daddy gave me a bath last night.” He gave David a winning smile.

David wasn’t sure whether to feel proud or mortified. Naftali had dropped his volume... but not nearly enough for David’s taste. At least the group at the other end of the table was really noisy.

Jamie chuckled. “So I heard. Lucky boy.”

Naftali looked slightly abashed. But not much. “Oops. We’ll be quieter.”

Jamie shrugged. “I think our room is the only one that can hear you. There’s a closet on your other side, and the floors are poured concrete, so nothing gets through.” He winked. “Be as loud as you want.”

Great. So only Jamie, and possibly his two partners, had heard them.

“Oh, perfect!”

“We often don’t rent that room out because Neil loves baths so much and, well, you can hear us, too.”

Naftali seemed delighted by this. “We’ll have a competition.”

A what?

“Yes! I’m going to tell Daddy and Neil. Though there are three of us and only two of you...” He threatened, teasingly.

Naftali grinned. “I can be twice as loud.”

Oh no. No. Was this really happening? “Naftali!” David heard himself barking out.

He found two pairs of eyes looking up at him, radiating innocence.

Damn. He shouldn’t think Naftali was so cute.

“Yes, Daddy?” he asked, syrupy sweet.

“We are n-n-n-n-.” David squeezed his eyes closed until he thought he had a handle on his stupid tongue. “N-n-not having a c-c-c-competition.” And now he was stuttering all over the place in front of Jamie.

“But Daddy, I’m sure we could win. Maybe if you...” Naftali leaned in close, dirty thoughts written across his face.

“No.” Single words were best. And he was not budging on this.

Naftali’s voice dropped to a true whisper this time. “Am I in *trouble*, Daddy?”

David sucked in a breath. Because he was still mortified. But also horribly aroused. Naftali looked like he hoped the answer was *yes*.

And now all that David could think of was turning Naftali over his knee and taking a hand to him until his ass glowed red. Or tying him up and teasing him until...

This *really* wasn’t the time or place for those thoughts.

How was he supposed to respond? And with Jamie sitting right there?

“N-no hot, hot, hot chocolate today.”

Fuck. Was that okay to say? To just... tell another grown adult what he couldn't drink? Was he screwing this whole thing up?

Naftali pouted. Adorably. "But I *love* hot chocolate."

David tried to look serious. "I know."

Jamie cackled with glee. "Oh, your Daddy has your number."

And then, inexplicably, Naftali was nuzzling up to David's shoulder. "I *know*." Like he was pleased by this whole exchange. He followed it up with a soft kiss on David's cheek, as if he was thanking him for taking away his hot chocolate privileges.

Something glowed in David's chest. Was he... was he actually doing this Daddy thing right? Jamie certainly seemed to think so, which was more affirming than he ever would have believed.

"Hey," Jamie interrupted his thoughts. "I was thinking that there's no reason why you guys can't have access to the dungeon before the event. When we want to use it, we just put up a sign saying that the basement is temporarily closed—no explanation—and then open it again when we're done. If you want the key, just ask at the front desk."

When Naftali was snuggled against him like this... And Jamie was calling him Naftali's Daddy like it was the most natural thing in the world... He almost thought he could do that. Just be cool about taking Naftali into some kink basement and doing naughty, decadent things with him.

Except... not the part about asking at the front desk.

"How's your staff about that?" Naftali asked, more sensibly than David would have been.

"Oh, we're all a bunch of degenerates. It's a small crew here. Our family, Ty who served breakfast, and Maria who's in the kitchen somewhere. Everyone's queer, most of us are somewhere on the creative end of the gender spectrum, and Maria's vanilla but she doesn't kink shame. Lord knows, she's

a big fan of the dungeon. She's heard us often enough in the laundry room and knows not to come into the office!"

David hoped he wasn't staring. Did they just... Well, probably they did.

Naftali looked around, like he might be trying to find the laundry room. "I think I just found my new goal in life. When I grow up, I want to run a kinky B&B in the mountains."

Of course he did. But then... When David thought of it... What would it be like, having Naftali at his side, in a place like this, all the time?

Or anywhere?

"It's a good life," Jamie agreed.

David let the conversation flow around them, because Naftali's hand was still on his knee, and every time Jamie mentioned him, he called him Naftali's Daddy.

All too soon, the next shift of breakfast guests was coming in, and Naftali was bouncing up the stairs to get his coat so they could head to the slopes.

David told him he'd follow along in a minute and took their plates to the bin. Then Jamie had a few suggestions for restaurants nearby, so he ended up talking longer than he'd expected.

Now that he knew that Jamie wasn't trying to steal Naftali away, he was getting to like him. And Jamie hadn't batted an eye when sometimes a sentence took too long coming out because of his stutter.

Maybe it would actually be good for David to hang out with Jamie and his partners. He had to admit to a lot of curiosity about seeing a real-life relationship that he'd only read about but wanted so much. Maybe Jamie's Daddy could even give him some tips.

He was still thinking about this as he climbed the stairs, hoping that he hadn't already missed Naftali coming down in the elevator.

When he got to the room, he found Naftali sitting on the desk where his phone was plugged in, his attention fixed on the screen.

The rest of the room looked like a whirlwind had hit it. Half of Naftali's stuff was strewn about on their bed. Papers, books, clothes, markers, and, amusingly, the silky black underwear David had retrieved for him in the airport. There was more on the desk and draped over the chair.

It still astounded David how someone so messy in private could be so put-together and confident when he walked out into the world.

He itched to put it away, preferring order in his life when he could control it, but he'd already prepared himself for this. And he found it kind of endearing though—like he'd been giving a little window into Naftali's lively, jumbled mind.

Naftali looked up just then. "Hey, Daddy!" He beamed, like a ray of sunshine bursting through the clouds.

David flushed at the word. Naftali had said it a dozen times now, but it still gave him a flutter in his chest.

"Ready for the-the, the s-slopes?" He scanned the mini-explosion on the bed, wondering if there was a hat or something in there that Naftali was trying to find. Though David had put all of their winter gear away in the closet last night before bed, and it still appeared to be there.

Naftali looked around with him, like he'd just noticed the chaos. His face fell. "Sorry for the mess," he murmured.

David might not be the best at reading people, but even he knew that something was very wrong. Naftali's fingers were clenched tight around his phone, and he wouldn't meet David's eyes.

Was all this about the stuff on the bed? It didn't seem like that big a deal, and Naftali had to be used to it by now.

Then all the pieces clicked together. Zeev's words about not trying to change Naftali. Naftali's own sad comments that he wasn't cut out for a twenty-four/seven relationship. That

first snappy remark about not wanting a Dom to help him to get organized.

David had been given all the information. His autistic brain just needed more than one example to put it all together. This was a pattern.

God, like the time everything fell out of Naftali's backpack at the airport. Naftali hadn't been embarrassed about David seeing his *underwear*. He'd been embarrassed about being disorganized.

And somehow his ex was at the bottom of it. Had he shamed Naftali for this? Told him that he wasn't good enough, or that he had to change?

David stepped closer to Naftali, wanting desperately to make this better. "Naftali, if you're w-w-worried about how you want to organize your stuff, I d-don't care."

Naftali sighed. All the light was gone from his eyes. "It's not organized. And you might not mind yet, but you will. This is how I am all the time."

David wanted to say *it's not a big deal*, but clearly it was. He ran through a dozen phrases before he found one that he hoped would work out. "A lot of creative people are."

Naftali gave a rueful smile, which was much better than the stricken look he'd had a few minutes ago. "I was just going to charge my phone, but I got distracted."

Another flash of choices went through David's head. His first instinct was to applaud Naftali for charging his phone, but that would be demeaning. He also thought about tidying all of the backpack detritus—it would only take a few minutes. But that might look like he was saying he couldn't do it by himself.

David could also give Naftali a moment to tidy everything himself, but then it might look like he was standing over him and supervising. Given what David was piecing together about the ex, that was probably the worst.

David wished that he had more people skills. That it was easier for him to figure out what to say.

Finally, he did what he wanted most to do. He walked over to where Naftali sat, and stood between his parted knees. Then he gave him a soft kiss. “We’re not in a hurry. And we can clean everything up before b-b-bed.”

“Do you want me to pick everything up now?” Naftali asked, voice small.

“I w-w-want you to have a w-wonderful day.” He brushed Naftali’s cheek with his. He couldn’t stand seeing him miserable.

“Alright.” David felt like he’d won a medal with the shy look Naftali gave him.

“Just so I know, would you feel comfortable if I moved some of your things, or should I l-l-l-leave them alone?”

“Oh, you can move anything. Hell, you can move all of it. Just put it somewhere or shove it to the floor if it gets in the way. That’s what Zeev does when they come into my room.” Naftali seemed to be feeling better. Maybe Zeev helped him feel more comfortable.

“I’ll put it on the desk.” He certainly wasn’t putting Naftali’s special belongings on the floor where they’d both trip.

“Thank you.” Naftali gave him a small peck that grew into a languorous kiss.

David wasn’t sure whether he was being thanked for the help itself or for how he’d handled things. All he knew was that he was feeling fiercely protective of Naftali right now, and angry at anyone who’d ever made him feel like he wasn’t good enough.

And he couldn’t get enough of Naftali’s mouth, and the way he clung to David’s shoulders, sipping from his lips.

It didn’t feel sexual, just close, their breath mingling together.

David wondered if they should just forget about skiing and stay in today to cuddle and watch a movie, or read books

again. He wanted to pull Naftali into his arms and make everything better.

“Thank you, Daddy,” Naftali murmured against his lips. He looked pleased. Peaceful.

“You’re welcome, baby boy.” David felt a rush of something more powerful than just arousal. *He* had helped Naftali feel better.

“So... skiing?” Naftali asked, hopefully. “Did you check what time the advanced classes are?”

David laughed. If he hadn’t just seen it, he wouldn’t have had any idea what had been going through Naftali’s head a few minutes ago. But now, all of his stress seemed to be gone.

“Absolutely.” Whatever made his baby boy happy. And let him know just how perfect he was. “And there’s one at ten, so we have plenty of time. I’m not sure I’m up for any jumps, though. That’s all you.”

Naftali considered this. “Will you still do the same slopes with me? Or at least ride the lift together?”

God, he was just so sweet. “Of course. I need to see your jumps.”

NAFTALI

Naftali snuggled against David's side all the way back to the hotel. Well, as much as he could, in the car.

His body was feeling the pleasant exhaustion of being well used on the slopes today, and there was something warm and happy about singing together in the car.

David's voice wasn't practiced or always on pitch, but when he got comfortable, he sang with heart. He didn't stutter at all, either.

When they got back to their room, David unwound Naftali's scarf from his neck and took his coat. He followed up with a peck on the cheek. "Go charge your phone, baby."

Naftali froze for a moment, testing all the tones in David's voice.

But all he could hear was... care. David could have told him any old way, or even forgotten. He could have gotten frustrated. Or worse, been disappointed. Condescending.

But instead, he sounded affectionate, like Naftali's forgetfulness was an endearing trait instead of an annoying one.

Naftali wasn't sure how long that would last, but he appreciated it a lot right now. Especially after the mess this morning. Even Zeev said he'd never want to share a room with Naftali, and David was definitely fastidious with his belongings.

Naftali dug his very dead phone from his pocket and plugged it in on the desk while David hung up both of their coats. A moment later David had neatly gathered up the flotsam and jetsam Naftali had left on the bed, setting it in a pile on the desk, like it wasn't a big deal.

There were no pointed looks or heavy sighs. No teasing either. He just stacked everything up, so it was out of the way.

"Was that okay?" David asked, apparently thinking along the same lines. "Reminding you about your phone? And... tidying?" He gestured vaguely at the two neat piles.

He was so sweet. And so very different from Noah. "Yeah. I said you could move my things. And I asked you to remind me about my phone. It didn't feel like overstepping."

"Good. I sh-sh-should have asked you instead of telling you."

Naftali walked up to him, toeing off his boots. He loved the way David's arms just wrapped around him automatically. The way their bodies fit together, but David was just enough bigger that Naftali felt small and cared for.

And *that* was what this whole Daddy thing was about.

He hadn't understood the appeal of it until this week. He knew enough people who used the term. And he'd definitely been leaning into the roles he thought they were supposed to be playing.

He just hadn't realized how well they would fit.

How nice it would feel to have David reminding him to plug in his phone in the same voice that he used to ask if he was hungry. Or get him a mocha with whipped cream to warm up—because it wasn't technically hot chocolate. "You did it perfectly," Naftali told him.

David gave a lopsided smile. "I'm trying."

"Mmmm... Try any harder and I won't want to go back home." He didn't want to think about how true that actually was. Instead, he made his tone suggestive. "Any ideas for how we could relax together, Daddy?"

“Watching TV?” David asked innocently. “That’s relaxing.”

Naftali enjoyed how he was playing along. David seemed to be either serious or anxious most of the time, but Naftali could always bring out this side of him. “No...” he drew the word out.

“Taking a walk? We haven’t walked along the c-c-canyon yet, and I’m sure it’s beautiful.” David’s hand slid down to Naftali’s ass. It was exciting to see him become so bold.

“I’d love to see it. But that wasn’t what I was thinking, either.”

“Hmmm... I’ll have to keep thinking.” David’s eyes sparkled.

Naftali lifted his chin, begging wordlessly until David joined their lips together.

David started with a gentle exploration of his mouth that made him feel like his whole body was melting, fusing them together. He loved how David was a bit taller, how he had to reach up to meet his mouth.

Naftali still hadn’t gotten the chance to explore David’s body, and he reveled in it now. He wasn’t ripped, but he had a thick, delicious cushion of softness over the hard muscles beneath. Heat poured off him through his shirt, warming Naftali’s cold hands.

Naftali slid under his shirt, needing more contact. More of him. “Is this okay, Daddy?” he whispered.

David hesitated, then nodded.

Thank goodness. He would have respected any limits David had, and still made it sexy. But he’d been *dying* to get his hands on him.

David had a light dusting of hair on his chest, Naftali ran his fingers through it, enjoying the contrast of rough hair and smooth skin while David sipped and licked at his mouth.

“What do you want, baby?” David’s voice was husky.

“Whatever you want. But I brought a few things with me. I thought you might want to explore a little bit.” And this seemed like the right time. After last night, Naftali couldn’t stop thinking of David holding him down. Hurting him in just the right way.

“Yeah?” Naftali couldn’t tell if he was nervous or excited. Maybe both.

“No pressure. I could just kiss you all day. But if you wanted to practice some of those boy scout skills... let’s just say I came prepared.”

“Handcuffs?” David seemed oddly sure about this, even though it was a question.

It took Naftali a moment to remember joking with Zeev before they left. “Handcuffs are just the beginning, Daddy. Come see.” He dragged David over to his suitcase. About half of it was clothes, though they were more out of the suitcase than in at this point. The other half was a black duffle bag.

Naftali heaved it out and set it on the dresser. Then he opened the zipper with a flourish and gave David a peek at his treasure trove.

He lets out a whistle. “You took all that on the *plane*?”

“There was a reason I checked my luggage. Not that I haven’t flown with toys in my carry-on before. It can be kind of funny as long as they don’t get confused and try to confiscate anything. Like, *I promise you, TSA agent, I can’t hold up a plane with my glow-in-the-dark dildo and spreader bar.*”

David laughed, his eyes growing wide. “Do you *have* that in there?”

“Not this time. Just some basics.” Naftali started taking things out because David still hadn’t made a move to touch anything, though he had to be dying too. Sometimes, for newbies, the first step was just to look and touch.

“Plenty of rope.” Naftali pulled out a handful of coils. “Floggers. Crop. Nipple clamps. Clothespins, for more or less the same thing. Buttplug. Anal beads. Another buttplug. First

aid kit. Dildo, obviously.” He waved it around. “Condoms, dental dams, lube, gloves, wipes, et cetera.” Those were all in one clear zipper bag. “Handcuffs. Other handcuffs. These are basically handcuffs, too. Or ankle cuffs, whatever.” Everything came out in a snarled mess.

He stuck his head in to look around the bottom of the bag. “Ooh! Vibrator. I forgot I had that one. And an adjustable spreader bar.” He emerged, holding it up triumphantly. “Totally forgot that was in there, too. And... yep. Bondage tape and safety scissors in the side pocket. Alright, so maybe we can hold up an airplane now.”

David was just looking at everything, eyes wide. He didn’t even laugh at the joke for a full five seconds, then Naftali got a quiet chuckle.

Naftali was dying for David to be as excited about everything as he was, but more importantly, to feel welcomed. It looked like he needed a moment to process.

Naftali had certainly felt the same way the first time he walked into a kink party, even though he knew exactly what he wanted and why he was there.

To take some of the pressure off, Naftali took a moment to straighten everything out. Well, maybe not actually straighten things, because who had time for that? But he untangled the velcro handcuffs with the straps from the leather ones with the metal chain and kind of laid them out in a row with the longer straps hanging over the side of the dresser.

David still hadn’t said anything, so Naftali took a step back and wrapped his arms around David’s stiff form. “This doesn’t mean we have to do anything with any of this. It’s an invitation, not a requirement. You can just look if you want. See how they feel. Or we can put everything away and make out on the couch.”

“No.” The word came out quietly. David lifted one hand toward the dresser before putting it back at his side. “Don’t put it away.”

Naftali nestled in closer to him, dropping kisses along his jaw. He wanted to give David all the time he needed, but also make it feel sexy for him. To feel fun instead of intimidating. “Want to ask me any questions?”

“Those...” He pointed.

“Floggers,” Naftali supplied. “And a crop.”

“Don’t those take a lot of practice?”

Mmmmm... Naftali could only hope that was what he chose. But he still wasn’t sure what David craved and what might be too much. “Not the ones I brought. All three of these impact play tools are short and light enough that they don’t take any particular training. Aim for the shoulders, chest, or ass, avoid the kidneys. If you went at it for a long enough time in the same place you could probably leave a bruise, but I doubt you could break the skin even if you tried.”

“Have you ever had someone use something like that and break the skin?”

“A few times. That’s not usually my objective, but it happens from time to time. Usually with a more whip-like implement when the marks cross.”

“Oh...”

“For my body, personally, by the time it gets to that level it might be enough for me to safeword. But I’d wear the marks proudly for the next week.”

David took a step closer to the dresser, pulling Naftali with him so that his chest was to Naftali’s back. Naftali adored that feeling, of being held and pinned, whether David had intended it or not.

David traced one finger down the falls of the leather flogger. Naftali felt like the same motion was stroking down his spine. David’s other hand came up over his belly. Tightly. Keeping him close. “You really want-w-want-want this?”

“Only if you do. But yes, I love the sensation.”

“And this?” He stroked down the length of the crop. It was black. Braided leather. Too short to be very springy and

intense, but Naftali could already imagine the slap against his skin.

Naftali wasn't sure whether David was confirming his consent, taking time to process his own desires, or just trying to drive Naftali crazy with anticipation. He knew they needed to take things slowly enough to cover the basics, but he was ready to throw himself over the bed now. "I would enjoy that too, Daddy."

David's hand on his belly clenched a little harder. He returned to the flogger, stroking two fingers down the handle and then wrapping his fingers around it. "You'll have to give me instructions."

Oh, hell yes. "Yes, Daddy."

"Am I still your..." David's voice trailed off.

It was a good question. "I'd like you to be. Sometimes people do switch. The person holding the flogger takes control of the scene and becomes the Dom. And it *is* valuable for Doms to know what submitting feels like. But a sub can also demonstrate something to their Dom as a form of service." He shrugged. "For me, it just feels like sharing information or teaching a skill. It doesn't change our dynamic. You're still Daddy."

David nuzzled at the back of his neck, warming it with the roughness of his beard, then placed a kiss over the spot. "I don't know how I g-got so lucky."

"I don't know how *I* got so lucky. So... may I show you some techniques, Daddy?"

"You m-m-may. Thank you, baby boy."

God, Naftali loved that name. He'd never been *baby boy* to anyone else, but it still wasn't that creative. It was more that the combination of those two words did all sorts of things to him inside. It didn't make him feel like he was younger. Just submissively David's boy, but with the sweetness of being his baby, too.

This whole Daddy thing was addictive.

Naftali picked up the other flogger. “You keep that one, I’ll demonstrate with this one.” He reluctantly left David’s arms to walk over to the bed. “You want to stand with your feet planted wide and solid. If you’re in the wrong position, move your feet not your hips, arms, or shoulders.”

David nodded, taking everything in. Naftali could practically see him committing everything to memory.

“You want your arm relaxed, elbow out, not in. For the movement, think of it as dropping your hand, not hitting something. You’ll be moving in diagonals. You can either do a single strike like this...” He grabbed the end of the falls with one hand, then dropped his other hand to create the diagonal stroke on the edge of the bed. “As soon as you do one, you get ready for the next one.” He slapped the bedspread again with a soft thump. “Or you can use a cyclic pattern, like a figure eight.” Naftali started up the rhythm, slapping the mattress while he continued speaking. “The idea is that you should be able to do this for a long time—an hour if you wanted to—without injuring yourself or getting too fatigued. See it’s all in the wrist, here. Drop, drop, drop, drop. Want to give it a try?”

David nodded again, face lined in concentration. He repeated the single strike once, then a couple more times. In between, he checked the weight of the flogger, running the falls through his fingers.

“Nice. Now keep aiming for the same spot and try picking up the pace when you feel ready. The repetition is how you build up endorphins.”

David tested the motion again.

“See how you’re leaning forward there? That means you’re too far away.”

David shuffled closer, quietly repeating to himself, “move your feet, not your shoulders.” That was the seriousness that Naftali expected David would give the advice, but he still appreciated seeing it.

David struck the bed a few more times, this time faster and with more precision. Naftali was starting to feel jittery with

excitement. “Want to try the cyclic stroke? Start the rhythm away from the target, then move in.”

David set up an easy rhythm, swinging the falls through the air. When he finally took the small step forward to hit the bed, Naftali let a little gasp escape his lips.

David smirked at him. “Something else you-you-you wanted to share?”

“Nope.” Naftali grinned up at him. “You just let me know when you’re ready, Daddy.”

“Don’t I need m-more practice? I’m serious about keeping you safe.” He turned to Naftali, taking his shoulders in both hands while the falls gently dangled down his back. So damn sexy, the way he could take charge like that, but also let Naftali know that their communication was central.

“You should practice until you feel ready. Just know that these really are beginner floggers. This one’s for warm-up and the other one has a bit more heft to it once you get started. But they’re both too short to wrap and cause an unintended sting. They’re too light to bruise, even with more momentum. You could probably use them almost anywhere without causing pain. I just thought you’d appreciate learning good technique.”

David pressed a kiss to the corner of his mouth. “I do appreciate that, baby boy. I’m going to practice for a few-a few-a few more minutes. Th-then I want you naked and kneeling, r-r-r-right there.” He dropped a pillow to a spot a few feet away, the dominance rising in his tone. “Where I can see you.”

“Yes, Daddy.” Naftali tried to put all of his enthusiasm into those two words. Watching David transition from student to Dom was hot as fuck.

He knew how big a step this was. And he could still sense David’s nerves seeping through. But Naftali had seen him transform three times before, when he finally reached his Dom mindset.

He was sure this would be just as magnificent. If anything, Naftali felt honored to share this moment.

He hurried out of his clothes, shoving the tangled pile on top of his suitcase so at least it wasn't in the way. Noah would have made him fold them, but... he wasn't with Noah.

And that might have been the first time that he thought of his ex without a shred of remorse or longing. A sense of regret that he hadn't been able to be a better sub.

What David offered was so much better.

Behind him came the steady thump, thump, thump of the flogger against the mattress.

Naftali knelt on the pillow, noticing as he did all the things that David had considered. His aching knee, which was still fine for the moment, but David had specified *a few minutes*. Naftali's desire not to be ignored, which David had taken into account with a few words, so that he didn't even have to think about it.

After that, Naftali just soaked in the heady feeling of beginning a scene. David's eyes weren't on him, but he knew that he was thinking about him with each strike.

Naftali was practically dancing with excitement, but he tried to slow his breathing, to think about his Dom. David hadn't told him to keep his eyes down, so he watched the muscles ripple across his shoulders through his t-shirt. The way his thighs and butt filled out his jeans.

Naftali started to imagine all the ways that he could please his Dom, by giving himself over to his command.

Finally, David turned to him. "Very good, baby boy." His face was stern, but his eyes were soft.

Naftali didn't try to hide his smile. His chest went warm and bubbly each time Daddy offered his approval.

David walked a little closer, until he was towering over Naftali. The contrast, of David fully clothed while he was kneeling naked on the floor, was intoxicating. David stepped closer again, until one of his feet was between Naftali's knees. The position was all power. Naftali would just have to lean forward a little bit to suck him off.

“How should I position you for this? Tell me w-w-w-what I need to know.” David stroked his hair gently, but his voice was all Dom. These were questions, but they were also commands.

“I can lay on the bed, but that’s a bit harder for equal distribution. Leaning against the wall or over the bed is easier. Well, the bed’s probably better. Good angle for my ass or shoulders. And other things you need to know... Just start off slowly. Touch to bring the blood to the surface. Increase the intensity, then bring it back down instead of stopping abruptly.”

“Crescendo and decrescendo?”

“Exactly like that.” Naftali loved that David enjoyed music, even if it was mostly to listen to. It meant they could communicate in so many languages.

“Over the bed, baby boy.” His voice went deliciously harsh. “Ass in the air.”

“Yes, Daddy.” Naftali scurried to obey, practically throwing himself onto the mattress, then finding a stable position for his feet on the floor with only a little scrambling.

David snorted out a chuckle. Though really, if he was expecting an elegant, graceful sub, he should know better by now.

Naftali heard him shuffling around and turned his head, craning his neck, in case David needed any other advice or support.

“Head down, baby.”

“Yes, Daddy.” Naftali nestled into the mattress. David had this. Naftali knew he did.

This time, when Naftali heard David behind him, he didn’t respond. That wasn’t the same as being calm, though. There was still that frisson of excitement and nervousness arching through him.

A man, who he was still just getting to know, was about to flog him. David was bigger and stronger. He was clothed

while Naftali was spread out and naked and vulnerable, completely accessible to his desires. It was everything Naftali wanted, but it was still a little nerve-wracking in those first few moments.

He didn't know where the falls were going to land first. Shoulders? Ass? Would David understand how to start lightly, or was he in for a sting? Naftali was tingling with anticipation, but also wishing David would just get it over with, so at least he would know...

"Relax." Two warm hands landed on his lower back, grounding him.

Ahhh... that was what he'd needed.

David always seemed to know. Naftali melted into the mattress, luxuriating in David's touch as those wide hands slowly rubbed up toward his shoulders and back down.

"You're gorgeous," David murmured. "So good f-for me."

Naftali smiled into the little cave made by his arms. David's style felt so different from a lot of Doms he'd been with. And Naftali didn't think it was because he was so new to kink.

There was a sincerity there, a sense of care and affection that tempered David's desire to control and inflict pain. He was still just as much a Dom when he was massaging Naftali's shoulders as he'd been when Naftali was kneeling on the floor.

David kept one hand on Naftali's back as the soft tickle of a flogger floated down his skin.

Naftali hummed happily. He loved how sensual this was. He couldn't see David, but he could imagine his expression. Focused, but also aroused and delighted.

David kept dragging the falls over his back, teasing and playing, until Naftali was wriggling on the mattress. They dangled down across his ass, then along the back of his legs where his knees were sensitive and ticklish. On the way back up, they brushed his inner thighs. Naftali parted his legs helplessly in invitation. On the next slow stroke, the falls

nestled between his ass cheeks and flowed against his hole, making him whimper.

David's hand followed the flogger, kneading into the flesh of Naftali's ass, stroking up his spine. Then back down again, just as slowly. Rough touches and gentle ones.

Naftali was moaning now, each one followed by a deep, pleased hum from David. It was a rush, hearing how much David wanted him. Most Doms were so silent.

David started again at Naftali's heels, taking his time traveling all the way up. Naftali never wanted it to end, but he was also going crazy. "Please," he gasped.

David chuckled. "I w-wondered how long it would take you to get there."

"I told you I'm not patient."

"No, but you're gorgeous when you squirm." He trailed the soft leather down Naftali's back again. "I could watch you like-like-like this all night. I like seeing you desperate and begging."

Shivers swept through him. God, he loved it, too. He liked knowing that David was completely in control. That he'd planned this sensuous torment. "Please, Daddy."

"Very good, baby boy."

David's hands left for a moment, then the first flash of the flogger landed on Naftali's ass. It wasn't hard enough to hurt, but his sensitized skin soaked in the brief sting. "Thank you, Daddy."

David hummed in approval, then brought the flogger down on the other side. Oh, yes. More of that. Naftali let all of his need out in his unsteady breath, his gasps and cries speaking for him.

He could hear the whistling swish of the flogger before it hit his skin the next time, and then the moment when David fell into a pattern. Left, right, left right. Naftali jerked out a moan.

Usually he wouldn't be so blissfully aroused just at the beginning, but David had been teasing him for so long that even this gentle rain of sensation sent him spiraling.

"More," Naftali begged. "Please, more, Daddy."

The rhythm stopped, but immediately David's hands were on Naftali's ass, roughly squeezing the reddened flesh.

"Mmmm.... yes please. Oh, and I forgot to tell you, you can swing the flogger underhand. Same figure eight, but the diagonals are upward."

"And you l-l-l-l-l... l-like that?" His voice was rough. His fingers were so close to Naftali's eager hole.

"Yeah. More sensitive there." Naftali was arching his back into David's hands. Usually when someone was flogging him, he just wanted them to get on with it. But right now, all he was thinking about was David making his ass glow and then sliding into him while it was still aflame.

"I've got you, baby boy."

Another swish of leather filled the air. This time, David was using the heavier one, and when it landed right at the tender bottom edge of his ass, he cried out.

He'd hardly absorbed the feeling when the next strike came on the other side. Then the next, and the next. There was a stinging slap, but mostly this deep, pounding ache. Naftali's hands were curled into the bedspread, his body not sure whether he should push away from the force or back into it.

It hurt. And Naftali was so aroused he thought he could come.

Those steady beats just kept falling, pushing him up onto his toes. "Relax," David commanded.

And that was when Naftali melted. It wasn't his job to move into the strikes or pull away. He didn't need to anticipate anything, because David was bringing everything to him. Naftali's body went limp, keeping just enough tension in his legs that he didn't slide off the bed.

“Fuck,” David whispered, reverently. Then, a bit louder, “Good boy.”

Naftali was soaring. David switched the rotation, downward strikes now on the center of his ass, but with more force. Naftali didn't remember this flogger being this heavy, but maybe David was using it just right. The deep, bruising sensation felt like it was working its way into Naftali's bones. David didn't pause at all, just went on and on, letting Naftali float.

His skin was on fire, and he knew he was going to revel in these bruises tomorrow. It was almost getting to be too much. Naftali must have made some sort of sound because David started to lighten up. “What do you need, baby boy?”

It was hard to think. “I... maybe too much... in the same spot.” David halted his motion so fast that Naftali was almost stunned. “Don't stop. Please, don't stop. *Please* don't stop, Daddy.”

David rested one hand on his fiery ass. Then the leather slapped gently across his shoulders. “How about this?”

Naftali whimpered, nodding his head frantically.

“Put your arms down.”

Naftali complied. David did a few gentler test strokes, and then started up the alternating pattern. Not at his hardest, but mingling tangles of pain and ecstasy.

David must have stepped closer, because suddenly the denim of his jeans was rubbing against Naftali's ass. The moan that rose from Naftali's mouth felt like it was torn from his chest. The fabric was rough, and it hurt exquisitely. Naftali could feel the soft bulge of David's packer, which made intoxicating promises, even if it didn't reflect the arousal that he knew David was feeling.

Naftali pushed back against him, seeking more. “Want you,” he panted, “to fuck me like this.”

David groaned and thrust against him. Naftali pushed back to meet him. It was so easy to press back with each beat of the flogger. There was no penetration. No actual skin touching,

even. But it felt like David was fucking him. There was the same rhythm. The same raw intimacy.

“Yes,” Naftali gasped. “Like that, Daddy. Just like that.”

David dropped the flogger. His hands gripped Naftali’s heated shoulders, his hips crashing harder. “You like this, boy?” His bulge surged between Naftali’s cheeks.

“Yes. So good, Daddy.” The last word got lost in a moan when David clawed into his shoulders, sending shards of beautiful pain through him on the next thrust. “I can feel you inside me.”

And he could. He truly could. Naftali knew exactly how David’s cock was plowing into him, filling him up with David’s rough desires.

“Do you w-w-w-want me to...?”

Naftali clutched at David’s hands, twisting his arms around to keep them pinned to his shoulders. “Just don’t stop now. This is so good.” He wanted to do so many things with David, but having him pause now to strip down in the bathroom, put on a harness, get an insert for his packer or swap out for a dildo... There were so stupidly many steps. It could be hot some other time, but right now Naftali just needed *him*. “Just you. Your hand. Whatever you want.”

David leaned over Naftali’s back, hips still thrusting deliciously against his ass. “Let me just get lube,” David murmured against his ear.

“Okay, Daddy.” He could wait for that. Or maybe he really couldn’t, because as soon as David’s comforting weight left him, he was twisting around, hoping that David could find the lube quickly, because it just wasn’t as important as...

David snagged the bag of supplies and pulled out the bottle. Then he strode back over and slapped Naftali’s stinging ass. The pain made his body sing.

“Head down.”

“Sorry, Daddy.” He was grinning as he put his head back down. Disobedience was a game he’d like to play another

time, but not right now. He just needed Daddy's body on his.

Daddy lay on top of him, so heavy he couldn't move. He felt perfectly trapped. Small. Vulnerable.

Daddy rutted against him, gripping his hair exquisitely to sweep him into a voracious kiss. "Where do you want me?" They were both panting, warm breath merging.

"Anywhere. Don't care." Then the rest of his brain caught up. "I haven't cleaned myself out or anything."

"I've got you." Daddy's hand lay heavy on the back of his neck, pinning him while he somehow managed to flick the cap off the lube one-handed. Then his slick fingers were gliding over the entrance to Naftali's front hole, then up to his cock. Daddy rubbed the swollen nub roughly, with just the right amount of pressure.

"Please, Daddy." Naftali wasn't even sure what he wanted. Just more of everything. He pressed into Daddy's hand on his nape, grinding against Daddy's hips as much as he could reach them.

Daddy circled his entrance again, then slid in with two fingers. Naftali gasped. He hadn't done this in a while, and he'd forgotten how good it could be to have someone else touching him inside, driving into him. Even more, to have Daddy touching him while forcing him to keep still. It was rough and beautiful and exactly what Naftali wanted.

Naftali knew, with that heavy weight on his spine, the thrust of his hips, that he was Daddy's to command.

He could also feel Daddy's care, the way they were so perfectly in sync. Daddy's breath was ragged, and he pulled out for a moment to add a third finger, or maybe a fourth. Naftali didn't know, but he felt stretched open, gloriously full.

"So good for me, baby boy." Daddy rocked against his ass, using his hand to pound into him with the force of his hips.

But Naftali knew it was his cock. Knew it was all of Daddy's masculinity and virility, pulsing inside him.

Naftali was floating in the sea of endorphins, sparking each time the rough denim hit his heated skin. He mumbled something incoherent. He loved being Daddy's good boy. Loved being taken like this, used for his pleasure.

Naftali humped against the edge of the bed, trying to get more stimulation. With every twist, he came up against the steel of Daddy's hand on the back of his neck, and that just drove him further into that deep submissive place, where all he wanted was to give himself to his Daddy.

"Touch your cock," Daddy commanded. Naftali's hand shot down between his thighs and he rubbed over his dick, hard with two fingertips the way he liked it. There was no doubt about Naftali's masculinity or Daddy's, even when they were fucking with the parts they had available.

Naftali was close to spilling over the edge. The extra stimulation, the growled command, the way Daddy bound him with his own strength and Naftali's desire to serve. But Naftali wanted to see him, too. It felt too emotional, too close, to do without seeing his face.

He twisted around, then moaned when Daddy shoved him back into the mattress. So fucking hot. "Please, Daddy. I want to see you."

"You've got me, baby boy." He leaned forward, weight heavy on Naftali's back as he kept driving into him, hand and hips still coordinated to form a driving cock. Something that was part of him. The angle was awkward, but his liquid brown eyes were wide with need. "Come for me, Nafti."

With that whispered caress of a command, with his nickname on Daddy's lips, he fell over the edge. Daddy was kissing him, and he was falling into an ocean of bliss, swept away by the currents and tossed by the waves. Hoarse screams ripped from his throat, gathered up by Daddy's mouth.

Naftali clasped his hand over Daddy's where it was tangled in his hair. He needed to be closer. He needed to be absorbed in him.

Daddy pulled back just a little, panting. His fingers—his cock—were still inside, meeting Naftali’s clingy emotional needs now that his sexual need was sated.

“Want you to come too,” Naftali mumbled. “Come all over me, Daddy.”

Daddy sucked in a breath, then pulled out. Naftali whimpered at the loss. But he wanted Daddy to feel as good as he did. He wanted to know that he’d made Daddy feel good.

Daddy was still stretched out above him, and Naftali could feel him doing something with his jeans. Naftali would have dropped to his knees to suck his cock if Daddy would allow it, but he wasn’t sure that was an option. Then he felt the rhythmic strokes of Daddy’s hand on his own body, muffled by his jeans.

Naftali had already come once, but he was still riding the wave. “Thank you, Daddy,” Naftali told him as his groans got louder against his cheek. And he did feel grateful, so honored that they were sharing this intimacy together. He grunted and gasped along with him. “Want you to feel so good.”

With a final cry, Daddy jerked roughly against Naftali and then collapsed. The zipper of his jeans dug into Naftali’s skin and his soft packer nestled between his buttocks. Naftali liked thinking of him as soft now, replete. It was cozy, with just the edge of pain to ride out his pleasure.

Daddy surged off him, then tugged until Naftali clambered onto the bed where he could nestle in Daddy’s arms. They kissed lazily, unable to quite let go of what they’d built together. Naftali only fell back when Daddy turned to stroking his hair, their breaths coming out in little puffs so that they shared the same air.

That was so much more than just a scene. It was magical. A connection.

“Was that good?” Daddy asked, the first bit of insecurity that Naftali had seen from him throughout the scene. “I’m sorry if I didn’t...”

Naftali cut his words off with a kiss. “That was... I don’t even have words for that. That was amazing. Glorious.”

He snickered. “Glorious, hmmm?”

“Yes. Glorious.” And he was sticking to it, even if it sounded ridiculous.

Naftali nuzzled in closer. He was getting lube everywhere, but Daddy was going to have to wash his jeans anyway. If Naftali could just get close enough, he could imagine that Daddy would never let him go.

On that thought came a worry: that Naftali was thinking of David as Daddy. Not just for play, but for... well, something that felt more real.

He wanted Daddy to be *his* Daddy.

And that wasn’t what they’d agreed on.

Or what Naftali had promised to himself.

But he let the worry drift away. He couldn’t hold onto it when Daddy was running his fingers through his hair. Or when, much later, he had Naftali roll over so that he could put lotion on his bruises, murmuring words of praise and desire, his hands never leaving Naftali’s skin.

Naftali knew it was probably just the endorphins talking, but it felt a lot like everything he’d ever wanted.

DAVID

David woke while it was still dark, but that wasn't surprising. His body still hadn't quite adjusted to the west coast, and it was the middle of December. But there was a quietness to the air that suggested it was still too early. Pale moonlight, or maybe a streetlamp he couldn't see, drifted through the windows.

The menorah that they'd lit again last night was just a shadowed outline against the stars.

He glanced at the clock. A bit after four, which wasn't too bad. He'd always had difficulty sleeping.

Naftali had drifted to the other side of the bed, and David turned to watch him. He was hugging his pillow, one arm raised over his chin so that just his mop of curly hair and softly closed eyes were visible.

Even watching him sleep, David's heart beat a little faster.

His baby boy.

Or at least he liked to think of him that way.

He knew it was temporary, but after last night...

He'd truly never believed it could feel like that. All of the pieces that he hadn't quite believed would fit—the cruelty and the kindness—had come together the moment he heard Naftali begging for another stroke of the flogger.

David's hand had trembled before he made the first strike. It had been dizzying just imagining that he was going to inflict pain on someone that he cared about so much.

But then it had been... magical. Every one of Naftali's moans had urged him on. By the end, he was putting his arm into it, hitting harder, because he just needed to drag one more cry out of Naftali's mouth.

It was a high like nothing else. He'd never been so aroused.

Which was how he'd found himself fucking his boy, fingers in a tight pyramid so that he could absorb every heated squeeze of his hole. Hips thrusting madly, because he wanted Naftali to *feel* his desire, the rough way he wanted to claim him and hurt him and take care of him until there was nothing between them.

David hadn't had sex that way in years. And then, only twice, during the brief period where he thought he might be a lesbian. In his rare and unsuccessful hookups, he'd always prepared well before with a strap-on. The same with Mike, and the boyfriend before him. Sex was something more... scheduled. Planned.

He'd figured out, with his exes, how to get into the kissing, see if it was going anywhere, and then slip off to the bathroom for a few minutes to get things ready while he told his partner to get ready in the bedroom.

With Naftali, it had been wild. Unstoppable.

And he'd never felt more masculine or dominant in his life.

He still wanted to fuck Naftali properly—as he thought of it—with his dick. It just amazed him that last night hadn't felt any different. Every part of him had been absorbed by Naftali's needs, and the clench of Naftali around him.

What was even more surprising was that David had touched *himself*. It had taken him months to feel comfortable jacking off with Mike around, even with his clothing on.

Last night, he'd felt brazen with desire. It probably helped a lot that Naftali was trans, too. Naftali had opened his whole body to him, and that didn't make him any less a man. There

was definitely a lot of comfort in knowing that David's body would just be... understood.

But more, it was Naftali's words. *Come all over me, Daddy.*

Physically, it wasn't possible.

But in his mind, he'd covered those beautiful red marks that heated Naftali's upturned ass with spouts and spouts of white cum. He could imagine it trickling down Naftali's crack. Practically feel it shooting from his cock.

He'd come so hard that he shook.

Even now, he was getting hard again just thinking about it.

Naftali gave a soft snuffle in his sleep and then rolled over, spread out like a starfish. It was a good thing they had a king-sized bed, because Naftali moved more than anyone he knew.

He'd already woken David up a few times in the past few nights. But it was worth it, because often as not, Naftali would find David and snuggle up to him in his sleep.

For a moment, David contemplated waking him up right now. Covering him with kisses until he was panting and groaning with need, waking up soft and open for David to slip right back into him...

It was a beautiful picture. And he was certain that Naftali would respond with enthusiasm.

But he wanted Naftali to get a good night's sleep, too.

His baby boy had been yawning last night when they'd finished a movie in bed.

And the idea of watching over his sleep, of taking care of him in this way too, gave David a tender twinge in his chest.

So David rested one hand under his cheek and watched the rise and fall of Naftali's chest.

Maybe he could plan their day.

Only...

Fuck.

It was Friday.

They were going skiing in the morning... and then to the anniversary party in the afternoon.

Maybe it wasn't such a surprise that he was struggling to sleep today.

David claimed that his parents had no effect on his life choices. That he'd set appropriate boundaries that let him stay in touch and also live happily. That they maintained a friendly, casual relationship.

Still, he wasn't looking forward to seeing them this afternoon. His belly started to churn.

How would they react to Naftali?

How would they react to *him*?

Suddenly, he wasn't sure that he wanted Naftali to see all that.

He wanted Naftali to admire him. To look up to him for courage and strength. To take care of anything that went wrong.

He already had enough difficulties, between his stutter and his struggles with people. He didn't need anyone to point them out to the one man he wanted to impress.

On top of that, all of his relatives would be there. People who'd only known him before. People who he might not even remember. A whole noisy, invasive crowd of them.

Just the idea of it made him shudder.

His nerves were getting to be too much for staying in bed. Sometimes he paced, or took a long shower.

Yes, that would work.

He got out of bed.

"Daddy?" came Naftali's sleep-muddled voice.

God, his heart hurt just hearing that name sometimes. Naftali had said it even in his sleep.

"Go back to sleep, baby boy. It's still early."

Naftali's hum seemed to mean agreement, because he rolled over the other way, his breaths soon coming evenly.

So David took a long shower, letting himself get lost in the pelting water on his shoulders.

It was a type of stimming, he now knew. A physical sensation that he could use to calm himself down when his emotions got to be too much for him.

When he was a teenager, his father used to bang on the bathroom door, reminding him that he was wasting water.

His mother used to tell his father to leave him alone, saying *girls will be girls*, which he'd hated even more, though he didn't have any words for why it felt so wrong at the time.

And now he was thinking about his parents again.

But he was an adult now. And he could take a long shower if he wanted to. Guilt free.

With a conscious effort, he decided he would think of something happy. That was something he'd learned in therapy: he *could* control his thoughts, and that would let him, sometimes, control his feelings.

It wasn't hard to think of something happy. Naftali in this very shower, letting David take his weight as he soaped and touched each gorgeous plane of his body.

David let himself drift, imagining Naftali there with him again. Until he started noticing the square, white tiles of the shower wall and the patterns that they made. Then even those thoughts sort of disconnected, and he just got lost in the repetition of the water on his skin.

He had no idea how long he was in there, but eventually there was a knock at the door.

It felt like he was swimming to the surface. He'd needed this time, for the water to crash over his mind like ocean waves.

"Come in," he called. Thank goodness the shower curtain was a solid white sheet. Despite everything, he wasn't quite ready for Naftali to see him naked.

Maybe getting there, but not yet.

“Daddy?” Naftali asked.

David could barely hear him, so he shut off the water. The whole bathroom was steamy and warm.

“Is everything alright?”

It took a moment to find his voice. What did alright mean, anyway? And how much should he say?

Before he could answer, Naftali continued. “I woke up and I missed you.”

The sweetness was killing him.

But how could he be a good Daddy now, when he was already feeling off-balance?

“And also,” Naftali added, “I need to pee.”

David’s laughter shook him out of silence. This, at least, he could handle. “Let me dry off, and you can come in.”

“Okay.” The door shut.

David dried off quickly, then slid out to exchange places with Naftali. His eyes traced over the ruffled blankets on the bed, seeing but unseeing.

He knew he should be getting dressed—or at least slipping on his underwear before Naftali came back—but he couldn’t get his mind to go there.

It was just stuck.

Sometimes he *couldn’t* change his thoughts and his feelings, either.

And he really, really didn’t want to see his parents and forty other people. With Naftali, or without, they both had their own pitfalls.

But he *did* have to go. He couldn’t just elect not to attend, which is what he chose in most of his life if he didn’t want to do something. He was an adult. He could not go to things.

Except for this.

David's stomach hurt, and he needed something to cling to. He got his headphones first. Music always helped him, and he had a playlist just for this.

On his way back, he stepped on one of Naftali's shoes. That set him into motion.

Every item out of place seemed to scratch across his vision like a stain. He picked up Naftali's shoes, lining them up in the closet.

It gave him a little pulse of pleasure, to see them arranged so neatly by his own shoes, and also to know that he was taking care of Naftali's things.

He checked his memory, and yes, Naftali had given him blanket permission to move anything.

So he picked up a shirt that Naftali hadn't worn yet, and an unexpected green whiteboard marker that lay on the floor.

He organized Naftali's books by size. Coiled up cables and folded clothes that he thought to be clean. Placed useful objects in backpack pockets, and lined up all of the ornamental ones—which didn't seem to have a rhyme or reason—in a neat row along the back of the desk. A rock. A plastic panda. A bouncy ball. Two little prayer hats that he thought were called yamakuhs. A bedraggled feather. And on, and on. He put the largest in the middle, then made sure they decreased in size, out to the edges.

He liked arranging them. Liked touching Naftali's special things, and hopefully making them easier for him to find. Giving him a pleasing presentation.

When everything was finished, he turned to the dresser.

It was still covered with a staggering number of kinky sex toys. That was almost enough to make him smile. He would—not now, but hopefully soon—get to play with them. With Naftali.

With reverence, he sorted through them, arranging them by purpose and size. The floggers from last night stretched out along one edge by the cane. He rolled up long straps and shorter ones that were surely meant for restraint. The ropes

came in beautiful hues, and he stroked their rough-smooth texture a few times before setting them down. Then the dildos and buttplugs. Had those been *inside* Naftali's body? They were clean, but they certainly weren't in any packaging.

If touching the things in Naftali's backpack had been intimate, this was even more so.

He lined up the last few objects, creating a spiral with the chain that connected the nipple clamps. There. Now he could see everything. And more, it was all lined up to be pleasing to the eye. Everything exactly where it belonged.

He finally looked up to find Naftali sitting cross-legged on the bed, watching him.

Oh. He hadn't realized Naftali was even there.

Reluctantly, David pulled off his headphones. "Hey," he offered. Because that's what people said.

"Hey, Daddy," Naftali replied.

So, he was still Daddy. At least for now.

"Want to tell me about this?" Naftali gestured around the room. David could detect only curiosity and acceptance in his face, and his voice was soft.

"Uh... I j-j-j-just thought..." David wanted to say that the room looked better this way. That it made his eyes happy, and his brain happier. That he wanted Naftali to like it, too. "Is this okay?"

"Of course it's okay. I told you that you could move my things."

David swallowed. "My, uh-uh-uh-uh-uh, my autism comes with a s-s-s-s-side of OCD. Not always but... it can g-get worse. The st-st-st-st- the-the-the stuttering c-c-c-can be a side effect, too. And the ins-s-s-somnia."

Naftali nodded. "And they're all hitting right now?"

David nodded. He knew his tongue would twist itself up.

"What can I do to support you?"

He was sure that Naftali had been trained to say that—probably part of being a teacher. But he appreciated it anyway.

“I...” He hated to say this. “I d-d-d-d- d-don’t think I c-c-c-can go skiing today.” Which sucked, because they’d bought a three-day pass, and this was the third day. After that, the ski lodge would be closed for Christmas Eve and Christmas. The next day was the Kinkmas thing, and then they were going home.

But more than that, he didn’t want to see the disappointment on Naftali’s face. “Y-Y-Y-Y-Y-You can s-still go.”

“That’s silly. I don’t have any reason to go if you’re not there.”

David hadn’t expected the wave of relief that crashed through him. Naftali wasn’t leaving.

“What do you need right now?”

Food, probably, at some point, though he didn’t feel hungry. Mostly, he was kind of hoping that if he crawled back into bed, that Naftali would cuddle next to him. But he couldn’t quite make himself say that.

“Why don’t you put your PJ’s back on,” Naftali suggested. “We can watch a movie or something.”

That sounded perfect. When the feelings crashed over him, he just wanted to watch something familiar. Something where he could quote every line.

David put his pajamas on in the bathroom. When he returned, he found that Naftali had piled up the pillows at the back of the bed and was holding his tablet. “What shall we watch?”

A lot of David’s comfort movies were actually kids’ movies. The ones that he’d memorized as a child, before his parents stopped him from watching the same thing over and over. There were fewer that he’d grown to love as a teen or adult.

“L-L-Labyrinth?” he suggested. That wasn’t too childish.

“Oh my God. I love Labyrinth. Best movie ever. David Bowie is just so genderlicious. You might have to stop me from watching it twice.”

Naftali was already zipping around on the screen, so he didn't see David nod. He would happily watch it twice, too. Though he assumed that Naftali didn't mean it literally.

The second David slid under the covers, Naftali snuggled into his arms, twining their legs together.

It was... God, it was everything. Naftali's supportive presence. The weight of his body. The way that, even now, he'd assumed that David would be the big spoon.

The way that he hadn't run for the hills, literally or metaphorically.

Naftali started the movie. The haunting music and fluttering owl gave way to a very young Jennifer Connelly addressing the Goblin King in her book, then racing inside with her waterlogged dog.

Of course, Naftali sang along to every song, his smooth voice capturing each nuance, and often chiming in on favorite lines, too.

David let himself get swept away, quoting lines back, and even laughing. Naftali somehow convinced the hotel staff to let him bring two breakfast plates upstairs, and David found that he was even hungry enough to enjoy a muffin, then some eggs.

Especially when Naftali, without asking, turned up the volume so he wouldn't have to hear him chewing.

It was all Naftali—his quiet, soothing presence. His warmth.

They started the movie a second time—which no one else in David's life had *ever* suggested, but it was exactly what he wanted—and sometime very much later David found himself waking up, groggy and disoriented, to smooth, soothing music that definitely wasn't the soundtrack he'd fallen asleep to.

He felt drained, but more even-keeled. The torrential emotions had run their course.

He blinked and sat up to find Naftali looking out the window and playing a wooden flute, his nimble fingers dancing over the holes.

David didn't even wonder where it came from. Of course, Naftali had a wooden flute in his luggage. And of course, he was playing lullabies on it while he watched the snow. A modern Pan.

Naftali turned, still playing, and then let the tune reach its resolution. He dropped it to his side. "Hey, Daddy. How are you feeling?"

"Better. What time is it?"

"A little after two. We still have over an hour before we need to go."

David groaned. "I don't want to see my f-f-family."

Naftali nodded calmly. "I wondered if that was it. Family can be tricky."

"I don't-I don't-I don't... I don't want you to have to s-see them either."

Naftali crossed to the bed. "Are cuddles good now?"

"Yes."

That was all the invitation Naftali needed to crawl onto his lap, knees splayed out to the sides so their faces were inches apart. "How about kisses?"

"Those are g-g-good too."

Naftali started gently, pressing soft lips to his, letting David savor each touch. When David opened his mouth, Naftali matched him, tangling their tongues together.

David's hands rose automatically to squeeze along his back, filled with the warmth and solidness that was his baby boy.

Who, miraculously, still wanted to kiss him after his meltdown this morning.

Kissing Naftali like this, without any urgency, might be the best stim that there was. Their chests pressed together, anchoring him perfectly.

“I have an idea,” Naftali whispered, when they finally broke for air.

“What?”

“I want you to get me ready, Daddy. You choose my clothes. You put them on me. I want Daddy to take care of everything I need.” He pressed a kiss to David’s cheek. “And then, the whole time we’re there, you can know that every article on my body was placed there by your hand.”

David’s heart leapt, even as his body relaxed, because this was exactly, *exactly* what he needed. Putting him back in control, in just the right way. And Naftali had suggested it before he’d even figured it out himself. “That sounds good, baby boy.”

“Thank you, Daddy.” Naftali kissed him again. “And if you like, you can add a few little secrets.” Naftali’s voice had that naughty, suggestive tone that David was coming to know so well.

David’s breath hitched. “Like what?”

“Oh... like what if every time I moved or sat down, you knew I was feeling the butt plug you put inside of me? Or what if I was hiding a pair of nipple clamps under my sweater?”

Oh, fuck. David could imagine all of that. In fact... he might not give a damn about *anything* at this party if Naftali was walking around like that.

“So, what do you think, Daddy?”

“I think you’re trouble,” David growled in reply. Because he could even handle teasing right now. Naftali was like a breath of fresh air.

“Does that mean you’re going to do it?”

“You better b-b-believe I am.”

Naftali cocked his head to the side. “If you’re thinking of nipple clamps, you’ll actually need to put them on me right before we go inside. Or, you know, before we sit down to dinner or something. My limit’s about an hour if they’re set loosely. For a butt plug... three or four hours. Maaaaaybe five? And you might need to apply more lube. But I’m sure we can find a bathroom somewhere.”

A bathroom. In his parents’ house. Good God.

Except he could imagine it so clearly.

“So,” Naftali concluded, “Use that knowledge wisely, Daddy.” He was grinning like a maniac.

“You really are trouble, baby boy.”

Naftali squirmed in his lap. “Get me ready, Daddy!”

DAVID

Naftali was singing again, as they drove down the highway. His whole body lightly swayed and his fingers moved as they tapped out the beat. That was typical for the car, though—he was rarely still, and just seemed to emanate music from his soul.

Between songs, Naftali asked, “Anything else you want to tell me before we get there?”

There probably was, but David wasn’t sure if he wanted to go into it or not.

While David was thinking, Naftali turned in his seat, drawing his knees up under him. Then he let out a moan. “Daddy,” he whispered. “I better not sit like this later, or *everyone* is going to know how good your plug feels in my ass.”

With Naftali, that pretty much guaranteed that he’d do it before the night was out.

Instead of feeling worried, which should have been his reaction, all David could call up was increasingly wicked thoughts. He had to bite back a moan in return.

He could *make* Naftali sit like that. Maybe wrap one arm around him, then whisper that he should pull up his feet... “Not quite, baby boy. It’s y-y-your job to make sure they don’t notice. Otherwise, there might be a punishment.”

“Fuck,” Naftali cursed. “You are not helping. What’s the punishment?”

He looked entirely too excited about that possibility.

“It won’t be a spanking.” David actually had no idea. He just loved saying it, and Naftali seemed to bring it out in him.

“Dammit.” Naftali pouted, but only for a moment. “So, anything else I should know about the fam?”

David rolled his eyes. “Uh... I don’t even know where to start. There’s going to be too much f-f-f-food and a godawful centerpiece. Please compliment it, as my mother will have made it herself. The ugly centerpiece, not the food—that’s catered. She’s going to compare me to my brother, Sean, because he’s straight and gave her grandchildren. She’s also going to compare him to me, because he’s an art teacher, whereas I have a *real* job. I should mention that he loves his job as an art teacher, and the two-the two-the two of you will probably get along well.”

As soon as he said it, he realized that might have been the wrong thing to bring up. Naftali had those same insecurities about “real jobs” and his own worth.

But Naftali was already on his own path. “Hang on, hang on,” he called. He reached for the backpack at his feet, accompanied by another aroused hum. “God, I really hope I don’t embarrass myself later.” He didn’t seem at all phased by the possibility, though.

“Okay, give me a sec...” Naftali was flipping through a notebook. David couldn’t even begin to imagine why.

Naftali started to write. “God-awful-centerpiece. Real job. Trans-phobia. Ho-mo-pho-bi-a. Um... married. And... grandkids. Alright, give me more.”

“What are you doing?”

“We’re going to play bingo.” He held up the notebook. Like this was self-evident.

David was mostly watching the road—they were close enough to Portland now to get some traffic, even though they were going to turn off before they reached the city. But what he could see from the corner of his eye was a classic bingo

grid, with a large star in the middle. A handful of squares had been filled in with Naftali's messy handwriting.

"Are you serious?" He asked, but he was already laughing. This was going to be a family visit like none other before.

"Why not? Keep going."

"My sister-in-law, Alicia, is black. So my mom w-w-won't be overtly racist, but she'll say *people like Alicia*. As in 'I know that it's different for people like Alicia...' and then she'll smile because she's so understanding."

"Um, that's racist."

"It is. God, it's just... Do we have to go?"

Naftali squeezed his knee. "We'll only be there for a few hours. We'll hang out with Alicia and Sean, right? What are their kids' names?"

"Jorah is six. Kenzie is three. Unless they've had birthdays. I don't see them much, but they're s-s-sssss-sweet kids."

"Awesome. Kids are an excellent excuse to hide out in the den and ignore everyone else."

This was probably true. David just wouldn't have thought of it. Sometimes kids were hard to make friends with, too. But Sean and his family were honestly the only people he wanted to see.

"Okay, I'm gonna give *people like Alicia* and *racist bullshit* each their own square. Keep going with your mom."

David just had to chuckle. "Uh... She's going to tell you about the lesbian couple at her church. And the one gay guy."

"Hmmm... is that one square or two?"

"She'll bring them up together, usually. As far as I can tell, they have nothing else in common with each other, or with my mother."

"Let's start with one square, and expand it to two if we run out of ideas."

“P-p-put down that she’s an ally, too.”

Naftali snickered.

David couldn’t believe he was doing this. But he was... maybe even tentatively looking forward to this. Kind of like a haunted house, where you knew you’d be uncomfortable, but in a way that you had some control over, and it held its own amusement value.

He was kind of curious to think up more squares now. “Um, God. She might try to aggressively show you a picture of me as a baby. Or, no, probably my high school class picture that’s still up in the hall. She’ll tell you how beautiful I used to be.”

“Shit. Are you kidding?”

“Did I mention the deadnaming?”

“Well... We’re filling up a lot of squares. And you still want me to...”

“Ignore it. Just keep u-u-u-using my name like you normally would.”

“You know, there are some folks who will retouch baby pictures to be gender affirming. Like, they’ll give you a new haircut and fill in the background, or change the color of the clothes. That could be cool to think about.”

“What, and just switch it out one day when she isn’t looking?”

Naftali laughed. “Yeah! Or just have it, you know, for yourself.”

Actually, David kind of liked that idea. Maybe just one or two pictures would feel... healing. Maybe a baby picture and a photo with his college friends or something. “I might look into it.”

“Alright, gimme more.”

“This is our turn off.”

“Speed round!”

Ugh. Speed made his brain go all wonky. At least he knew the roads around here. “Uh, uh... v-v-v-v-v-volunteering. Sh-sh-sh-she always v-volunteers.” He truly couldn’t think of anything else, and they were only a few blocks away. He hadn’t even explained why it got a square.

“Got it. I’ll just give us a freebie in each row.”

David parked in the street in front of the house. It looked like it always did. Manicured lawn with those weird lawn-cabbage things that stayed bizarrely purple and green all winter planted along the walk. The gardeners tore them out each spring and replaced them with something new.

The Christmas lights that meticulously outlined the front porch and eaves of the house made it feel festive, like something from a postcard. The lights were all on, glowing warmly, and the Christmas tree filled most of the bay window.

David felt jittery, but not in the way he expected. Naftali had changed all of that. “I should have mentioned the lawn cabbages,” he said.

Naftali laughed. “I’ll give you that one. Lawn cab-bag-es. See! We already got one. Ready, Daddy?”

“I h-hope you know not to say that inside.”

“I do. Just getting it out of my system. Daaaaddyyy. Daaaaaaddy! Daddy-Daddy-Daddy! Okay, I’m good.”

David laughed as he opened his door. Naftali was already bouncing around his side of the car, and he claimed David’s hand as soon as they reached the walk.

Then he whispered, “Daddy,” one more time, like it hadn’t quite been enough.

Something clenched in David’s chest. What would it be like to just... have Naftali’s enthusiasm and joy with him all the time?

To be introducing him to his family for real?

Not that he cared that much about his family’s opinions, but what the act represented.

What if Naftali were really his?

What if Naftali called him *Daddy* and really meant it?

While David was caught in this moment of sparkling dreams, Naftali was bending over to look at the ground. “Do you think we can eat the lawn cabbages?”

“Uhhhh...” How was he just so... so... Naftali?

“I’ll look it up and let you know,” Naftali assured him.

David nodded, smiling. Of course he would. And then he would probably eat them.

Naftali swung their hands together as they continued the walk. “Oh! How much PDA is okay?”

“This is, this is—this is fine.”

“And a kiss on the cheek?” Naftali stood on his toes and demonstrated.

David nodded. That was fine, too. That was... God, his entire family was going to think they were really together. They’d be asking about Naftali for years.

Before David had the time to dwell on all of the ramifications of that terrifying thought, they’d reached the front door. There was nothing else to do but go in.

“David!” Thank God, the first person to see him was Alicia. She was dressed in an elegant red dress, her hair in a curly halo around her head.

“Hey Alicia!” He dropped Naftali’s hand to wave, and then greeted his brother, who followed behind her. “Sean, good to see you.”

They hugged, and then David pulled Naftali up against him. “This is Naftali.” There were looks of interest. They’d both met Mike a while ago, but this was the first time he’d brought someone to meet the parents.

“Hey!” Naftali said brightly. “David says I’m going to like you guys.” He extended his hand for shakes, and by the time he pulled back, he’d already asked Sean about his art teaching and dove into a conversation about meeting student’s

emotional needs through the arts. By the time they'd hung up their coats, Sean had been pulled away by a shout from one of the kids somewhere, and Naftali was asking Alicia about her pathway to tenure and what percent of her time went to teaching versus her own biology research, and how parenting had impacted it.

David just followed along. Naftali seemed to make friends everywhere he went. It was kind of stunning watching him. It was clear that he cared about people, just by the thoughtful questions he asked.

David was happy to just listen and interject a comment here or there. It was quieter in the hallway, and Naftali was still holding his hand. Talking with just a couple of people who he liked was his preferred social interaction.

They lingered there, until a group of people came in behind them, who David didn't know.

Might as well get this over with.

The three of them entered the living room, which had been extended into the back yard with an enclosed temporary pavilion and space heaters that glowed with flickering orange flames. The tables and chairs were elegantly covered with white cloths and gold bows, and the whole space was decked with boughs of holly and pine, tied together with more of the gold bows.

"Fancy," Naftali commented with a grin. "You take me to all the best places. With all the..." He glanced around until he found the monstrosity presiding over the buffet table. "...best centerpieces." Then, he clutched David's arm suddenly, speaking in tones of wonder. "David, it has *sparkly quails* in it. I want a *sparkly quail*. Can I have one?"

And just like that David's tension was gone. "No, Naftali." There were four or five of the feathered faux birds mixed in with the tower of pine and golden glitter. Along with assorted berries, glass balls, and God knew what else. It was likely that no one would miss one little faux bird... but when Naftali said things like that, it was like he was just begging David to be his

Daddy. He had to put his foot down. “You may not take a sparkly quail out of the centerpiece.”

Alicia laughed. “If you take one, please don’t tell my children.”

David shook his head, taking in the room. It was crowded, with a constant hum of laughter and conversation. Probably, everyone else was having a good time.

It already felt overwhelming. Too many voices. Too many bodies.

His mother and father were holding court at a rectangular table at the center. Perched on top of it was an array of photos. Just great.

He tugged at his sleeve so that he could rub the edges of it, then remembered that his mother hated that. He felt along the ridges of the phone case in his pocket instead.

“That’s your dad?” Naftali asked. At David’s nod, he added, “You look just like him.”

It was a small thing, but a little bit of David still glowed to hear things like this. Even all these years after transitioning, it meant something that he looked like his father. They had the same nose, and the same jaw line now that David’s cheeks had grown more masculine and slim. Mostly, he still enjoyed the affirmation of looking like a man.

They approached the table, and David cringed before his mother even greeted them. He knew what was coming. “Alicia! And Dian—”

“You must be Mr. and Mrs. Wisener,” Naftali cut in smoothly, overriding her. “I’m Naftali. David’s told me all about you.”

Score one for Naftali.

“Oh?” His mother looked pleased. “Don’t believe any of it,” she joked.

Naftali’s smile still looked genuine. “He was just telling me about one of your volunteer projects, but I’d love to hear more.”

And just like that, the two of them were off. She talked about church benefits and Naftali complimented her on how important volunteers like her were to his synagogue. She asked what he did, and he described his job like he worked full-time as a music and Torah school director.

If David hadn't realized how pieced together his jobs were—or how belittled he'd been made to feel about that—he never would have known now. Naftali sounded exactly as talented as he actually was, and David's mother showered him with compliments.

David had known his mother could be like this, but he'd somehow forgotten. She had loads of charisma when she was just meeting new people. Sometimes his friends hadn't even believed him when he'd described how difficult it was being raised by her. Would Naftali start to think that, too?

Alicia had taken the opportunity to slip away, and David's father had returned to eating the array of hors d'oeuvres on his plate. David wondered if he could slip away, too. The two of them were lost in conversation. He was invisible.

Just David and his phone case.

Then Naftali nudged David's arm. Naftali was watching David's mother, but his hand rose to his collar to trace over the soft ridges of the creamy white sweater that David had chosen for him.

The sweater that David had put on him, after dropping kisses along his neck and calling him baby boy.

The sweater that bundled Naftali all up like a present, complete with a plug that David had slid in and out of his ass an hour ago, while Naftali moaned and made all sorts of dirty promises about unwrapping him later.

He hadn't told Naftali, but when David had dressed himself, he'd put on his favorite strap-on. It was long and heavy with an erectile rod inside, so that while it waited tame and plump in his pants right now, it would be ready with just a snap.

That was his present for Naftali. Possibly one that they would use in this very house.

David felt himself flush.

He and Naftali were playing this naughty little game... all while talking with his mother. It was bizarre, but David suddenly felt this tremendous rush of affection for Naftali. It was banked arousal, but so much more than that. It was solidarity and support, combined with Naftali's unique playfulness and zest for life.

"So, have you been taking Diana to this synagogue of yours?" David's mother cut in.

David cringed despite himself. He should have known he couldn't escape the deadnaming.

Naftali looked confused for a moment, like *who the hell is Diana?*, then connected the dots. He answered without a break. "Not yet. But *David* and I have been lighting the Hanukkah candles together." He slid an arm around David's waist, like they belonged together. Like they were really building something.

David held him in return, feeling the warm solidity of his frame. Naftali was like his forcefield. He stroked the soft fluff of David's sweater, letting it soothe him.

"You should take her," his mother advised. "I mean, *him*." Like it was easy to get mixed up when he was standing in front of her with a full beard and flat, broad chest. Like she hadn't made this "mistake" every time she saw him for almost a decade.

"If he wants to go with me," Naftali answered simply.

"He needs it in his life." She pronounced. "It's not too different, right? After all, Jesus was a Jew."

Naftali's mouth just about fell open, probably because that was deeply offensive. But he recovered quickly. "It's a little different. Different holidays. Different language, you know. The whole service is in Hebrew."

Naftali was being snarky, but David's mother went on like she hadn't heard. "Oh, that reminds me. Are you coming to the Christmas Eve service tomorrow night? Diana always loved the music. Oh, and our congregation is very accepting. There's a lesbian couple there, with the cutest little girl. And a gay man. He's in the men's ministry."

Naftali turned to David, eyes lit up like he'd won a prize. Or a bingo square. "That sounds lovely."

David interrupted. "We'll have h-h-h-h—, h-headed out by then." Not quite a lie. They weren't flying home till Tuesday, but they wouldn't be in the neighborhood anymore. His mother didn't know that he hadn't changed his flight plans—she just hadn't remembered his schedule. Or had willfully forgotten.

"You really should stay for longer," she chided him. "I asked you to stay. And remember to rehearse the sentence in your head before you speak, so you don't stutter."

Like he was a child, who didn't know that. Like he was a constant disappointment to her.

Naftali squeezed him tightly, a silent support. Then, Naftali dragged David's arm downward, until it wasn't hanging respectably around his waist, but resting on his ass.

And suddenly all he could think about was the plug inside his boy. His boy who was a devious, naughty, perfect little minx.

And the way he could pull out that plug and dive inside him...

He ran his fingers over the seam of Naftali's pocket instead. A much, much better stim. The sexiest stim. And he didn't even have to mask it, because Naftali would know what he was doing and support him.

"We have some Hanukkah-Christmas plans of our own," Naftali told her, straight-faced, all while subtly wiggling his ass against David's palm. "I'm very fortunate to have David in my life." Then he pressed a kiss to David's cheek, as if they

really were boyfriends with plans bigger than maybe checking out the dungeon before saying goodbye in a few days.

Still, the simple kiss made him flush.

“How long have you two been together?” David’s mother asked, before turning to him with a frown. “Diana didn’t tell me about you until last month.”

David’s stomach clenched. What could he possibly say?

But Naftali just laughed. “Oh, we were keeping it casual for a while. We met at this workshop and started talking. David just picks up new information and skills so quickly—he really impressed everyone. We took our friendship more slowly for a while, but I knew he was the one I wanted.” Naftali gave David a couple-y squeeze. “He really knows how to make a guy feel special.”

Now David was definitely blushing. Because Naftali had just spun their whole relationship to not just make it look good, but like David was the one he actually wanted, out of all the experienced guys out there that Naftali could be with instead.

David’s mother squinted, probably because her worldview was getting tipped on its axis. “It’s nice to be friends first,” she finally managed. “That’s what a stable relationship is based on.” She put her hand on her husband’s shoulder, and he looked up, startled, from his preoccupation with the hors d’oeuvres.

Naftali might have *possibly* snorted. It was more like a light sniff. David didn’t know how Naftali was holding back his laughter.

“Tell me about these pictures,” Naftali suggested.

Now David let out his own strained snort. Because... Hell. Because this was practically a comedy routine at this point. When Naftali was here, his mother’s behavior was *hilarious*.

“Oh, this one is our wedding day,” she cooed. “Doesn’t Edward look handsome?”

“David looks just like him,” Naftali replied, then, before she could comment, followed up with, “And such a beautiful bride.”

“Oh, you don’t have to say that, dear.”

Wow. If Naftali was *dear*, he’d officially made it into her good books.

“Here’s Sean and Diana.” She held up a posed family portrait in front of a Christmas tree. They were wearing matching family outfits, the red plaid of the dresses coordinated with bow ties for Sean and his father. Sean looked about ten, and David was about five. “She used to have the most beautiful hair. Remember that?” She looked up at David.

The picture felt like a different person. Sure, it was him, at one point, but he’d hated the ruffled dresses and the little barrettes. Worse was the way that his mother had fawned over his hair. He’d wanted it short even then.

He stared back, rather than answering.

“You must be so proud of your boys,” Naftali said.

“Of course,” she nodded. “You know, I was telling all of my friends that Diana got a promotion last month. I know she works so hard. But... I guess there won’t ever be grandchildren, will there.” She looked at both of them sadly.

Naftali just turned to David and silently mouthed, “Bingo!”

David’s cheeks filled, holding back the laughter that wanted to emerge.

“Wait!” His mother squawked, “What? Are you thinking about it? I heard that you can get a surrogate to...”

David finally let loose a chuckle. His mother was rabid, and she’d completely misinterpreted their interaction. It was funnier that she had no idea that Naftali’s reproductive organs weren’t what she thought they were.

Naftali’s earnest answer should have won an award. “We’re still pretty new in our relationship.”

“But you talked about it. I can tell. A mother always knows.”

Ha. David wondered if he could get a retroactive bingo square for that one, too.

Naftali kept his answer light. “I think we’d have a few steps to go through first.”

It did make David wonder, though. Did Naftali want children? He would be a great father. David had almost given up the possibility, because Mike had been adamantly against parenting and David had been ambivalent at best.

If Naftali were really his, though... He could almost see himself with a kid. Not because his mother wanted it, but because they’d take the kid on hikes together. Play silly games.

Or maybe Naftali would find someone else to do that with. When he was ready.

David’s mother went on to the next picture and tuned out the rest of their conversation. Except for the moment when his mother—just like clockwork—said “people like Alicia” and Naftali popped in, all innocence, with “Biology professors? No? Uh... mothers with young children!” and kept guessing until he’d made her say it.

God, he was perfect.

David jumped when he suddenly felt someone next to him. It was a couple who he didn’t know—around his parents’ age, so probably colleagues.

His parents greeted them warmly, and Naftali made their goodbyes, with a departing wish of congratulations on their anniversary.

“Done?” Naftali asked as soon as they slipped away.

“Yeah.” David let out a long exhalation. He was feeling better than he’d ever expected to, but the room was still too crowded, and today had been a tangle of too many emotions.

“Where should we go so that it’ll look like we’re still at the party, but we don’t have to interact with anyone?”

Damn. How did Naftali know?

It was the strategy David always tried, but he never would have said it out loud.

“Maybe over there?” He pointed to a table in the corner. If they hunkered down, hopefully no one would come over and talk to them. Or Naftali would deflect them all with his usual ease.

David didn’t know most of his extended family well enough to consider them anything but unfamiliar and overwhelming. But he would stay because he was supposed to.

Naftali shook his head. “Do you see all these people milling around?” He indicated the house, where people were, indeed, wandering between the heated tent and the first floor. “Think bigger. We’re not staying in the same room with your mother.”

Wow. It had never occurred to David that he could just... leave.

Well, of course he had hidden away from parties as much as he could as a child. His old room was now a guest bedroom, but it still had the comfort of the window that he loved, looking out over the trees. He desperately wanted to go there—or better yet, take Naftali and drive away from this whole mess. Curl up in their magnificent bed at the lodge and watch the snow fall.

But he really should put in appearances for at least an hour or two, because his mother would check.

Naftali just gave him permission to do it his own way.

He thought for a moment about all of those dirty plans they’d made and his arousal rose. Naftali was so delightful. Deserving of every reward.

But David wasn’t quite ready for that yet. He knew he’d be in the wrong headspace.

“Did I see a grand piano on the way in?” Naftali asked.

“Yes. Sean played for a f-few years when we were kids, but no one else uses it.”

“Is it in tune?” Naftali looked doubtful.

“Probably.” His parents would think of it as maintenance, like hiring the landscapers.

Naftali rubbed his hands together. “Here’s the plan.” He dropped his voice to a dramatic whisper, like they were spies discussing tactics. “First, we case out the buffet. I’m thinking... you’re on food, I’m on desserts. Get two plates so we don’t have to come back. Then, we meet at the piano.” His voice changed again, going high and cute. “You can stand in the little curvy part to be my muse and feed me delicacies.”

David laughed. How could he not? “Is that what a muse does?”

“Yep! Ready? Three... two... one... break!”

Still smiling, David went to get the food. With Naftali here the whole interaction with his mother had been... almost fun.

He chose the best pieces of everything from the buffet, thinking about what he could slide into Naftali’s mouth and what would make him hum with pleasure. Probably everything, really, which made David feel warm inside.

By the time he’d finished the task, he could see Naftali making his way across the room. David led the way to the piano, which had its own room that opened into the others. There was no one else in the sunny little space so far, and that was just what David needed.

David set his two plates on top of the closed piano, and Naftali deposited his beside them.

“That’s a lot of desserts,” David observed. They were stacked so high that some seemed to be in danger of toppling off the confectionary mountain.

“I know! I got some of everything.” The moment his hands were empty, Naftali flowed into David’s arms. “How are you doing, Daddy?”

So much better now that Naftali was pressed against him, warm breath against his cheek. “Alright. That was... that was pretty normal.”

“I’m sorry you had to go through that. She’s aggressive.”

That was a great word for his mother. Even before David had transitioned.

“Does your father even talk?”

“Sometimes. His hearing is going, and he refuses to get hearing aids. I think their marriage has gotten better for it.”

Naftali laughed, delighted. “Sounds like a great solution for both of them.” Then he tilted his head up to David’s ear, his lithe body squirming against David’s front. “Daddy, I think you’re going to need to check my plug pretty soon.”

“Oh. Is it getting uncomfortable?” Now he was worried.

“No, Daddy. It’s just going to be difficult to play the piano when I keep thinking about your cock inside me.”

David squeezed his eyes shut. Now he wasn’t going to be able to concentrate on anything else. He didn’t *want* to concentrate on anything else. He wanted to bend Naftali over the piano here and now. Let him know what his teasing would get him.

He took Naftali’s hand and guided it between them. He could feel as much as hear Naftali’s gasp when he reached the thick, full length below his zipper.

“Daddy...” Naftali sounded breathless. Awed. He stroked David’s cock, under the direction of David’s hand. “Need you, Daddy.”

God, yes. David needed his boy, too.

But then... there was also something exciting about making Naftali wait. So far, Naftali had pretty much been running the show. And while David was eternally grateful for how easy Naftali had made everything today, how understanding Naftali had been of his needs... David wanted that control back. He wanted to feel powerful again, like he was taking care of Naftali instead of the other way around.

And he needed a moment to grow into that role.

“Not yet, baby boy,” he cooed back. “Play me something pretty. And D-Daddy needs to give you something to eat.” Damn. He couldn’t believe he’d just said that in his parents’ house.

Then again, he’d never expected to have a sexy man fondling his dick in the sunroom, either.

“Mmmmm... *Yes, Daddy.*” Naftali’s eyes darted downward in a suggestion of just what he was hoping to eat.

“*Food, Nafti.*”

Naftali blinked up at him innocently. “Of course, Daddy.”

His darling little monster.

Naftali sat at the piano—with a great production of stretching and quietly moaning so that all David could think about was that plug stretching out his ass—and then began to play.

He started with something soothing and sweet. Almost romantic. David held up a little ball of melon and Naftali nodded eagerly. He wasn’t even looking at the keys as he opened his mouth to swallow it, tongue darting out to lick David’s fingers.

David sucked in his breath.

God, Naftali was sexy. Playfully, sensuously, sexy. So entirely out of David’s league, and yet there he was, begging with eyes for more of whatever David wanted to give him.

He followed up with a little circle of bread spread with something orange and speckled with green. “Mmmmm...” Naftali hummed, pitched to the music.

It was like they were in a world apart.

They went on like that, Naftali playing and David unable to look away from him, until the first plate was almost gone.

Then there was a commotion at the door. “See! It is Unco David’s boyfwend!” That was Kenzie, swinging around the doorframe as she ran into the room, her afro-puff pigtails bouncing with her.

Jorah raced in right behind her, but then stopped less certainly by the entrance. David wasn't surprised—Jorah had always been shy, and David was practically a stranger.

“Hey!” Naftali turned around. “Are you Kenzie and Jorah?”

He'd even remembered their names.

David regretted the interruption, but if there was anyone he wanted to be interrupted by, it was these two. He barely got to see them.

“I'm Kenzie!” She pointed to herself. “Can you play Twinko, Twinko Witto Staw?”

“I love that song!” Naftali agreed. “Will you sing it for me?”

It was the fanciest arrangement of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star that David had ever heard. Naftali gave it a lush orchestral background the first time, and then went through it again with a reggae beat while Kenzie made her solo debut.

The man was damn talented, both musically and with the kids.

“Any requests, Jorah?”

The older boy had been sneaking closer to the piano while his sister sang. “Can you play Star Wars?”

Naftali scrunched up his eyebrows, then fiddled around with a few notes. “You mean like this?” He nailed the first few bars of the Imperial March. Then it got kind of flakey from there—most of the melody, with the occasional chord thrown in. He laughed, clearly unbothered by his failed attempts. “I don't really remember how it goes. And then it just kind of repeats?” He'd made it back to the beginning, the dun-dun-di-duun part that everyone recognized. The second time through sounded better.

Alicia found them, and then Sean joined a moment later. “I wondered where they got to. But then I heard Star Wars, and I knew.”

“Is that your favorite movie?” Naftali asked Jorah. “Who do you want to be?”

“Darth Vader.”

“Great choice. Do you have a lightsaber?”

“Yeah. Two of them. But Darth Vader’s is red.” Jorah was right by the piano bench now.

It was like magic, every time David saw it. Naftali could charm anyone.

“I hab a wite sabo, too!” Kenzie chimed in, pulling on David’s sweater.

“I bet you’re fierce with it. Are you Luke Skywalker or Princess Leia?”

Jorah rolled his eyes. “Princess Leia doesn’t have a lightsaber.”

“Good point. I always wanted to be Han Solo. He didn’t have a lightsaber, but he drove the Millennium Falcon and got to hang out with Chewie.” David could see Naftali as Han Solo. Slightly irresponsible, but always having the most fun.

“Play Izzy Bizzy ‘Pider!” Kenzie shouted.

Somehow Naftali managed to play Itsy Bitsy Spider for Kenzie while carrying on a conversation with Jorah about double-bladed lightsabers, and how the new movies weren’t as good, but had better weapons.

Sean stepped up next to David. “He’s good at this.”

David nodded. “I know.”

“And he seems like a good match for you. You smile when you look at him.”

David nodded. There wasn’t much else to say. Naftali would be a good match for anyone. He would make anyone smile.

“You all should come visit us sometime. I know we don’t live close but... we should both make more of an effort. Or do some video calls with the kids.”

“We should.” He didn’t have the heart to tell his brother that Naftali wouldn’t be a part of all that. It would still be nice to get to know his niece and nephew better. They might need a while to warm up to him, but they were worth that time.

He could start now. “Hey Kenzie. Do you know how to do flips?” That had been one of Mike’s niece’s favorite things to do.

“Uh huh!” Kenzie tumbled inelegantly across the floor. Calling it a summersault would be generous.

“Beautiful!” David applauded. “Let me show you another kind. H-h-h-hold my hands... Now walk up my legs. Really! Put your feet r-right here. Keep walking... higher... and... flip!” She turned over in a flurry of ruffled skirts and high-pitched shrieks, then popped up to face him. “Again!”

Naftali met his eyes, over her head, grinning from ear to ear. For a moment, something passed between them. Something affectionate and warm.

Then Jorah pulled at David’s pant leg. “Can I have a turn?”
“Sure.”

And somehow, David ended up having a marvelous afternoon, chatting with the one part of the family he wanted to see, laughing at Naftali’s antics with the kids, and sharing their ridiculous plate of desserts with everyone.

He was *almost* tempted to tell Sean that their flight back wasn’t until Tuesday, and that he could spend Christmas with them. But... maybe some other year.

He didn’t want to get into it with his mother again, and that’s who Sean’s family would be hanging out with. And, maybe selfishly, David wanted to spend more time with Naftali. They already had their own plan for the next two days.

Or maybe, just as selfishly, he didn’t want to have everyone get too used to Naftali and then have to explain his absence.

When people started filtering out, David and Naftali said goodbye to his family one more time, accepted an immense

bag of leftovers that the caterers had wrapped up, and hit the road.

“How was that?” Naftali asked.

“Great, actually.” David had left the party smiling, something that he didn’t think was even possible. “Thank you. That was... so much better than I expected it to be.”

“Any time.” Naftali offered happily. But of course, he didn’t mean that. It was just one of those things that people said. “I really enjoyed hanging out with your brother’s family. And meeting your parents was... educational.”

David merged onto the highway. “That’s one way to put it. They like you.”

Naftali shrugged. “That’s only because I was playing your mother’s game. Though I get the sense that it’s easier with her to just follow along, and then walk away to regroup.”

“Yeah.” That had been his strategy all his life. It was oddly affirming that Naftali, with all of his people skills, saw that, too.

Music swelled through the car’s speakers, and Naftali started singing, his light tenor wrapping around David like a blanket as the dark began to settle in around them.

Which was when Naftali produced a quail from beneath his folded coat.

“Good God, Naftali! You actually took it?”

“Yep. My two sidekicks each got one too. We swore a vow of secrecy from Grandma.”

David shook his head, exasperation warring with awe and a deep affection. “Didn’t I tell you not to take that?”

“Ummmm... I think I might have heard something like that.” Naftali twisted the bizarre bird’s wire legs around until it perched on top of the rear-view mirror. Now David would have to look at it every time he checked behind him.

It was really difficult keeping his face stern. “Well, I think I might remember a punishment coming.”

“But Daddy... I was so good all night!” Naftali’s hand settled on David’s knee. Probably getting glitter all over his jeans. Then it began to travel up his thigh. Over to his...

“Nafti! What are you doing?” David tried to make his voice threatening.

Naftali’s eyes were wide when he turned to face him. “Daddy! I can’t wait any longer. And I’ve been so good...”

“You were naughty. You s-s-stole that bird...” God, he loved this playful back and forth.

“Glitter quail.”

“And now you’re touching Daddy without permission.”

“But Daddy... I’ve been thinking about your cock all night.” His hands were on it, now, stroking up and down with enough pressure that David felt every motion, his bio-dick growing hard beneath.

Fuck.

“I could give you a blowjob,” Naftali offered. “Right now.”

David didn’t manage to fight back the moan that left his lips. He’d never asked his partners to suck him off. He didn’t see the point of it, when he couldn’t really feel it with a strap-on, and his dysphoria usually left him uncomfortable with anyone that close to his body. But the idea of Naftali’s head bent over him, making hungry, wet sounds of desire...

He clasped his hand down hard on Naftali’s and moved it away. His voice came out gruff. “That’s not safe, baby boy. You’d make Daddy crash the car.”

Truly, they were in the mountains now, the highway curving dangerously. And even if he couldn’t feel a blowjob, he knew the raw, dirty feeling of Naftali’s soft curls bent over his lap, would have him completely distracted.

Naftali reached for him again. “Need it, Daddy.”

Somehow, this boy made David feel like no one else ever had. Manly. Dominant. Desirable. And so fucking horny all

the time.

There was a sign for a scenic overlook in half a mile.

He put on the turn signal.

He'd never been this type of person before. Never even imagined it was possible.

"You have a punishment coming first, boy." He heard his own voice, rough and deep.

"Sorry, Daddy!" Naftali put his hands between his knees. "I don't need a punishment. I'll be so good." With Naftali, that was pretty much the opposite of a safeword. It was like begging.

They reached the lookout. It was nothing more than a pull-out space for three cars, with a bit of pavement and a wooden fence that appeared with his headlights. There was one streetlamp, but David parked as far away from it as possible. No one else was there, and if he turned off the car lights, it would be nearly dark.

"Back seat, boy."

Naftali was out of the car before David had even found his seatbelt. David leaned over and pulled the passenger seat forward, then got out and moved his own. He had lube in his pocket. He was ready for this.

The moment he slid into the back seat, Naftali was on him, all warm hands and warmer lips. One knee sliding over his hips, so that they were pressed together. Chest to chest, cock to cock.

"Settle, boy." In all the porn David had watched, that was the phrase that had always stuck with him. Something about the power and care in it. *Settle, boy.*

Of course, Naftali didn't settle. His hands roved everywhere. He kissed, open mouthed, down David's neck.

Willfully disobedient.

"Turn around, Naftali. Hands and knees."

He scampered to obey that command. “Yes, Daddy! Need you.”

“Pull down your pants.” It was too dark for David to do it. And he was feeling impatient. It was cramped in the car, Naftali’s boots up against David’s thighs, until David turned in his own seat, crouching with one leg on the floor for leverage. His head pressed against the ceiling, but that didn’t matter.

His eyes had adjusted to the dark, showing him the pale outline of Naftali’s bare ass. David felt his way over it, stroking and kneading. Pressing at the plug.

God, he still couldn’t believe Naftali had been wearing it all afternoon. It was like David’s claim on him.

David pulled back his hand and struck with a resounding clap.

“Daddy!” Naftali’s voice came out on a moan.

So David did it again. He had the angle better this time. And again, and again, each time rewarded with Naftali’s cries of pleasure.

“Do you think you’ve learned your lesson, boy?”

“No, Daddy. Need you to teach me.”

Fuck. His gorgeous little troublemaker. Who truly hadn’t done anything wrong. Who’d made a day that David was dreading into a memory to treasure.

David struck harder, distributing his blows over both cheeks and that sensitive area that Naftali had enjoyed so much with the flogger, where his fleshy butt met his tender thighs. Every few slaps, David made sure to hit the T-shaped base of the silicone plug, which was when Naftali really cried out.

David’s hand was starting to sting. Which seemed only fair, when Naftali’s ass had to be burning.

He knew Naftali could take more, but David was impatient now. He needed to mount and claim.

He kneaded Naftali's ass with one hand while he used the other to open his own jeans. This would be quick and dirty. No need to shove them much below his hips.

He pulled his cock from between the panels of his tight boxer briefs. It was warmed by his body, heavy in his hand. He gave a hard stroke along the bottom, from the base to the tip, and then he was erect. The soft click of the rod straightening within was lost to Naftali's cries.

When David's hands were free, he started to wiggle the plug, interspersed with more rough slaps. He slid it out, just a bit, then let it slide back in. And again.

Naftali was truly begging now, cries of *Daddy* and *more* and *please* intermingled in a senseless wail.

"You want my cock, baby boy?" He hadn't even known his voice could sound so rough. So dangerous.

"Yes, Daddy. Need it in me!" Naftali thrust backward, until David had to hold him still to pull the plug from his greedy body.

He let it fall to the floor, which was a problem to think about much later. He opened the pack of lube, coating his cock with two quick glides and then thrusting two fingers into Naftali's welcoming hole.

He was so *hot* inside. So tight and responsive. David pushed inside two more times, then three. Naftali was addictive.

Then he pulled out just far enough to guide his dick inside. He tried to go slowly. To give Naftali time to adjust. But Naftali pushed back, impaling himself with a wild cry.

The vibrations traveled down to David's groin, radiating pleasure. But even deeper was the pure joy of fucking.

He grasped Naftali's hips again, keeping him in place. An agonizingly slow withdrawal. An even slower return.

"Daddy, *please!*" Naftali was trembling under his hands.

"You sure?" Naftali's nod was all it took for David to drive in hard. "I'm gonna rail you, baby b-b-boy. Destroy your

pretty hole.” He didn’t even know where the words were coming from. Words he’d never thought he’d utter, but they were tumbling out of his mouth in a rough snarl.

“Yes. Make me feel it. Ohhhhh... Mmmm...” And Naftali was lost again.

David raised one hand to wrap around Naftali’s throat. Not hard enough to pose a threat—just a claim. Naftali was *his*. He was *owning* him.

Their bodies were pressed together in the tight confines of the car, layers of clothing separating them everywhere except those few exquisite inches of skin. There was no sound but their groans and the slap of their thighs.

Naftali’s voice was rising. His moans turning to breathy, pleading whimpers.

David reached around with the hand that still bore traces of lube, and burrowed past Naftali’s jeans to find his cock.

“Gonna come for Daddy, baby boy?”

Naftali didn’t even answer in words, his whole body shaking, and a hum that could almost have been a *yes*.

David snapped his hips harder, driving into him. He stroked Naftali’s cock to the same frantic beat, two fingers and a thumb jerking roughly followed by a glide over the smooth head. Ruining Naftali, in his mind, for anyone else.

Because David had sure as hell ruined him. He’d never had anyone he wanted this desperately.

Naftali’s whimpered breaths were even faster than the rhythm of their coupling. He was so close.

“Come, boy. Come for Daddy.”

Naftali cried out, and David could feel him falling apart in his arms. Shuddering and shaking as he rocked back for a few final thrusts that David gratefully offered him.

“Good boy.” David kissed the soft curls at the back of his head. Burrowed beneath the collar of his sweater to find his neck. Bit and licked, tasting his sweat. “So good for Daddy.”

Naftali was still now, but pressed up against him as close as he could get, muscles still trembling. David tried to ease out, but Naftali grabbed his arm, keeping David's hand tight around his throat and grounding him there. "Don't pull out yet," Naftali whispered. "Still need you, Daddy."

The car was getting increasingly uncomfortable in David's hunched position, but he didn't care. Feeling Naftali come in his arms was better even than coming himself. He'd stay as long as Naftali needed him.

Slowly, he pulled his hand away from Naftali's neck and stroked over his face. His beard was just starting to fill in, rough when he stroked against the grain. Naftali turned his head to kiss David's fingers.

Finally, Naftali released a low sigh. David took that as a signal to pull out, gently disentangling them.

Naftali turned as soon as he did, crowding into David's space. David sank down to the seat, jeans still hanging off his thighs.

"Let me, Daddy?" Naftali was stroking down his chest. Over his belly. Down to his hips.

"What?" David asked, incoherently, though he already knew.

"Hand job. Please, Daddy?"

David knew he wouldn't be able to feel most of it. Sometimes his cock felt like an extension of his body, like it had when he'd been plunging into Naftali's ass just moments ago.

Sometimes, though, it just didn't. A disappointing blob of silicone that was no substitute for the real thing.

He was about to say no, but Naftali was watching him with such need. His mouth was open, eyelids drifting down in pleasure in the faint light of the streetlight. "You're so big, Daddy. Just wanna touch you."

Fuck. How could he say no to that? Even if it didn't feel like much.

“Go ahead, baby boy.”

And then David learned that he was very, very wrong.

Because Naftali had *technique*. And breathy little gasps of praise. “God, Daddy. Your balls are so full.” He was cupping them, pressing them back into David’s bio-dick while the heavy, soft weight of his scrotum felt just right between his legs.

“And you feel so smooth...” He was stroking David’s cock, fast enough to add little vibrations of pleasure, even as his palm smoothed over the head before sliding back down the shaft. “You’re so thick, Daddy. I’m gonna be feeling you in my hole for days.”

David couldn’t take his eyes away. He suddenly wished there was more light. Because Naftali’s arousal was driving his own to the stratosphere. His hips bucked up, seeking more friction.

“That’s right, Daddy. Fuck my hand. Let me make you feel good.”

Oh God. Naftali couldn’t have any idea how good it really felt. Or maybe he did. David thrust upward. He was so close. If he could just get the right angle...

And Naftali did something. Pressing in all the right places at the base. Stroking hard and frantic on the shaft, so that each vibration traveled deep below.

If David could just rock against him just right... “Baby!” he gasped.

David gripped the handle of the door. His other hand landed on Naftali’s shoulder. He couldn’t do anything more than hold tight and rock his hips up frantically.

It looked like a handjob. It *felt* like a handjob.

He was going to tip over the edge. The pleasure coiled higher and higher. If he could just work himself off, just a little bit more in Naftali’s talented hands...

“Come for me, Daddy. Want your cum. Come all over me.”

Closer, closer, closer, closer... And then he was soaring. Floating. Shooting out his cum, it felt like, all over Naftali's waiting face.

He collapsed back into the seat, every part of his body suddenly lax and boneless.

Naftali curled up against his side. "God, Daddy," Naftali breathed. "That was hot."

Those words were the final thing David needed to hear. Because he hadn't even known that he could find an orgasm in something that was so sexy and affirming at the same time. And to know that Naftali thought it was hot, too, made everything come together.

Naftali kissed along his jaw, and David turned to capture his lips.

He never wanted to move again.

And at the same time...

He was sweaty and hot. Covered in lube with his pants hanging off his ass at a highway pull-off literally fifteen minutes from their cozy, private hotel room.

He started to laugh.

"What?" Naftali demanded.

David kissed him again. "That was hot."

This vacation might have been the best decision he'd ever made.

He never wanted it to end.

NAFTALI

Naftali wandered around the room, fingers playing over one of the little bubble fidget toys that David had lined up so carefully on the desk.

He liked popping them. In—out—in—out. Pop, pop, pop.

He liked seeing his stuff mixed with David's too. The way that David had organized all of his stuff, but left him his own space. The way that their toothbrushes sat together in the bathroom. David had folded each of their pajamas and put them under the pillows on the bed.

Naftali couldn't believe that there were only three more days left. Four if you counted the plane ride home.

He thought about... what if they had more time?

He'd thrown himself into this week, but that was because it was easy. All the pampering and sex and play time that his submissive little heart could desire with no strings attached.

And apparently he'd discovered a new kink. He was *definitely* into this Daddy thing. Hands down. Ten out of ten. Would sub again.

Especially with David.

God, the man was magnificent. Maybe he wasn't confident about everything yet, but that was healthy for a new Dom. For any Dom, really. Doms didn't have to be perfect.

For a newbie, though, David was rocking it. Naftali's ass still stung exquisitely from last night, when Daddy had pulled

the car over and just *taken* him in the backseat after spanking him practically to orgasm.

That was a memory he wouldn't forget soon. Or the look on Daddy's face, almost surprised or scared, like he couldn't believe Naftali was touching him. But it had been glorious when he finally came.

Damn.

Naftali threw himself back onto the couch just to remember. The flute was right there, and he raised it to his lips to play a meandering melody.

Should he start listing Daddy kink as one of his things? Was it always this magical?

Because it wasn't just the sex that was electric. It was the whole thing. The way that David teased him back instead of getting stern when his brattiness got out of hand. Or, well, Daddy *did* get stern, but there was still this teasing side to it. Funishments instead of punishments.

And then there were all the little things David did for him. Kneeling down to pull off his ski boots. Choosing two meals at every restaurant and then dividing them in half so that Naftali could have some of each. Even now, David was out at the grocery store buying "special treats for a special boy."

Well, really he was stocking up on food since the store closed at noon on Christmas Eve, and they assumed all the local restaurants would be closed on Christmas Day. Naftali wasn't with him because he tried to avoid driving or making purchases on Shabbat.

But Naftali still knew that David would be spoiling him.

He wondered for a minute what it would be like to have that all the time.

But he couldn't really visualize it.

For one thing, he would never let himself be financially dependent on someone else, as if he couldn't hack it in the real world. Without any disrespect to folks who were very happy in relationships like that, it wasn't for him.

For another, he knew that real life would intrude. Conflicting work schedules and conflicting needs.

This was a vacation. An escape. Their only goals each day were eating out at cute little restaurants, watching movies in bed, playing in the snow, and fucking like bunnies. Of course everything was wonderful.

Plus, Naftali knew that he wasn't ready for a full-time relationship again. That's why he'd made the pact with himself. He knew he was impulsive, always ready for the next new adventure. It was following through that was the problem.

So this year, he was taking care of himself first. Staying single. Having fun with sexy newbie Doms like David, who was giving him the best vacation of his life.

He focused on the flute in his hands, chasing a winding melody that unfolded in front of him as he played. A winter song, he mused. For the wind dancing through the snow-capped trees and the mountain peaks in the distance.

Then he heard the click and whir of a key card at the door, and shot up from the couch. A quick glance at the clock showed him that it was past ten. How had a whole hour passed?

He was supposed to have taken a quick shower, grabbed his own winter gear and David's thick gloves, rented the snow shoes from the front desk, and met David downstairs. He'd remembered everything, but he'd thought he still had plenty of time.

He looked around the room and realized that he'd messed up the room, too. Before dating Noah, he'd barely noticed when it happened. Things just ended up on chairs or the floor by their own will. Entropy, he called it.

Now he was hyper-alert to it. There were clothes on the bed, winter gear sprawled all over, and he'd messed up the little row of objects that David had so carefully arranged.

He wouldn't have minded—or even noticed—if it was just his room, but this was David's room and David's organization. David, who liked things neat and tidy. He'd fucked it all up.

“Hey, baby boy.” David walked in with a smile and kissed him over the back of the couch.

“Uh, hey.” Naftali should have been lighting up to see him, but his muscles were all clenched.

David walked away to put a small bag of groceries in the mini-fridge and another one on the counter beside it. “I told the front desk that we don’t need to store anything in the kitchen fridge. I think it’ll fit here.” Then he looked up, to examine Naftali more closely. “Is something wrong?”

Naftali had to admit it. “I didn’t get the snow shoes yet. I thought I still had more time.”

“Were you writing a song?” David didn’t look upset. Mildly concerned or curious, at most.

Naftali twisted the flute in his hands. “Uh, no. I wasn’t even really listening to it. I was just... thinking about things.”

“Sad things?”

“Oh, uh, no! But I messed up the whole room. And I’m late. Again. We were supposed to meet downstairs.”

“Baby boy, we’re going snowshoeing around the lodge. On vacation. You c-c-c-can’t be late. And I would have come up anyway to put this away.”

Dammit. Of course. Naftali was still over-reacting. David wasn’t Noah. David hadn’t made any rules about punctuality or tidiness, so Naftali wasn’t breaking them.

David walked around the couch and pulled Naftali into a hug. “Relax,” he whispered, his beard brushing against Naftali’s cheek.

Naftali buried his face in David’s coat. It was cold from the outside, but Daddy’s hold warmed him up everywhere.

There was something magical in that word, *relax*, or at least there was when David said it. The most gentle command. The one that had entranced him from the very first day.

David didn’t rush him, just held him close until he was more centered.

“Good boy.” David dropped a kiss on his forehead.

The rush of pride Naftali felt was disproportionate to the comment. But David had told him to relax, and he did it. Somehow, instead of being a failure for making him wait, Naftali was Daddy’s good boy. He felt like he was glowing.

“Uh, I’m still sorry that I messed up your organization. Of, you know, the crap in my backpack.”

They both looked over at the desk. Then David squeezed him a little closer. “I’ll tell you a secret. I like organizing things because it makes my brain happy. It used to annoy the hell out of my ex.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah. He could handle it for my stuff and the stuff we shared, but I learned not to touch any of his things. He called it fussing. I called it, depending on the d-d-d-day, either trying to take care of him or giving in to my OCD.”

“How do you tell the difference?” Naftali didn’t know much about OCD, beyond the stereotypes of washing your hands a million times or checking the door was locked even after you already had.

“OCD comes from a place of fear. It’s these unwanted thoughts that keep coming back, and no amount of rationalizing or changing your external situation ever really makes them go away. But for me, it can overlap with the hyper-focus of autism sometimes, so I have to notice where my brain is because it can look the same from the outside. I take a medication for it that helps with my moods too. It comes and goes, though. When I have more worries in real life, they can manifest in obsessions or compulsions. Like, my brain has all this anxiety swimming around, so it wants to have something to control.”

“Is that what happened yesterday?”

“Yep.” They both looked at the line of objects, Naftali seeing it with new eyes. He’d gotten a sense that it was an autistic thing and that it was calming for David, but he hadn’t quite matched it up with OCD.

There was something really comforting in knowing that Naftali wasn't the only one who was struggling, even if they were very different struggles.

David gripped the back of his head. "You were better than any medicine, though."

That was all Naftali needed to make everything inside him go soft and happy. Especially when David swept him up in a passionate kiss. All soft lips, demanding tongue, and the strength of David's arms around him.

David finally broke the kiss, but only enough to whisper against his mouth. "There we go, baby. I want my relaxed Nafti back."

Naftali loved that he used the nickname. And that David was so supportive about all of this. So open about his own behaviors and how he handled them. Naftali hadn't realized how much he needed that.

"Still want to try out the snowshoes?"

"Absolutely!" That was exactly what he needed. "Thank you, Daddy."

They went downstairs together to get the snowshoes. There was a woman at the desk who they hadn't met yet, but she got them set up right away.

Naftali was surprised to discover that snowshoes looked nothing like tennis rackets. Instead they were long and sleek, with brightly-colored aluminum frames, flat panels of plastic, some adjustable straps to fit around your boots, and a set of metal teeth to grip the snow just under your toes. Naftali mostly loved that they didn't sell them based on your shoe size—his feet were ridiculously small—just a weight capacity range for you and all your gear that largely overlapped between the two possible sizes.

Then, they were headed across the highway and onto the trail. Well, not a trail, exactly. They'd been warned to avoid any cross-country ski or snowmobile trails that they could mess up, which meant they were breaking a new path through

the snow-covered pines. Everything was quiet around them, like they were the only people in the world.

Naftali loved that feeling, and he knew it was a bit cheesy, but sharing it with David felt romantic. They talked quietly, giving reverence to the silence, as they floated across the smooth planes and wove around the trees.

Dialogue came in little bursts of memories. David told stories of high school ski trips, and Naftali told him about the Jewish summer camps and outdoor exploration workshops he ran throughout the year.

David didn't believe Naftali that Ponderosa and Jeffery pines—the kind they were surrounded by at this altitude—smelled like dessert. So for about a quarter of a mile they stopped by every pine tree to smell it.

David grinned as he raised his nose from the next one. “Butterscotch.”

Naftali leaned into the rough bark. “I'd say coconut.”

David kissed his nose. God, he loved those little kisses.

David tried another one. “Baking Christmas cookies.”

Naftali snorted. “I'll give you cookies on that one. I was going to say cinnamon.” They usually only agreed on the chocolate-smelling trees. “Do you miss it? All of those Christmas traditions like baking cookies?”

David considered as they continued walking. The ground had gotten steeper so they needed to dig in their poles and stop pausing at every tree.

“I think I have some nostalgia about it. I remember waiting up for Santa as a kid, but always falling asleep before he arrived. And the excitement of w-w-w-waking up on Christmas morning to open presents. By the time I was a teen, any family time was usually tense in my house, and as an adult, it never meant much. I liked celebrating it with Mike's extended family—that's my ex, who I thought I'd be with right now when I first booked these tickets.”

“Yeah?”

“We’re still g-g-good friends, actually. This was all his idea.”

Wow. That said a lot about David, actually, that he was still close with his ex. Naftali and Noah had drifted apart pretty quickly once it became clear how incompatible they were. Naftali was curious about why they’d broken up, but David had already changed the topic.

“At any rate, like you said, I can bake cookies any time. How about you? I was surprised that H-H-Hanukkah wasn’t more... Hanukkah-y.”

Naftali laughed. “What does that mean?”

“I thought it would be more about presents and decorations. Big parties. Or going to church... um... synagogue. I like lighting the candles with you, but I thought there was... more to it.”

“Yeah. Hanukkah is usually a pretty social holiday, lots of parties. It’s not really a religious holiday. It came after the Torah was written, and it’s pretty minor in the scheme of things. If I wanted to follow it a bit more closely, I’d try to eat fried things every day this week, but we had a Hanukkah party on Sunday at our house, and I went to another one on Monday night. That’s plenty of latkes and donuts for me.”

“That’s funny. I always thought it w-w-was this big deal like Christmas.”

Naftali shook his head. “Not even close to the most important holiday of the year. But I think the real difference is that Jews don’t have the same sense of anticipation about our holidays. It’s not like there are only two big ones and then a void. It’s more a way of seeing time. The Jewish calendar is very connected to the natural world. It breathes in and out with the weeks and months and seasons. There’s joy and sorrow. There’s silliness and deep study. There’s a mini-holiday each week for Shabbat, and just an awareness of where you are and how to make it special. Errrr... sorry if I went all religious on you.”

“No, that sounds beautiful. I can tell this is something you love. Tell me something about it.”

Naftali knew he had a dopey grin on his face. It was just that... this was super important to him, and it meant a lot that David wanted to learn about it. He looked around for inspiration.

“How about this: there are four different blessings for enjoying a pleasant scent. Including one for smelling fragrant trees.”

David looked dubious. “Are you making this up?”

“Nope. Completely serious. It’s kind of a mindfulness practice for noticing the world. A practice of gratitude.” He paused his ascent by the nearest tree. “*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei atzei besamim.*” He inhaled, savoring the scent. It wasn’t a Ponderosa, so it just had the sharp sap smell of pine. He took a moment to really experience it. To feel that connection and appreciation.

David waited until Naftali kept moving to talk. “So what did you just say?”

“Loosely translated, *You’re pretty awesome, God, creator of the universe, who makes fragrant trees.* There are other ones for herbs, or for fruits with a scent, or for miscellaneous natural scents that can include things like animal musk or coffee.”

“I think I like your traditions.”

I shrug. “You can borrow them any time. There’s no gatekeeping. You just do them if it feels meaningful to you.”

“I don’t know if I w-w-want to include God in it, but this feels meaningful.” He stepped up to his own tree and took a long inhalation, closing his eyes. “Thanks, universe, for the trees.”

They let the silence settle over them.

“You know,” David commented as they started up the slope again, “my ex would have hated this.”

“Yeah?”

“Our plan was for him to hang out at the lodge all day, or maybe go into Portland for the museums, while I went out skiing.”

“Did that work for you guys?”

“We made it work. But I’m enjoying my time out here with you much more.”

Naftali knew he shouldn’t have felt so pleased by the comparison. Of course it was more fun to go snowshoeing with someone else.

But if David liked him more than the ex who he was still good friends with... That felt special.

For a while the slope got really steep—too challenging for real conversation—and then they were at the top. Well, the top of the ridge of one little foothill on the way up the mountain. There was still plenty of mountain to go.

David talked Naftali through making his poles longer and leaning back for the next descent. It took a few steps to get the hang of it, and stretched a whole different set of muscles.

As they wandered, they stumbled across a little clearing with two stone benches.

“Do you think we can sit here?” David asked.

Naftali shrugged. “I can’t imagine anyone putting these here and getting upset about people sitting on them. For all we know, they could even belong to the Meadowlark Lodge. I know there are supposed to be marked trails around here.” Though for snowshoeing, they were just told to go up until they decided to go back down, and then find the highway.

David chose one of the benches and brushed off the snow with his gloved hand. “How are you doing?” he asked. “I was thinking that this would be a good halfway point for a snack, and then we could go on a bit further or head back?”

“Perfect. This place is beautiful.” It really was, with the towering, snowy pines wrapped all around them. “And I think the trip back will be just right, especially with the extra drag

from the snow shoes on the descent. Thank you for bringing me.”

They dropped down onto the bench together. Naftali took a sip from his water bottle, shivering at the cold liquid even though he was thirsty. Meanwhile, David started taking things out of his backpack. Two insulated thermoses with cups built into the lid, a box of graham crackers, a tiny kerosene stove which seemed like total overkill for a morning hike, chocolate, and...

“You brought things for s’mores!” Naftali was so excited that he clapped his hands. “I love s’mores!”

David grinned. “I know. A little bird t-t-t-told me. Or maybe a very tall bird.”

“Who? Oh... Zeev?” He’d forgotten about that.

“Yep. You mentioned it, t-t-t-t-t t-too. And I pay attention. You like to explode them in the microwave. And I noticed there weren’t any at the beverage station in the lobby.”

“Yeah.” Naftali could feel his cheeks heating, though he was sure they were already rosy from the cold. “Thank you. This has to be one of the sweetest things anyone has ever done for me.”

“I promised you a week of pampering.” David winked, and Naftali felt like the most adored sub in the world. Except that the week was almost over.

Still... marshmallows. That Daddy bought for him.

It was funny how quickly that name popped into his mind now. How even the smallest thing could trigger it.

David poured a full mug of hot chocolate into the first thermos lid, then dropped in two of the large, pillowy confections.

“Thank you, Daddy.” It felt right to say it. Naftali took a sip and hummed in appreciation. “This is the good stuff.” It was chocolatey and tangy, the bitter coming through with the sweet. It wasn’t piping hot after an hour, but enough to warm him right up. Or maybe that warmth was David lighting up the

tiny metal stove and putting a marshmallow on a short metal skewer.

“You’re welcome, baby boy.” His face was ringed by a furry hood, and his brown eyes were wrinkled with happiness as he handed it over. “Go ahead,” he urged. “I’ll get the-the-chocolate out.”

God, it would be so easy to fall for this guy. To get lost in all of this attention and closeness.

It didn’t even seem to matter that they’d only known each other for a ridiculously short time. Or that they were clearly still in the throes of new relationship energy. They had seen each other at their worst and best. There were some things that maybe you didn’t need a long time to know.

When they were apart, Naftali could remember his convictions. When David was nearby, gifting him these ridiculously romantic s’mores in the middle of the woods, it was hard to remember why he wasn’t just throwing himself headlong into Daddy’s arms and never letting go.

When Naftali’s marshmallow reached the perfect golden brown, he held it up. As promised, David had a graham cracker ready to ease it off the stick onto the chocolate, then presented it back to him with a flourish.

Naftali took a bite, humming in pleasure. “Aren’t you going to have one?”

David shook his head. “Nah. I think I’m going to put some of the hot chocolate in my coffee, though.”

“Ooh! There’s coffee, too?”

He laughed. “Next time I’ll remember that. Want me to add some to yours?”

“Yes, please.” He’d really done all of this for Naftali.

Naftali kept trying to make sense of it in his head, because he usually hated being dependent on people, unless there was some kind of exchange. He wasn’t that into gifts, either, unless they were pictures from children or other small tokens.

But every single thing that David had done made him feel like the most treasured guy on the planet. There was something about the way he did it, too, that made David feel like *Daddy*, even when they were just talking and walking through the woods.

Naftali had worried that he'd feel smothered if he tried kink outside of the bedroom again. But instead, he felt euphoric. Almost bubbly with happiness. And it was plain to see that David was getting something out of it, too.

When Naftali finished his treat—well, two of them, since they were so good—David packed everything away.

“Here,” David reached for his face. “You have crumbs on your chin.” He brushed them gently away, leaving Naftali all tingly. Then he pulled him into a kiss, and it felt like the whole world was turning around them, the trees, the mountains, and the heavens all singing with them as they got lost in pleasure and the sharp, cold air.

They walked back in companionable silence. David showed Naftali how to do a kick-step technique to build up a solid surface for each foot as they made their way up the steep path. When they reached the top again, Naftali was exhilarated, but ready for the easier descent.

His phone beeped when they reached the bottom of the hill. He wouldn't usually carry it or answer it on Shabbat, but they'd both brought their phones for navigation or emergency calls, just as a precaution.

Naftali dug it out, just to see what was going on. He was involved in enough different projects with enough different people that he might answer it if it was urgent.

“Low battery.” He shoved it back into his pocket and zipped it up.

David nodded. “I can remind you to charge it when we get back to the room.”

“Thanks.” Naftali nodded. “And, uh, I know I already said this, but thanks for not getting annoyed that I'm so scatterbrained. I swear I can usually manage normal daily

activities without a keeper. I usually charge my phone by my bed. Well, like, half the time. And I carry lots of chargers. It's just the new space that has me off my routines."

David turned toward him. "It's not a big deal. I'm happy to remind you to plug it in each night. I should have remembered last night, too." The expression on his face was fond, like this was something endearing.

"Well, thanks, then. For not making a big deal out of it."

David gathered his two poles together in one hand. With the other, he reached for Naftali's glove. Since they were on a flat surface, Naftali reached back.

There are a lot of padded layers between them, but it felt like a connection. It was boyfriend-y and supportive.

"Do you want to talk about it? You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to, but I know there are some topics that you're pretty jumpy around."

"Like what?"

"Being late. Forgetting things. Your career and income."

Naftali sighed heavily. He hadn't wanted to bring any of this onto the trip. But some baggage followed you, even when it couldn't be tucked neatly into an overhead compartment.

So did he want to talk about it? Not really, especially when this had been such a perfect day. But he also felt like he owed David this. For putting up with not just Naftali's messiness, but his over-the-top reactions, too.

Plus, David had opened up so much about his family and his autism. It seemed only fair to open up, too.

"Yeah, I guess I can tell you, if you really want to hear."

"I would like to. But no pressure."

Naftali drew in a breath and began. "I think from some of my earliest memories, people have always told me that I needed to stay focused. That I wasn't living up to my potential. That I just needed a system to organize my life. But it didn't really bother me when I was growing up. I would try

new systems and they would fail, and in a few days I'd forget about them anyway. Stuff like that never seemed as important as whatever I was doing at the time. I knew I was a space cadet, but I could always write good papers at the last minute, you know?"

"Makes sense. A lot of creative people aren't as organized. And it sounds like that wasn't your priority."

Naftali liked the way David said that. He'd kind of forgotten that those other explanations were out there.

"I think that's how I used to think about it," Naftali replied. "It was just... who I was. You know, Naftali, kind of daydreamy, always late, super-focused once he gets somewhere. But with my last Dom, I think I made a mistake. I told you a bit of this before. After we'd been together for a while, Noah suggested that we should choose something for me to work on together. Something for me to aspire toward. It's not a bad idea—it's what a lot of D/s couples do. I said I wanted to work on being organized and not being late, and he said he'd help me with it. Rewards when I was on time, small punishments when I was late. Things like that."

David's eyebrows furrowed, but Naftali wasn't sure if he was concerned about where the story was going or the kink elements of it. As much as he seemed to embrace the lifestyle, it was still pretty new.

"It started out good. For a few weeks I was really on time. I put everything in folders like I was supposed to, folded all my laundry in my drawers, washed dishes as soon as I used them. I was so on it. It was even exciting—I was doing this thing for my Dom, and I knew he was pleased with me.

"But then I started slipping. The first few times I was late, he thought I was joking. Like, angling for a spanking or to see where things went. But I wasn't. I just forgot. By a couple weeks later, he came over and my laundry was all over the floor. He gave me a real punishment and it was horrible. We had a long talk and decided that I'd bitten off more than I could chew. So we scaled it back. Easier goals. Only rewards instead of punishments."

David wrapped his arm around Naftali's shoulders. Not like a Dom, just like a friend. It meant they couldn't walk any further without kicking each others' shoes, but Naftali appreciated his attentive listening and support. He stared at the trees as he talked.

"Needless to say, that didn't work either. I know he was trying to be encouraging, but I just couldn't do it. I *couldn't*. I think until then, I'd always believed that I was just artistic and easily distracted, but if I worked hard enough, I could be just as organized as anyone. That year showed me I was wrong. I felt like a failure every time I showed up late or lost my keys. And Noah would just give me this look like he was so *disappointed* in me. Like if I were just a better sub, or a better person, or maybe if I loved him more, I would get it right.

"After a while, he started saying that maybe the problem was that I had too many different jobs. Like if I just had one job, I could show up at the same time every day and leave on time, and not lose crap everywhere. And then maybe I'd have more money, too, and not always be scrambling around for gigs. The thing is, though, I've been offered promotions before. I've worked nine-to-five. And I was miserable. I even tried being the year-round assistant director of a Jewish summer camp, which I should have loved, right? But you know what you do for nine months of the year? Paperwork. And fundraising. I wanted to be in it with the kids out in the woods, so I asked to step down."

Naftali was angry at this point. He knew his voice was too loud, even when there was no one around to hear it. It's just that he was feeling the injustice all over again. How trapped he'd felt, by Noah and his own brain.

David squeezed his shoulder. "I'm sorry. You didn't deserve any of that. I hope you know that you're one of the most vibrant, talented people that I know. Not many people could do as many jobs as you do and do them with such skill and passion. Everyone who you work with is really lucky to have you."

Naftali rested his head on David's shoulder, the fight going out of him. He was able to believe that most of the time, and it

really made a difference that David said it.

“What can I do to support you?” David asked.

Just the fact that he asked was such a difference. Then again, he’d probably had plenty of experience being on the other end of things.

Naftali considered. “Honestly? I think the biggest thing is just not getting annoyed and not asking me to change. Beyond that, what you’ve been doing is amazing. You can organize my stuff if it makes your brain happy. Or if you see where I put something down and remember it for later, that would be nice. Reminding me to charge my phone is greatly appreciated, as long as you’re not frustrated by it.”

“And maybe bringing a book or something to do if we’re going to meet somewhere?”

“Yeah. That would be amazing.” Did that mean they were going to meet somewhere after this week? They still had three more days. “Mostly, I just want you to know that I’m not trying to waste your time. Zeev does that, with the book I mean. They can hurry me up when I’m not moving fast enough too, but I feel like they’re on my team, if that makes sense.”

“That totally makes sense. Have I been doing okay so far?”

“Yeah. You’ve been awesome.”

They started walking again. Naftali liked how they could be quiet together as well as talking. It gave him time to notice the woods. To hear their breath together in the silence.

When David spoke again, it was with a soft voice. “I’m not sure if I should bring this up, but have you ever wondered if you have ADHD?”

Naftali scrunched up his face. David was far from the first person who’d asked, but he was the gentlest about it. “I have wondered. I mean, I probably do. Well, not the hyperactivity part, but the other thing. Inattention. Would it matter if I do?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know if having a diagnosis would matter to you. But it made a huge d-d-d-d-d-difference to me.

When I was a kid, I thought I had all these different things. The stutter. Selective mutism. OCD. And just, you know, the general awkwardness. I learned a lot of coping strategies since then, and like I said, the meds help even some things out. But getting a label for this thing that was kind of binding it all together was a revelation to me. I'm neurodivergent. My brain works differently from neurotypical brains... but it works like a lot-a lot-a lot of other autistic brains. It helped me have names for a lot of things I did, like sensory seeking and avoidance, and I realized what my strengths were. It also explained why I couldn't just *try harder* to be a different person."

"Amen to that. There isn't enough trying in the world."

"One of the things that made it harder for me, too, is that kids who are socialized as female are often supposed to be quiet and polite. And kids who have the academic intelligence to figure things out even if they miss the instructions, or who can pull off a good assignment at the last minute, often get overlooked. Everyone's looking for the autistic kid who can't make eye contact, or the ADHD kid who can't sit still. If you don't have one of those traits that everyone thinks they know about neurodiversity, it can be hard to get a diagnosis."

Suddenly so many things made sense. "My God! That was me. So, uh, do you think that would happen for me, with ADHD?"

"Maybe. If you want to talk about it, I have a good friend who's getting her psychology degree so that she can diagnose adults with ADHD and autism. Pretty similar story—she thought she might have one of those as a teenager, but her school guidance counselor and her family doctor told her it wasn't possible because she got good grades and had a few friends. So she was pretty pissed when she finally got an accurate diagnosis as an adult. Now she can use different therapies and some medications to help her manage her life the way that she wants to, and help other people do that, too."

"Huh. That sounds so mature. And really useful. I had a teacher who wanted me to be evaluated as a kid. But my parents were reading all of those headline articles about the

Ritalin craze and how everyone was drugging their kids. We never checked it out. By the time I was older, I figured I had enough coping strategies. I work with children who have a range of diagnoses, but since we're usually out in the woods or talking about Torah while we bang on plastic buckets or have naming ceremonies for our pet rocks, it doesn't matter too much."

David grinned. "That's what you do in Torah school?"

"Yep. Multi-sensory, play-based, student-led. All that stuff. It's good for all kids, not just the ones with special needs."

"It sounds like you've created a whole life for yourself like that." David looked impressed.

"I suppose I have. It makes me happy, anyway."

"Then maybe you don't need a label for anything. Just some patience with yourself. I was mostly thinking that meeting with Cara might help you see that you weren't a bad partner or... sub." He hesitated over the word, and Naftali remembered how new he was to all of this. "It's just how your brain works."

"Thanks. I might like to talk with her."

"I can set that up. For you guys to meet and hang out, or for her to talk with you just about this. I think she's got another semester before she can give you an official diagnosis without clinical oversight, but she'd know. Let me know what you'd prefer."

"Thanks." Naftali still had a lot to think about, but he felt lighter now. Not just that he'd talked about Noah and all of his failings, but that David had taken it all in stride. In fact, this might be the most helpful conversation he'd had on this topic in a long time.

They made it back to the highway and unclipped their snowshoes.

It felt weird to be walking around in his regular boots, like Naftali had to regain his balance. The drag and lift were all wrong, like he was stepping too high and didn't know where the ground was.

He still didn't want the morning to end. "Do we *have* to go back?" he asked.

David gave him a fond look. "Of course not. We can stay out here as long as you want. But I did pick us up something nice for lunch, and we have all of those leftovers from the party."

Naftali melted into the curve of David's arm as they started back along the shoulder. Food did sound good. So did getting back to their cozy room.

But that wasn't really what he'd meant with his question.

It was like taking off his snowshoes to discover that the familiar ground had become a foreign landscape—after this week of magic, how was he going to go back to the rest of his life?

DAVID

It was strange being around the hotel on Christmas day. The kind lodge owners had let them stay, since David had booked the first few days last spring and then added on the Cuffd event. But the agreement was that they were supposed to essentially pretend that they weren't there—no breakfast, no towel service, and presumably, no snow shoe rentals.

David fully respected that. The owners had their own Christmas plans and he didn't want to get in their way.

So he and Naftali had a long, luxurious breakfast in bed, snacking on the croissants and fruit he had purchased yesterday while they watched a movie.

For lunch, they'd moved all the way over to the couch, and Naftali had shared some of the music he'd written. The recording was less polished than David had expected—a bunch of friends with instruments singing together in a room—but the songs were evocative of deep feelings and easy to pick up, for all that they were in Hebrew. He'd bet they were gorgeous and fun with a whole congregation. Naftali was a talented man.

Now it was afternoon, and phrases like “bouncing off the walls” and “like a caged animal” came to mind as David watched Naftali wander around their small room, touching everything as he chattered.

David was used to long stretches of time at a desk each day, but Naftali, apparently not so much. Right now, he was

pacing along the back of the couch, tracing the seam with one finger.

“Get your b-b-b-boots, baby boy.”

“Yeah? Where are we going?” His head bounced up like a little puppy’s.

“Outside.” Which wasn’t even a real answer, but there had to be something to do.

Naftali’s face lit up. “Thank you, Daddy!”

Had Naftali realized how much he needed to move and not wanted to say anything? Or was he not even aware? David thought about bringing it up, but they’d already had one long conversation about it yesterday. Naftali would need to take the next steps.

And until then, David would just study his behavior and try to figure out how to give him what he needed.

Naftali raced to the closet, and had his winter things on in no time. David trailed along behind him, tidying a few things along the way that had been bugging him, and ending by wrapping Naftali’s forgotten scarf around his neck, with a little kiss to his nose.

Getting Naftali dressed a couple days ago had been immensely satisfying, and this was a little echo of that. He wondered what it would be like, dressing Naftali each morning. It sounded marvelous in his head—getting his boy ready and sending him off for his day.

Naftali headed downstairs first to figure out which direction they might want to go, which was how David came to find him, five minutes later, in the industrial kitchen of the lodge.

“Oooh! Those are gorgeous!” Naftali was leaning close... very, very close... to the naked chest of the guy who’d checked them in on the first day. Jamie, that was his name.

Or her name, now? Jamie was wearing what could only be described as a “naughty Santa” dress. It involved a lot of red satin and white fur trim, and very little coverage of strategic

places. It didn't help that Jamie was pulling down one shoulder to reveal a pale, slender shoulder for Naftali's inspection.

David sucked in a breath. Okay. So Naftali had explained that he wasn't flirting with Jamie before. And there was no reason—well, almost no reason—to believe that he'd be flirting now.

David had gotten to know Naftali much better this week, and they'd both shared a lot. He had to trust him.

"Nafti?" he asked from the doorway. He wasn't above using a special nickname, though.

"Hey, Daddy!" Naftali greeted him with a stunning smile that sent all of his worries away. "Come on in. They said we can be in the kitchen, since we're the only ones here."

David entered—taking scant notice of the industrial oven, refrigerator, and stainless steel counters covered with food in various states of preparation—and wrapped his arms around Naftali from behind.

He wasn't jealous, especially since Naftali had already called him *Daddy* in front of Jamie and the other two men hanging out in the kitchen. But he was staking his claim.

Naftali snuggled right back into him, a comforting, solid weight in his arms. "Look at Jamie's tattoos! Aren't they the cutest? Jamie's the dragonfly, Neil is the cricket—" Naftali indicated the heavy-set older white man with a shiny bald head who sat at the counter "—and Daddy Sebastian is the daddy long-legs."

David had already met Sebastian once or twice, a burly Latino man, about his own age. He was hovering over a couple pots and pans on the stove, but he gave David a warm nod.

David looked at the tattoos across Jamie's chest. They were exquisitely detailed—the cricket and daddy-long-legs as black line drawings, and the dragonfly a rainbow of almost iridescent colors. David had never wanted a tattoo, but he appreciated the symbolism and dedication of inking their relationship into Jamie's skin.

“I got them for our anniversary,” Jamie told him, before reaching back to take the third man’s hand. Love shone in his eyes.

Even if Jamie was propositioning other bedmates at the front desk, it was clear where his heart lay.

“They’re lovely,” David replied.

“Did you get to meet Neil, yet?” Jamie asked. “He’s been hiding out in his office.”

They made the introductions, and it turned out that Neil had a private practice advising small businesses on strategies and finance—not too different from David’s own work. David was eager to hear more, and they drifted into conversation.

Neil spoke with a quiet passion in his deep rumbling voice about supporting new ventures, and even more about his love for helping struggling mom and pop businesses that just needed a little redirection to bloom.

David could have talked with him all day. He pulled up a stool and let Naftali drift away when Jamie wanted to show him something.

There was a coziness to the restaurant-style kitchen. A feeling of warmth and home, especially when Sebastian set a mug in front of Neil with a kiss to his bald head.

“Thank you, Daddy,” Neil replied sweetly, without pausing their dialogue.

David realized that—now that he wasn’t worried about Naftali replacing him with someone else—he was actually dying to know more about Jamie and his two partners. These three men were living a real-life Daddy/boy/boy relationship, and it was kind of stunning to see it in action.

He was trying to figure out just how to ask, when he heard Naftali’s hearty laugh intermingled with Jamie’s giggles from just outside the door.

“Boy!” Sebastian spoke in a deep, warning voice.

More giggles.

Was that what David sounded like, when he used his Dom voice? Or what Naftali called his Dom voice. There was no way he sounded that confident and authoritative.

Everyone looked toward the empty doorway.

“Just a second, Daddy.” That was followed by the sound of scampering feet.

Sebastian gave David a commiserating look, shaking his head sadly. “Leave two brats together...”

Wait. Was Naftali a *brat*?

No, that was a stupid question. It seemed obvious in retrospect. Naftali liked to tease and push limits, which was pretty much the definition. It was just that David hadn't put Naftali's playful energy together with what he'd seen on paper to realize that Naftali was a certain *type* of sub.

Now he was trying to remember what he'd read about brats. There were things their Daddies were supposed to do to meet their needs.

Fuck. Had he been doing those things?

There was more whispering outside the door, accompanied by another round of giggles.

“Dragonfly, if you're having trouble being good, you can just stay in the laundry room. You're already on five.” Sebastian warned again, presumably counting misdemeanors.

Hell. Was that what David was supposed to be doing?

“I'm being good, Daddy!” Jamie yelled out. “It's just a surprise.”

Sebastian snorted.

David found his voice. “Is *Naftali* being g-g-g-good?”

That probably wasn't a Dom voice. Especially not with his stutter.

“I'm being good, Daddy!” That was Naftali, whose faux innocence had to be covering up something naughty.

Because he was a brat. David was going to need to do a lot of reading right away.

“Everything okay?” Neil asked softly.

David kept his voice down. “Yeah, um... I just didn’t realize he was a brat. Sounds silly, I guess. But, uh, I’m really new to this.” It felt good to get that out there. These were hopefully people whose insights he’d want to receive.

Sebastian stepped away from the stove. “Any questions you have, just ask. I’m always happy to mentor new Doms. That’s one of the things that events like this Kinkmas thing are about.”

“Thank you. That would mean-would mean, would mean a lot to me.” And hopefully his tongue would start behaving itself. “Are there...”

The question he was going to ask was cut off, because just then, Naftali sauntered back into the room on Jamie’s arm.

He was wearing a pair of tiny blue underwear, sparkly silver socks that went almost up to his knees, and a silver garland that had probably come off a tree somewhere. Every inch of his muscular body gleamed with some sort of luminescent oil. His eyes had just a hint of eyeliner, making them glow.

Jamie held something sparkly in his hands. “We were trying to put on pasties, but you have to do that *before* the oil.”

Sebastian snorted. Neil shook his head. They were both still smiling.

David could only watch as Naftali walked seductively across the room. God, he was just so... sensual. The one stretch of blue drew David’s eyes right to the bulge that waited beneath it, like a promise.

It was a corny, Naftali way of being sexy, but for David, it was just mesmerizing. Naftali was so bold. So comfortable with his body. So attractive.

Naftali threw the tinsel garland over David’s shoulders, drawing them together. “Hi, Daddy.” His voice dripped sex.

For a moment, David froze. How was he supposed to respond? Especially with three other people watching him? Should he scold Naftali? Flirt back? Laugh at Naftali's antics? Touch all of that inviting skin? Or pretend like it wasn't a big deal?

What were brats supposed to need?

He'd never been good at situations like this—being put on the spot, and expected to act just like everyone else. The pressure just made everything worse.

Something changed on Naftali's face, his smile dimming.

Dammit. He was screwing this up for Naftali, too. And he'd been so happy just a moment ago.

"You're v-very shimmery." David finally managed. Which hadn't been any of the things he'd wanted to say. But he put his hands on Naftali's sides—his very warm, very naked sides—which was where he'd wanted them all along. If Naftali was going to be wandering around in his underwear, David wanted him as close as possible.

Naftali brightened. "Do you like it, Daddy?"

"I do."

Naftali gave a little shimmy. "I couldn't let Jamie have all the fun. Anyway... do you remember what you're supposed to do for Hanukkah?" he added slyly.

There was clearly a correct answer here, but David didn't know it. "Light candles?"

"Eat something covered in oil."

David had to laugh then, joined by everyone else in the room. Because Naftali was just so... Naftali. Bold and goofy and sexy, all at once. "Is that what you want, baby boy?"

Naftali nodded eagerly, helping himself to David's lap, or as much of it as he could get with David perched on the stool.

Now he had whole armfuls of slippery, delightful boy. "Well, I-I-I suppose it is the last night of Hanukkah."

There. He'd even been kind of funny.

“So, is your plan to prance around half-naked for the rest of the day?” David asked.

Naftali nodded. “Pretty much. Although there could be less prancing and more...”

David covered his mouth.

The trio in the kitchen had been watching all of this with amusement. Sebastian stepped away from the stove again. “Actually, would you two like to join us for Christmas dinner?”

Naftali squirmed around to face David. “Can we? Can we please, Daddy? It’ll be Christmukkuh.”

“Yes, yes, yes, yes!” Jamie added. “Say yes!”

David checked with Sebastian. “You’re sure it wouldn’t be an imposition?”

Sebastian chuckled. “I think Jamie would be very disappointed if I took his new friend away, after they’ve gone to all this trouble... and no doubt have plans for more. Plus, anyone who makes my cricket glow like that, is always welcome.” He gave David a nod before turning to Neil with a soft look.

“Uh, sure then. We can help with the cooking. Naftali is a whiz, and-and-and I’m not too bad either.”

Sebastian looked them over. “You up for chopping some potatoes?”

Naftali grinned. “I’d be happy to. Though... how would you feel about latkes?”

“Gimme, gimme, gimme!” Jamie chanted.

Sebastian shrugged. “I guess we’re making latkes.”

The afternoon grew more festive from there. Jamie put on some Christmas music, which, surprisingly, Naftali knew every word to—even the second and third verses that no one ever remembered.

When asked, he just explained that he’d been in a million “secular” choirs growing up, and there was inevitably a

Christmas concert.

It was feeling increasingly like a kind of holiday that David didn't think he needed, but really enjoyed. Not so much the Christmas part, but the laughter and friendship.

David grated a mountain of potatoes, while Naftali diced onions and garlic. The air was starting to fill with sweet and savory smells from the stove and oven.

That awful "Santa Baby" song came on, and Naftali and Jamie dropped what they were doing to sashay around the room, lip syncing. There were too many giggles for it to really be erotic, but God, did Naftali have moves.

Then Sebastian told them not to roughhouse in the kitchen. He also pointed out that Naftali should really be wearing shoes for health code reasons.

Jamie pouted, while Naftali sincerely apologized.

Then David added that Naftali needed to be fully dressed before he got anywhere near the hot oil, which earned him his own pout. "What about an apron, Daddy? Wouldn't that be sexy?"

David scowled. "I'm not interested in sexy. I'm interested in keeping you safe."

"A *big* apron? Like Sebastian's?"

"Clothing. I'm sure you can find some way to misplace your cl-cl-clothes afterward."

Naftali laughed. "Yes, Daddy."

So maybe David wasn't doing too badly at this after all.

A tray of popovers came out of the oven, and Sebastian started putting them in a basket. "Hey David, I'm going to run these over to a neighbor. Want to join me for the drive?"

David was startled. Out of everyone in the room, why would *he* be the one that Sebastian would choose?

But Sebastian nodded his head toward the front of the building, like David was supposed to interpret that signal in a meaningful way, so it seemed easier to agree.

David took the basket of warm, aromatic popovers and settled them in his lap while Sebastian started the car.

“I thought this might be a good time to answer some of your questions,” Sebastian said.

Ohhhhhh... Of course. “Thank you. I-I-I-I-I would... Yes. I’d appreciate that.” Though he couldn’t figure out where to start.

“How did you and Naftali get together?” Sebastian asked.

“Whew.” David shook his head. But he poured out the whole story—with a lot more detail than he would have given anyone else. With each sentence, it got a bit easier.

Sebastian admired rope bondage as a valuable skill, and even offered to give Naftali a demonstration in some of the longer and more painful impact play implements if he was interested. He already knew about the s’mores on the mountain, of course, because he’d rented David the equipment.

“It seems like you’re doing a lot of things right,” Sebastian remarked when David finished.

“I feel like I’m just figuring it out each day. Mostly I watch Naftali. He knows I’m new at this and struggle with social cues, so I think he’s making things a bit more obvious to help me out.”

Sebastian took that in for a moment. “He’s an experienced sub and I think he’s stepping up when you need it. But I’ll also tell you that you two have a good rapport. And he genuinely likes you.”

“Really?” The words were like gold. “You can tell that? I... I haven’t been certain. It feels that way, but...”

“No, I’m sure. I’m generally a pretty good judge of both character and emotion.” He ran his hand through his hair. “Not that I haven’t screwed it up before.” So, there was a mistake somewhere in his past. “But Naftali looks at you all the time. When he’s acting up with Jamie, he wants to make sure he has your attention.”

“Good. Um, he has m-m-my attention.” David couldn’t imagine a better Christmas gift than hearing Sebastian say that, though. “Is that what makes him a brat?”

“That’s probably part of it, at least when it’s playful like that. He’s flirting more than really trying to push your buttons.”

“Does Jamie push your buttons? I mean, if that’s not rude to ask.”

Sebastian laughed. “Jamie lives to push buttons. But his bratting style seems to be pretty similar to Naftali’s.”

“Can you tell me more about it? I m-m-m-mean, what you’re willing to share. Or anything that might help me understand the psychology.” This might be the most useful car ride in David’s life.

Sebastian ran his hands across the wheel, a fond smile on his face. “So there are a lot of reasons that brats might brat. Sometimes it’s making the Dom work to earn the brat’s respect and prove that they can manage them. Maybe even getting the Dom so frustrated that it adds fuel to the fire, and the threat builds until the Dom can’t take it anymore and starts the punishment. It can be rough in a way that *feels* dangerous, which pumps up all the endorphins and moves into a psychological space—though it’s all still negotiated first.”

David nodded. He could see that, but... “That doesn’t seem like Naftali.”

“It’s not Jamie either. With him, and probably your boy too, it’s still about testing the Dom’s reactions and seeing what they can get away with. It gives them freedom to do things that wouldn’t normally be socially acceptable, but are when they become a type of flirting—even if it moves into teasing and practical jokes.”

“Naftali stole this bird th-thing from my mother’s centerpiece when we saw my family.”

Sebastian laughed. “Just like that. Did you know he was going to do it?”

“I mean, I told him not to.”

“So you knew exactly what he was going to do.”

“Yeah.” David smiled, remembering the moment when Naftali had produced the ridiculous thing. And what had followed after.

“Did you punish him?”

“I mean... I spanked him. But by that point I think we’d both forgotten what the punishment was for. And it’s not like I was actually upset.”

“No. And with brats like our boys, they’ll know exactly where it stays fun, and when it crosses the line. For example, if there was something that would really upset you, Naftali wouldn’t joke about it.”

David was confident about that one. “No. He wouldn’t.” And Sebastian had just said *our boys*, like they were both in the same category.

“Jamie wouldn’t either. He knows just when to turn it off and on.”

David nodded. He could see that in Naftali, too. “So if it’s just for f-f-, f-fun... is there some deeper reason for it?”

“Absolutely. It’s hot. Playful brats are still subs. They want to be punished and subdued and put in their place. And for that to happen, they have to push some buttons. Think of it kind of like foreplay—the longer you keep your cool and hold out while they’re acting up, the hotter it is when everything comes together.”

“Ohhhhhh...” That’s what they’d been doing all along, and he hadn’t even realized it. “Does that mean I should give him more regular punishments? I heard you counting.”

The fond grin returned to Sebastian’s face. Which was funny, because he’d looked so stern when he addressed Jamie before. “You could count punishments if it worked for both of you. Part of why I keep count is because I’m twenty-four/seven with my boys, and we also work in a very public space. So if I whisper something like ‘that’s six,’ to him while I pass him in the hall, we both get a charge out of it.”

“Ah. I can see that. And what if it-if it-if it d-doesn’t lead to a punishment? Naftali is naughty a lot, but I’m not even sure if I’ve p-punished him once.”

“Is it working for you?”

“I mean... yes? But that doesn’t mean it’s working for h-him.”

“Ask him.”

David nodded. That was, of course, the right thing to do. Except... There was only tomorrow for the Kinkmas event. And then the ride home on the plane. And then they were over.

Naftali didn’t want anything long-term.

David couldn’t let himself think about that right now. Sebastian was dispensing good advice, and he didn’t want to squander the opportunity. If he were ever with another boy—which right now, he couldn’t even imagine—he needed to learn all that he could.

“But hypothetically, would it be alright if I d-d-didn’t punish a-a-a-a brat?”

“Sure. Sometimes the back-and-forth is all you need. Every time you say, ‘I told you to stop,’ you’re really saying, ‘I’m your Daddy, and I see you. I’ll take care of you. You’re important to me.’ And every time your boy gets bratty again, he’s saying, ‘I need you, Daddy. I want your attention. I want you to keep showing your dominance because it makes me feel special.’”

David blinked back what might have been moisture at the corner of his eyes. Because that was *exactly* what it felt like. Every single time.

Sebastian shrugged. “But you should still punish him sometimes.”

“Agreed.” Because it was fucking hot.

They pulled up to a little house, which was much further away than what David would have thought of as a “neighbor.” Then again, they hadn’t passed that many houses or businesses on the way.

Sebastian hopped out and knocked on the door. A stooped woman with gray hair and a magnificently ugly Christmas sweater opened it. She reached up to give Sebastian a hug.

They talked for a few moments, and then Sebastian exchanged the basket of popovers for what looked like a foil-wrapped pie.

“Who was that?” David asked when Sebastian got back in the car.

“That’s Dottie. She and her wife, Marcy—who got married eight years ago when it became legal, after fifteen years together—helped us out when we were starting up the lodge. Well, helped might be too strong a word, but they stopped by a lot and made sure we met the neighbors. I think they were just excited to see other LGBTQ folk around. But now they’re kind of like our neighborhood grandmothers.”

That was really sweet.

“They’ve got their own kids and grandkids there for Christmas,” Sebastian continued, “but Marcy loves my popovers, and if we don’t drive to them, they try to drive to our place with some of the grandkids to deliver a pie. And on one of the few days that the Meadowlark is closed... we don’t always want to interrupt our activities to open the door.”

David laughed, but he still wanted to check. “Are *we* interrupting?”

“Let me put it this way. Are you likely to be shocked or offended if I show up to dinner wearing a leather harness?”

“Er... no. But I might feel underdressed.”

“Good answer. Though there is no dress code. And if Neil were kneeling at my feet while I fed him?”

“No. But you’re sure that’s not... private?”

“Not private in that way. Neil doesn’t like the spotlight, but he enjoys being publicly claimed. Jamie, naturally, would invite you two to join in. Or, lacking that, challenge Naftali to a blow-job contest or something.”

David could completely see that. Not that it would work with his particular anatomy. Or at least, he wouldn't have thought so before this week. Maybe...

"But of course, if anything does actually make you uncomfortable, just speak up. That's always the rule, in any kink space. Safewords are for everybody."

"Thank you. I'm... I have to say that I'm actually k-k-k-kind of curious to see your dynamic in action."

"Well, watch away. And feel free to ask more questions."

"I have one now, actually. Do you have rules for your boys? And how did you make them?"

"Mmmm... There's a great topic. I have rules for Jamie that are essentially there so he can break them. They're kind of meaningless, and I make them up as we go along. I have consistent rules for Neil that remind him that I'm taking care of him, even when I'm not there. He works too hard and doesn't always remember how important he is."

"So maybe Naftali needs some rules like that?"

"Which type?"

"Both?" They both sounded right. Naftali needed silly rules to break... but he still needed to know how important he was. "Are there other reasons Doms make rules?"

"Sure. Some people want a dynamic where the Dom controls nearly all the aspects of the sub's life—food, schedules, sex, behaviors, the bathroom, even thoughts. It's an expression of guidance and even love, just like anything else. It's also common—especially in Daddy relationships, though not always—to choose something for the sub to work on, maybe an area for them to grow and improve to be a better person. Kind of like a personal coach at the gym incentivizing someone to exercise, but it could be anything."

David was already shaking his head. "No. No, that's..." Naftali's words still echoed in his head. *Not from a Dom.*

Sebastian waited patiently.

“S-S-S-S-Sorry. I don’t know how much I c-c-can tell you, but that’s not what Naftali needs. It’s... it would hurt him.”

“Good. If you know that, it means you’re listening to him and figuring out how to be his Daddy.”

Hearing that was a huge relief. After hearing about Naftali’s ex, David had been worried about making the same mistakes.

“I’ll just mention,” Sebastian added, “that he might someday have a goal that you could help him achieve. Maybe it’s having more self-confidence in an area where he doesn’t feel it. Or maybe it’s even something simple, like eating lunch each day. Whenever Neil is at the computer for more than three hours, he’s supposed to take a break to find me. I usually have him kneel at my feet and check that he’s not hungry or hurting his back by sitting too long. If he exceeds that time, especially if he hasn’t been taking care of his body, he earns a punishment. But that’s very, very rare. And when it happens, it’s when he most needs it.”

“I can see that... but that wouldn’t work for Naftali. He wouldn’t even know the three hours had passed, and then he’d just be in trouble.”

“Well, there you go. You design the rules that will tell Naftali that he’s safe, cared for, admired, and appreciated. Start there, and you can’t go wrong.”

David just nodded. Because clearly, it could very well go wrong. Noah, an experienced Dom, had been a disaster for David’s baby boy.

Though perhaps David shouldn’t be thinking about it anyway. Naftali was only David’s for two more days.

NAFTALI

Jamie was a blast. Naftali was having a great time with him, prancing around the kitchen while the Daddies were away, and Neil was a great big sweetheart who watched over their antics with a fond smile.

Nearly everything was ready for dinner, and Naftali had taken over making the gravy since Jamie assured him that Sebastian wouldn't mind. The turkey was resting on the counter, Jamie and Neil were bringing things out to the table with as much inappropriate fondling as Jamie could get away with, and Naftali was just getting the latkes started.

In deference to his Daddy's command, Naftali had slipped his jeans back on, along with his one and only Hanukkah sweater that read *Come On Baby, Light My Menorah*.

Jamie approved.

The second Naftali was done frying the latkes, though, the clothes were coming off.

Jamie had coaxed Neil into a red Santa hat with a red leather harness wrapped around his meaty chest and matching leather shorts. With his ample belly and gray-furred chest, Naftali told Neil that he was the only Santa Clause he wanted to believe in.

Watching the fifty-year-old man go pink under the praise was just adorable.

Naftali still wasn't interested in sleeping with any of them when he could have David instead... unless David was into it

with him. Mostly it was just fun being boys together and giggling about their Daddies.

“So this is really just a one-week thing?” Jamie asked.

Naftali sighed as he flipped the next round of latkes over in the bubbling oil. “Yeah. It’s weird.”

“You two don’t act like you’re temporary. I mean, maybe you did when you checked in, but not now. You seem really in tune with each other.”

“Yeah? I mean, I feel really in tune with him. But it’s hard to figure out. We’ve been together for a week. We’re on vacation where everything is fun and sparkly and easy, you know? Days of skiing and sex and no responsibilities. Our deal was that he’d pay for everything while we’re here, but that doesn’t translate well to real life.”

“Could it translate to real life?”

Naftali threw up his hands. Then he belatedly put the spatula down so he wouldn’t get grease everywhere. “I have no idea. I mean, not the money part. I want to be financially independent. But the Daddy part? I like it. I really, really like it. And that’s a little scary. Because he’s a new Dom and I’ve never had a Daddy before. I can’t separate out the new kink from the new relationship energy from being on vacation from just liking David as a person because they’re all happening at once.”

Jamie nodded, slowly taking that in. “Okay, I see how it’s hard to untangle that. But do you need to separate them out? It sounds like David the person and David your Daddy both fit you really well.” Jamie’s voice was serious for once. The playlist had switched to something slow and orchestral that fit the mood.

Naftali started transferring latkes to the paper towel-covered plate and sliding the next batch in. “Maybe? I just... I don’t want to disappoint him. And I don’t want to disappoint *me*. I got out of a relationship last summer, and I’m trying hard not to make the same mistakes. I told myself I wouldn’t date anyone for a year.”

“How much of that year is left?”

“Six months? I don’t want to just... fall into a relationship because I can’t function without a Dom. I mean, I still have casual play partners.”

Neil stepped into the conversation then, with his soft, rumbling voice. “Do play partners make you get dressed to keep you safe?”

That was really what it was. With David, Naftali could be as wild as he wanted, because his Daddy would reel him back in. He could say outrageous things, so that David would tell him no with that stern expression and sparking eyes.

Casual play partners didn’t do that.

Casual play partners didn’t make you the center of their world.

But then again, this was still a vacation. Naftali couldn’t possibly be the center of David’s world in the same way once they got back home.

And if David ended up disappointed and frustrated with him after everything they’d shared together... It would be worse than his break-up with Noah.

That was an astonishing thought. Because that break-up had been pretty bad.

Actually, though... it had never really been the break-up. It was the months leading up to it that had been awful. When Naftali had never managed to do anything right. When Noah was disappointed with him. When his Dom doubted Naftali’s commitment and dedication, until Naftali started to doubt it himself.

The break-up had just been the final nail in the coffin.

But maybe... Well, actually, Naftali knew that what David wanted from him was different.

“What’s it like?” he asked Jamie and Neil. “For you two, living with a Daddy?”

Neil answered first, his quiet voice rumbling out without hesitation. “He lets me know he’s always thinking about me. Even when it’s just bringing me tea, I know he’s taking care of me. When I submit to him, it’s like he’s the only thing in the world, because he has everything I need.”

“And me!” Jamie put in. “You need me!”

Neil caught him against his chest and pressed a kiss to the back of his neck. “I need you too, dragonfly. Always.”

When Jamie turned in Neil’s arms, Naftali looked away. The moment was too private, and the three of them were so clearly happy together.

It was time to flip the latkes anyway.

There was a long, sensuous pause before Neil prompted Jamie, “What does Daddy give you, love?”

“Mmmmm... Spankings?” Jamie grinned. “Seriously though, he gives me freedom. I can be bratty and wild because he’s my tether. He lets me play.”

That was what Naftali wanted. What both of them had. “And it just... works? All the time?” He knew it was a stupid question. Kinky relationships weren’t any more successful or unsuccessful than vanilla ones. But... he wanted to hear it.

“I mean, we’ve had our ups and downs. But it’s a lifestyle that gives me energy and fulfillment every day.” Jamie was still nestled in Neil’s arms, kissing his cheek to punctuate his words.

“Does Sebastian pay for you? Or manage your money?” Naftali asked.

They both laughed. “*Neil* manages our money,” Jamie replied. “He’s good at it, and he does it as a service to Daddy. Then, when it’s time to go over the books, Daddy puts...”

“Jamie...” Neil warned.

“What?” Jamie complained. “You’re hot as fuck on your knees under that desk servicing Daddy’s cock after you serve him with the budget reports.” He whispered to Naftali

conspiratorially, “I don’t even *understand* the budget, and it’s my favorite time of the month.”

Neil blushed across the top of his bald head, but he was still clearly pleased.

They were both just so *pampered* by their Daddy... and so obviously happy about it.

All of this was giving Naftali a lot to think about.

It wasn’t that he didn’t know other people who called their Doms *Daddy*. He just hadn’t considered that it might be right for him. Or thought about the reality of a relationship like that.

Or how things might be different.

Noah used to say things like “be serious, for once” or “not everything’s a game.”

Naftali would bet Sebastian never said that to Jamie. And it didn’t seem like something David would say, either.

When David told Naftali *no*, it was almost like he was daring him *to* do the thing. Hopefully because there would be more delicious punishments in store.

So maybe Naftali was more of a brat than he’d thought he was, too. He’d started out bringing his larger-than-life personality to his interactions with David because he thought it would help him relax.

But maybe he really was that goofy and silly all the time. It certainly felt like the freedom that Jamie described.

Which meant that maybe Naftali didn’t know himself as well as he thought he did. Or, to put a positive spin on it, he was learning new things about himself.

Like, maybe he *loved* this Daddy-boy thing.

He slid the last latkes onto the plate and handed them over to Jamie to bring to the table. “Do we have any sour cream and applesauce?”

“Applesauce?” Jamie looked at him suspiciously.

“That’s what you put on latkes. It’s the food of my people.”

Neil laughed. “He’s right. I’ll go see if we have some.”

Neil was still searching when the Daddies came back, bearing a foil-wrapped pie that they set in the oven to warm. Naftali gave the gravy a final stir, then handed the whisk over to Sebastian to finish everything up.

Now that his vacation Daddy was here, he wanted kisses, too. David was all bundled up, his cheeks pink from the cold, and his arms open for Naftali. They met in the dining room, where the food was laid out sumptuously over the long table. “Hi, Daddy.”

David grinned down at him. “Thank you for getting dressed, baby boy. I like your sweater. It’s very you.”

Did he like being praised for silly little things? Yes, yes he did. Naftali gave a little squirm in David’s arms. “Thank you, Daddy. But I could take it off...”

“Am I always going to be chasing you around, trying to keep your clothes on?” David looked amused. More evidence that having a Daddy was just... different. Better.

Naftali was smiling inside, because David had said *always* like he was maybe thinking about their future, too. But on the outside, Naftali pouted. “No. You’re supposed to help me take them off!”

“It’s time for dinner.”

“I know! And I got all dressed up.” Naftali lifted his arms.

David kissed him. “You’re incorrigible.” But that didn’t stop him from dragging the sweater over Naftali’s head. “I s-s-still can’t believe we’re doing this.” His hands drifted down Naftali’s bare chest, then paused before his jeans.

Naftali held his breath. This was all so new to David. And that made it special for Naftali, too. He got to be David’s first for so many things.

Naftali leaned in. “Show me off, Daddy. Show them who I belong to.”

David sucked in a breath. Then he unzipped Naftali's jeans... definitely with a bit more stroking than strictly necessary for the task.

Naftali pressed into his hand, seeking out more touch.

He'd prepared for this when he'd gone back upstairs earlier. Usually he prepped his packer with cornstarch and had a layer of fabric protecting his skin from the sweat and irritation. But this was his sexy packer—ridged on the back, and now coated with Sliquid lube, so that it gave him a little jolt of pleasure each time he moved. The blue briefs were double-layered in the front, the tight ring in the first layer of fabric squeezing tightly around the base of his cock to keep it in place. And with the extra girth and flexible shaft inside, he'd effectively been hard all evening.

It matched where his brain was exactly.

David pulled him close, stroking him again.

"Daddy..." he exhaled.

"You like that?" David whispered.

"I can feel you everywhere." It was absolutely true. The heavy weight cupped in Daddy's hand and the bright pleasure at each stroke all came together.

Maybe he'd have to tell David about all of this... Let him know how he could feel good too... But not right now, while Daddy's hand was moving faster, harder, driving him higher to...

"Jesus, Naftali," David swore.

He removed his hand, so Naftali rutted against his thigh.

"Go get your food, baby boy," David whispered against his ear.

Fuck. How could he possibly think about *food* right now?
"You're mean, Daddy."

David shook his head. "We're supposed to be-to be eating dinner."

Naftali snorted. "Look around."

While they'd been making out, Neil had piled up two plates of food and set them down on a low side table. He was kneeling, with complete serenity, on a cushion in front of the nearby couch.

Jamie added his plate to the table, and then slithered across the same couch. He struck a pose in front of Neil, one knee raised with his bare foot crossed over his prosthetic leg, his skirt falling so far open that Naftali could see his lacy white panties from across the room.

Neil reached up to run reverent fingers down the wide V of Jamie's dress, but he didn't rise from the floor.

David took it all in. "Fuck."

Naftali grinned. "Exactly." Then he leaned in closer. "They're all going to know just how hard you made me. That you were stroking me off over here, getting me all worked up and desperate."

David's hands tightened convulsively on Naftali's sides. "And now I'm going to make you wait."

All David seemed to need, sometimes, was a little bit of the script to get started.

Naftali pouted again. "Mean Daddy."

David popped him on the ass. "Go get your food."

Naftali huffed, but really, he was thrilled. He toed off his shoes, leaving everything in a messy pile.

Then, just like Daddy told him, he got a plate. He took a little bit of everything—it looked *good*—and sauntered over to the couch opposite their hosts. Neil had chosen a corner that was tucked just out of the way of the front windows, but still close to the decorated Christmas tree and the golden menorah that Naftali had set up in the window when he came down.

It was a little chilly, since Naftali was only wearing his shimmering blue briefs and the silver socks that he'd pulled back up to his knees. But he had some ideas about what to do about that.

Predictably, David had stopped to fold Naftali's jeans and sweater, placing them on a chair with his shoes beneath. And for once, Naftali wasn't going to let himself feel even a little bit guilty or inadequate.

Because David kept pausing as he added things to his plate to watch Naftali, a tiny smile on his face.

Sebastian returned a moment later, now clad in black leather pants, boots, and a matching harness. He seated himself on the couch, legs spread wide and commanding, in front of Neil's face. There was no question about their roles—that Neil's only purpose was to serve, perhaps by sucking on the cock that was just inches from his lips. Jamie curled around his Daddy, sliding under one arm, like a shiny decoration to be pet and played with.

The three of them made a beautiful tableau together—dominance and submission distilled.

They must do this all the time, Naftali mused. The two boys were so different, but there was no question about their roles. Sebastian handed Jamie his plate, and in a rumble of quiet voices, they began eating together.

Jamie chattered in between bites, finding things he particularly loved and shoving them into his Daddy's mouth, or Neil's. They both licked his fingers clean, chuckling at his bubbly enthusiasm.

Neil, however, never lifted a finger. He ate when his Daddy or his boy pressed something to his lips, sitting still as a statue to be treasured and fed.

Naftali wouldn't have watched the trio for so long—he'd certainly seen enough kinksters eat with their partners before—but he was seeing everything with fresh eyes.

How Neil was the center of his Daddy's attention. How Jamie's partners laughed at his mischief, and Sebastian's eyes sparkled whenever he counted out another punishment. How they were serving their Daddy by being adored.

David was watching them too, and Naftali wondered what was going on in his head. He was holding a full plate, but

hadn't quite made it into the atrium.

Naftali waved, which seemed to set him into motion.

The moment David reached the couch, Naftali plopped onto his lap, legs thrown over the side. Just to make things clear.

Not that he wouldn't kneel, if David wanted him on the floor.

David's arm came around him, pulling him close. "This is..." He blew out a breath. "Just let me-let me-let me know if I'm not doing this right."

Ah. His nerves were back. New situation, new social requirements. Naftali nuzzled him. "There aren't any rules. Well, there are the rules *you* make, Daddy. You just tell me what you want me to do. My sense is that orgasms and nudity are a go, and you're welcome to show me off. Jamie would probably make out with me—" David stiffened, so he rushed to continue "—if you thought it was hot to watch and command the scene. Some people are into that."

"Are *you* into that?"

"Only if it's the scene you want to create. I'm into the submission and maybe the exhibitionism. I'll do what you tell me to do."

"So you'd do it... for me?"

"That's right, Daddy. You're in charge. You choose. You can show me off and make me come. Or we can save that for the bedroom and have a relaxing dinner together with some other kinksters who might put on a show themselves."

David seemed to take that in, nodding slowly. "I-I-I... I want to feed you." He seemed more confident with the options laid out. This was familiar territory.

Naftali opened his mouth wide, like a baby bird, eliciting the laugh he was expecting. *Now* David was really comfortable.

They smiled at each other, sharing something between just the two of them. Maybe like the way Neil and Jamie had

looked at each other earlier.

Naftali felt a swell of pride every time he could bring David that confidence. It was like there was this Daddy Domness lurking inside him, and all Naftali had to do to release it was be a little more himself.

David picked up a latke first—because he was perfect like that—and dipped it in the sour cream and applesauce before lifting it to Naftali’s lips.

“Mmmmm...” Naftali hummed in pleasure. It was still hot, the oil making it bubbly and crisp. Though the best part was really David feeding it to him.

David took his own bite, right where Naftali’s lips had touched.

Sexy as fuck.

Or maybe even romantic, with the way David was looking into his eyes.

David fed him the next bite, then took one himself, until Naftali was sucking the last greasy crumbs from Daddy’s fingers and then sucking even longer because of the wonder and adoration in Daddy’s eyes.

The rest of the room fell away.

“Happy Hanukkah, baby boy,” David murmured.

“Merry Christmas, Daddy.”

And suddenly Naftali was thinking about the future. About merging holidays, and how David had listened so intently to the things that were important to him.

What if they could have more holidays like this? What would David think of the deep but whimsical symbolism of Passover or the joyful chaos of Purim? What if they were still together next fall, braiding a round challah for Rosh Hashanah? What if they became one of those couples who put up a Christmas tree and a menorah together next winter?

What if David was actually exactly what Naftali needed, and he already had it right now?

When they were together like this, it felt inevitable. Like nothing could go wrong.

David picked up another morsel, a strip of turkey dripping with gravy. He offered it to Naftali, but some of the gravy splattered hot on his chest.

“Oops,” Naftali giggled. “Guess you’ll have to clean that up.”

David gave him a look, like this had somehow been his fault. True, he was the one with two free hands who could have easily swiped it up. But this was much more fun.

Jamie’s voice came from the other couch. “Oops. I spilled something too.” Naftali looked up to find him dragging a cranberry-coated spoon across his thigh.

Sebastian sighed, but he was holding back a smile. “Looks like we have some messy boys tonight.” He rested a hand on Neil’s shoulder. “Better clean that up, baby.”

Neil obediently started lapping at Jamie’s leg, while Jamie gasped and whimpered.

So damn hot.

Naftali turned to David, beseechingly. This was an invitation. Daddy could choose how to play it.

“You are t-t-t-t, t-trouble, boy.”

Naftali grinned, because he already knew what that meant. He twisted his chest up so Daddy could lick it. God, yes.

Jamie giggled behind him. “We should have a contest. Who can get the messiest?”

“No.” Both Doms spoke in stereo, then their voices tangled over each other. “We are *not* getting their f-f-f-furniture all dirty,” from David and “Do you remember how long it took us to clean up the last time this happened?” from Sebastian.

Naftali took up the giggling with Jamie.

“Okay...” Jamie pouted. “New idea. Blow job contests! It can be a new holiday tradition.”

Naftali only had to glance at David to know that was a terrible idea. David was still not totally comfortable receiving pleasure, and he might not want to come out as trans. Naftali was totally ready to drop to his knees and deep throat that big boy, but that didn't mean David would enjoy it.

Much easier to divert the conversation. "I don't know..." He gave a languorous wiggle across David's lap. "Since it's Chrismukkah, maybe the boys should get to come first. See whose Daddy can..."

Sebastian cut in. "See whose Daddy can spank them first if they keep acting up instead of eating their dinner?" His voice was full of threat, but he was clearly playing along.

Jamie took a quick bite.

"I'm being good!" Naftali added, opening his mouth pointedly for David to fill it.

David clearly didn't agree with that statement, but he still rewarded Naftali with the bite of turkey from before.

"M-M-M-Maybe w-w-we *should* have a s-spanking contest," David announced.

Fuck, yeah! Now he was getting into the spirit of things. Naftali's ass was already tingling at just the thought.

Sebastian looked up with calculated interest. "What are the terms?"

David looked around. He was clearly out of his depth, and Naftali didn't want this playful Daddy Dom side to go back into hiding.

Good thing Naftali was always full of ideas. "Whoever safewords first has to... vacuum this up." He waved around at the floor that was already speckled with crumbs.

Jamie clapped his hands. "Oh, you're on! I *hate* vacuuming."

Sebastian's voice came out at a growl. "I'm not going to go easy on you, boy."

Jamie batted his eyes. "Of course not, Daddy."

“Are you playing, Neil?” Naftali asked.

Neil shook his head, then added dryly, “I’ll referee.”

“Thank God,” Jamie huffed. “Otherwise we’d both lose.”

That set them all laughing. It was always the quiet ones.

“B-B-B-But only when you’ve eaten your d-d-d-dinner,” David added.

That glow in Naftali’s chest grew, because he *knew* how hard it was for David to speak when his stutter was acting up, but he was totally nailing it.

David placed another bite of food in Naftali’s mouth, tracing over his lips. Something bloomed inside him. He was just so... happy. Sizzling with anticipation for what was coming next, but also more at home than he’d ever felt on a Dom’s lap. Comfortable and silly and... himself.

He could see it every time he looked at David’s face, which he honestly had a hard time looking away from. Just by being here, Naftali was pleasing his Daddy.

The meal passed in a haze of teasing and cute stories of holiday memories. Jamie and Naftali threw friendly jibes at each other, in between warnings from their Doms.

It was maybe a little weird celebrating Christmas, but it was fun joining in with friends. On Daddy’s lap, Naftali had the soul-deep contentment of being exactly where he wanted to be.

He was sure David would get along with his friends back home. He could see them together at play parties just like this, or at dinner with some buddies. Lazy weekend mornings at home.

If only he could be certain that it would always be this good.

He didn’t allow himself to dwell too much on that, though.

Not when Sebastian was joking about warming up his hand and David was whispering in his ear. “You’re sure you want this, baby boy? You c-c-c-can say no.”

Naftali turned to face him, keeping his voice low. “Daddy, I want to feel your hand on my ass for *days*.” Especially since it was Sunday night already, and they flew home on Tuesday. He had to make it last. “But only if you want it, too.” That was just as important to check.

“I think you’ve been asking for this spanking all day,” David replied.

“What, me?” He hadn’t put that much thought into it. But if he had... This was exactly what he wanted. Another memory to preserve.

“Over my lap, boy.” It came out as a growl.

Hell, yes. Naftali *liked* this side of Daddy.

Jamie was already draped over Sebastian’s lap, wide hands massaging his ass and skimming under the lace.

Naftali made space for David to scoot to the middle of the couch so that he could take the same pose.

David’s hands landed on him, sending shivers through him as he stroked.

“Think we should bare their little asses?” Sebastian asked.

It was clearly a question for David, as it should be. But Naftali nodded anyway. They were still too new to each other for David to be confident with his limits in a new situation.

In response, David pulled the thin layer of fabric down past Naftali’s butt. The cool air rushed over the newly exposed skin, making him feel naughty in a whole new way.

It was one thing for him to prance around in a few strips of clothing. It was completely different for Daddy to bare his vulnerable parts to the room.

His ass was exposed because Daddy wanted it that way.

Naftali drew in a shuddering breath and wiggled a little to get everything arranged exactly right. His packer was nestled between Daddy’s thighs, giving him little jolts of arousal from the slick friction when he rocked.

So he did it again.

He could feel Daddy's thick cock against his side. Then Daddy's hands returned to his skin, warm and commanding, touching him wherever Daddy wanted while their friends looked on.

It was daring. Intimate. Wicked.

All of those flashing contradictions that wound his desire higher and higher.

"Ready?" Sebastian asked.

David must have nodded.

"May the best brat win!" Jamie cackled, ending in a scream. "Daddy, that was..."

Naftali laughed, but then he was grunting himself, because his first spanking was *hard*.

He jerked up automatically, and David's strong hand sent him crashing back down to the couch, heavy on his spine.

Hot. As. Fuck.

It still took a minute for the pain to fully absorb, while Daddy massaged it into his skin. This wasn't going to be easy.

Another slap fell on top of the first.

That hurt, too. Tears spring up.

"Ouch!" he complained.

David chuckled.

The third strike fell, and that was when something changed inside him. Suddenly he *craved*. He pushed his ass out, already seeking the next one.

David rewarded him.

Massage and spank. Massage and spank.

God, he was such a slut for this, moaning on Daddy's lap.

Daddy hit new spots, unmarked flesh that made him wail.

The caresses grew farther between, and the blows fell faster. Daddy wasn't holding back.

Naftali's cries were getting mixed together with Jamie's.

Naftali rocked helplessly against Daddy's thighs, seeking more friction. More of those intoxicating spankings.

Daddy pressed his other hand harder into his back. "I didn't say you-you-you could get off, did I?"

Oh God. Fuck. "Please, Daddy?" He might do it anyway. Just to see what happened. And because this was too, too good.

Daddy hit him down lower, just as the base of his ass. He howled.

Would Daddy really keep him from coming? He didn't even care about winning any more. Just the rhythm of Daddy's hand and how close he could come to reaching ecstasy before the pain got to be too much.

He was riding the edge, and he didn't ever want it to stop.

Sebastian barked out, "Spread your legs," to Jamie, which was followed by a whole new round of gasping cries from his companion.

So. Damn. Hot.

Maybe Daddy would...

David pushed Naftali's knee out to the side, spreading him open with his other hand. Naftali had to shift to keep his packer in place—meaning the perfect angle for rubbing off on his bio-dick—but that was fine because...

Oh, *fuck*.

It hurt and it stung, and it made him just about jizz right there.

"Daddy!" he called out. He needed... He needed...

Another strike fell, right on his sensitive hole.

One part of him said he should try to get away, but the rest of him arched up, seeking more.

He was tumbling into that upside down place where pain and need and arousal got all tangled up. There wasn't enough

warm-up, and it was sharp and difficult and so fucking good, because he was doing it all for his Daddy, who just kept whaling on him, on that most sensitive place that was Daddy's to do with as he pleased...

The flood of pain was rising within him, carrying him along.

He could hear Jamie, grunting and crying out to his own lost rhythm. Each smack crackled in the air between them.

Naftali's ass was on fire.

It was so good.

But almost too much.

It hurt. And he needed. Needed to come. Needed Daddy to stop smacking and just fuck him right now. Take his hole with those thick fingers, or turn him over and touch his...

The next slap released a sob. It *hurt*.

But he could endure. Just a little more.

Daddy rubbed over his reddened ass, giving him a little reprieve.

But not for long.

Another slap fell. The left cheek and the right. Part of his butt felt almost numb.

Maybe he should call it. Maybe he should...

"Red!" That was Jamie. "Red, red, red! That *hurt*, Daddy."

Sebastian laughed, delighted. "Really, dragonfly?"

David was already caressing Naftali's ass, soothing the burn into something that felt like ecstasy. "How are you doing, baby boy?"

"I won," Naftali smiled lazily. He felt almost drunk off the endorphins. "For you, Daddy."

David chuckled. "Come up here, you little monster."

The kite in Naftali's soul flew even higher. He had a nickname. He was Daddy's little monster.

With a few nudges and tugs, Naftali found himself pressed to Daddy's chest, his reddened ass sticking out behind him until Daddy covered it with his hands.

Which was just perfect because now he could rock against Daddy's cock and take advantage of all that delicious burn.

"What do you need, baby?" David's breath was hot along his ear.

"Need you, Daddy. You got me so hard."

Behind him, Naftali could hear Sebastian's commands to his boys. Neil was about to suck Jamie off.

David must have seen them, because suddenly he clutched Naftali harder to him. "Get yourself off," he commanded, quiet and rough.

Naftali didn't need a second invitation. He thrust one hand into his briefs, reaching behind the pebbled back of the packer to his T-dick. The angle wasn't great, but he was so close that just rubbing his fingers over it was enough.

Daddy squeezed his ass, reawakening every nerve ending, the thrill going straight to his cock. Daddy invaded his mouth in a dirty kiss, his tongue mimicking a rough fuck that Naftali echoed with his own hands.

Naftali could hear the moans ringing from his chest, the way they mingled with the grunts and whimpers of the trio behind him.

He was so close. So close. Spiraling up and up until...

"Come, Nafti."

Ecstasy broke inside of him, crashing over his body. He stroked himself a few more times, shaking with the pleasure that burst loose, clinging to it as long as he could.

Clinging to *Daddy*, who was holding him gently now, and even pulled up the little scrap of fabric over his ass.

As if he needed his modesty right now.

The thought made him giggle.

David nuzzled into him. “Was that okay?” For once, he sounded like he already knew the answer. Like he was already proud and delighted by Naftali’s pleasure.

“God, yes. It was so hot, Daddy.” He burrowed his head in Daddy’s neck.

Daddy cuddled him closer, stroking down his back in long, sweet rows.

Behind him, he could hear more moans. The trio was clearly still busy.

“Oh!” David started.

“Hmmm...?” Naftali wasn’t moving. No matter how engaging the show might be.

“They’re uh... I mean...”

Naftali hid his smile. David being awkward about sex was adorable. Especially after what they’d just done. “Fucking?”

“No. Uh, Neil sucked Jamie off and now he’s, uh, doing the same for Sebastian.”

“Is it hot?” Naftali asked.

“Uh, yeah?”

Too cute. “You know you’re allowed to look, right? They *want* you to look. Especially Neil. He’s got a humiliation-exhibitionism thing going. And you know Jamie likes to show off.”

David nodded. Apparently, he’d been too distracted before to pay much attention to the trio. Or maybe it was different now that cocks were coming out. He seemed to be entranced. He was hardly moving.

Naftali breathed against his ear. “Do you like watching, Daddy?”

“Uh...” But he jerked his head in a nod.

“Tell me what you see.”

David let out a little moan. “Sebastian’s just... leaning back. And Neil is... He’s so in-in-in-into it. He’s...”

“Hungry for it? A greedy slut for his Daddy’s cock?” Naftali whispered.

David nodded, his fingers grasping at Naftali’s back.

So... maybe Daddy was a bit of a voyeur. Or maybe he was just getting ideas. “Tell me about Sebastian.”

“He looks like a king. Just... he’s not even doing anything, just...”

“Letting Neil worship him? Accepting his boy’s submission as his due?”

“Yeah,” David exhaled.

“And what about Jamie?”

“Uh... he was laying on the couch before, but now he’s, um, licking it, too.”

“Mmmmm... Sounds like two boys who can’t get enough of their Daddy’s cock. What lucky, lucky boys.”

David moaned, so quietly that only Naftali could hear him.

“Are you imagining me doing the same thing for you?”

This time, David’s moan was louder, merging with the wet, throaty sounds from the couch behind them.

“I would do exactly that. Drop to my knees right here and take you out of your jeans.” It was an offer for the actual deed, but maybe what would really get David off was imagining it instead. Dysphoria was a tricky thing, and sometimes words were sexier than body parts. “I wouldn’t be able to wait to taste you. You’d feel so heavy on my tongue.”

David groaned, hips jerking upward.

“That’s right, Daddy. You could just let me lick you everywhere and suck you down. Or you could put your hand on my head and guide me exactly where you want me.”

David made a strangled grunt.

“You’re so thick, too. I might not even be able to breathe.” There was a rhythm to the moans behind him, and Naftali

matched it, rocking on Daddy's cock. His own was already reaching arousal again.

"Nafti," David breathed.

"Love how you taste," Naftali panted. "How you fill up my mouth."

David was trembling underneath him. His hand tangled in Naftali's hair, making his spine arch. Just like it would if he were down on his knees.

"Fuck, Daddy. That's it. Think I could get both of your balls in my mouth at once? I'd be so careful. And I'd bet you'd smell so good. All musk and man."

David's breath was hitching. This was working for him, and Naftali was more than happy to bring him pleasure this way.

Naftali shifted over, so he was just straddling one of David's legs, and his knee was pressed up between David's thighs. David could grind against that if he wanted, or not, but now the choice was his.

They weren't pressed as close together now, so Naftali could see David's face. His eyes were wide, darting between Naftali and the scene playing out on the other couch. His mouth hung open. God, he was gorgeous, letting himself go like this.

The sounds from behind them changed to thick slaps of skin against skin and muffled moans. "Is Sebastian being rough with his boys?" Naftali guessed.

"Yeah..." It came out more of a groan than a word.

"You know I like it a little rough, right? Watch how Sebastian does it. You could fuck my face, Daddy. Make me choke on your dick."

David ground against his knee. Naftali could practically feel the pressure at the back of his throat.

"Baby boy..." David gasped.

“That’s right. Give me everything you’ve got. I’ll take it all. Everything you want to give me.”

David’s hips jerked up. He was clutching Naftali’s side hard now, pulling his hair with the other hand, so that he was pinned in place.

“Tastes so good, Daddy. Fill me up. Want to taste you.”

“Nafti...”

“Oh, fuck, Daddy. Like that.”

Because Daddy was rutting against him hard now, his face pulled tight as he chased his pleasure.

The sounds behind him intensified. Sebastian sounded like he was close, the rough commands he issued losing out to ragged breaths. Jamie was whimpering and the sounds coming from Neil were wet and dirty and unpredictable.

“Want your cum, Daddy,” Naftali begged. “Want you to ruin my throat. I’ll suck you so good. All wet and tight and...”

Sebastian shouted. Deep moans followed, and Naftali couldn’t sort out who they belonged to. Nor did he really care.

David’s head fell back, neck straining, muscles shaking. Naftali could see the moment when orgasm hit.

“...taking everything you gave me,” Naftali finished. “Just like that, Daddy. Come in my mouth.”

David pulled Naftali in tight, cradling him close while he shook.

Naftali hadn’t come a second time, but it didn’t matter. Watching David come was worth even more.

He shifted around until he was straddling David again, then curled up against his neck.

“Thank you, Daddy,” he whispered. That was what he felt. Gratitude. For being able to serve his Daddy like this.

“Thank *you*, baby boy.” Then, wonderingly, “I can’t believe I did that.” His hands were all over Naftali’s back, light caresses that made him feel whole.

“I’m so glad you did. Hot as hell.”

“Really?”

“One of the things I always say in my classes is that the mind’s the sexiest organ in the human body. That was *hot*.”

“So you liked it, too?”

“I’m a sub. It really turns me on to please you. Tonight was perfect.” He listened to the soft murmur of voices behind him. “I think our audience appreciated it, too.”

David hid his head in Naftali’s shoulder. “I kind of f-f-forgot they could watch us. I was thinking that we-we-we, we-we were the audience.”

Naftali nodded. “I was actually thinking about it that way, too. Maybe we can do some watching tomorrow night at the Kinkmas thing.”

David ran gentle hands down Naftali’s cheek. “That would be alright with you? If we didn’t-didn’t-didn’t do anything else and just w-watched?”

“Voyeurism *is* something. Being your boy is something. I’ll enjoy whatever you decide you want us to do, and I’ll be content, too, if we stay upstairs. Though I may demand cuddles.”

David laughed, joyfully. “I’m sure you will.”

“But I still think we could have a lot of fun at Kinkmas...” Even watching had all sorts of possibilities. Naftali couldn’t wait to introduce David to them.

One more exciting first for David, and a beautiful memory for Naftali to take home. This week together was going to fill up his spank bank for the rest of the year. Maybe for life.

Naftali leaned in for a kiss, trying to save up this feeling for as long as it could last. David met his mouth gently, still tasting of latkes and cranberry sauce.

They got lost together, until Jamie’s amused voice drifted over to them. “Dessert, anyone?”



Naftali waited by the side of the bed, feeling sleepy and cozy. He'd just brushed his teeth, and now David was in the bathroom changing into his pajamas. Naftali was supposed to be doing the same in the room.

He got his PJs and sat on the bed.

David came out a few minutes later. "Nafti?" he asked.

Naftali didn't move. He was trying to figure out what he wanted. And then how to ask for it.

"Is everything alright?" David sounded concerned.

"I'm fine," he answered absently. He was just thinking. He knew how to ask for sex. And he definitely knew how to turn up the kink. He'd already asked David to dress him once.

But this was different, because this time, he was asking for himself. Maybe even admitting something to himself that he still struggled with at a deeper level.

"Can you put my pajamas on tonight, Daddy?"

David's face split into a grin. "Of course, baby boy." He crossed the room in a few strides and covered Naftali's face with soft kisses before easing him back onto the mattress.

He slid the long socks down Naftali's legs, planting a kiss on each knee. Then, without any change in his expression, he slid the tight briefs down Naftali's hips and over his feet.

That was just what Naftali had been looking for. It wasn't sexual and it wasn't the prelude to anything else. It was just intimate. Sweet.

Daddy taking care of his baby boy.

Neither of them spoke as Daddy pulled up the pair of soft cotton boxers, and then the loose flannel pants, ending with a kiss to Naftali's belly. He urged Naftali to sit up and slid the cozy shirt over his head. "Thank *you*, Daddy."

"Th-thank you, Nafti," David whispered.

Maybe it was for both of them.

Naftali yawned. He was relaxed now, all ready to fall asleep. He lay back on the mattress and snuggled in. “Did you have a good Christmas?”

David shut off the light and came around the other side. “The very best. Truly. Better than anything I’d ever imagined.”

Naftali smiled in the dark, so widely his cheeks almost hurt.

“Did you have a good Hanukkah?” David asked as he slid into bed.

Naftali laughed. “I mean... Hanukkah’s not really that big a holiday, but...” He searched for the right words. The ones that wouldn’t overcommit him, but would give some expression to how he was feeling. “This was more than I ever dreamed it would be.”

He snuggled into David’s open arms.

“Good night, baby boy.”

“Good night, Daddy. Sweet dreams.”

DAVID

David couldn't believe it was their last night together. The week had just flown by.

Tonight was the Kinkmas thing, and then tomorrow they were getting back on the plane. In less than twenty-four hours this could all be over.

They'd spent the day skiing, and then taken a long nap together before heating up the last of the leftovers for dinner.

David wished they didn't have to leave the room at all.

He'd been cautiously excited for weeks about going to a real kink event, and now he would happily forgo it all for another night with Naftali.

But Naftali was already in the shower, buzzing with excitement. The room, as usual, was festooned with Naftali's stuff, including a wide selection of any kinky articles that either of them could wear.

Like the leather chest harness that Naftali had held up to David, practically purring about how good it would look on him.

The bed had more of Naftali's itty bitty sparkling briefs in three different colors. Some clinging shirts that looked too small to even fit over his head. A few pairs of shorts that were far too short. Actually, all of that was clearly for Naftali.

David would stick to his own jeans and boots, obviously.

Naftali had also suggested leather cuffs with embedded metal rings for his own wrists. So he'd be *ready*, he'd said

with a wink.

And then Naftali had produced a collar... and a leash. He hadn't even blinked when he'd offered it up to David, suggesting that if it was clipped to his neck, everyone would know who he belonged to.

Fuck.

The idea was intoxicating, but... David would have rather tested it out in their room. Not that he was averse to showing Naftali off.

It was just... There was only one more night. And he didn't want to share even the air that Naftali breathed with another human being.

Still, he knew how much Naftali wanted to go.

David ran his fingers over the harness. The leather was chunky and thick, held together by wide metal rivets. He could smell the rich, musky scent of leather without even holding it to his face.

Was he someone who could wear something like that?

Naftali was still in the shower, so David whipped his shirt off.

It turned out that Naftali was a few sizes smaller, so he had to make a few adjustments to the buckles.

But then, it was on. Definitely not a useful piece of clothing by any stretch of the word. Just a strap of leather across his chest and two more across his shoulders.

He opened the closet door to see himself.

He looked... good. His thick belly balanced out his chest, where his small, flat nipples peeked out from coiled tufts of hair. His muscles weren't well-defined, but if the Daddy porn he'd watched was anything to go by, he didn't need to be.

He was an actual type... A Daddy bear or something, like Naftali had called him before. Even after years on T, seeing himself this way still filled him with a rich shot of affirmation.

He looked Dominant. Virile. Dangerous, even.

Someone who should have a sub like Naftali kneeling at his feet.

Damn.

He was almost afraid to admit how much he liked it.

The shower shut off, and Naftali wandered out of the bathroom before David could consider whether to take it off.

Naftali wolf whistled.

Okay, so that was kind of gratifying, too.

The boy wasn't wearing a stitch of clothing—not even the towel that dangled from his hand—and seeing him that way still made David suck in his breath.

Also, Naftali was dripping all over the floor.

“Didn't you dry yourself, baby boy?”

“Yeah...?” He held up the towel as evidence.

David chuckled and crossed the room. He couldn't decide whether Naftali truly didn't understand the use of a towel, or was just playing it up to get David to dry him.

Either way, he would take every opportunity he could get to touch Naftali's body.

To memorize every line and curve.

To towel off Naftali's hair, like he was a little kid, and then kiss hungrily down his damp collar bones in a way that was all sex and need.

Maybe if he distracted Naftali for long enough, they could just skip the whole Kinkmas thing, and he could make his baby boy scream up here. Naftali would fall asleep in a happy, exhausted puddle, and David would hold him, breathing in his scent.

Naftali's fingers traced over David's chest, tugging at the leather. “Good thing I've already staked my claim, or the subs would be all over you.”

David sincerely doubted that. Especially once anyone heard him stutter. But it felt good to hear Naftali say it.

“What am I wearing, Daddy? How do you want to show me off?”

David’s heart beat faster. He hadn’t been quite sure if that was his job. He’d just really wanted it to be.

He considered his options, instantly knowing that he’d be putting more clothing on Naftali rather than less. It was one thing to have Naftali slinking around mostly naked yesterday when it was just the lodge owners around.

David had known exactly who Naftali was putting on a show for, amidst all that giggling.

But today, there would be a lot of strangers. He didn’t want their greedy eyes on his boy.

He picked a plain black t-shirt, though there was still a shimmer to it. It clung to Naftali’s chest when he slid it over his head.

“These too, Daddy?” Naftali asked, indicating the pair of leather cuffs.

They hadn’t even used anything like that together yet, but how could he say no? There was a certain symmetry to it, too—the way they matched the black leather of his harness.

“Alright.” He picked them up. They were heavy and thick. He unlatched the short links connecting them, then opened each one.

Just slipping them onto Naftali’s wrists was like laying another claim.

So maybe he was into this. *Really* into this. With just a flick of his thumb, he could chain Naftali’s hands together. Behind his back so he was helpless. To something else, so he couldn’t move.

And even if he didn’t actually do it... anyone walking by would know that he could.

The possibilities were heady.

Next he chose a pair of black briefs. Like the others, there was an elastic ring in the inner layer of fabric for Naftali to

stick his silicone dick through while the balls remained anchored on the other side. “Do you want to wear your packer?” he asked.

“Yes, please, Daddy. The one from last night.”

Wow. David had kind of assumed that would be something more... private. But he should have known better.

David rinsed his own packer each night and dried it immediately before slipping it into the cornstarch bag buried deep in his suitcase. He wasn't ashamed of it, but he didn't want to look at it, or have anyone else see it, when he wasn't wearing it.

Naftali left his packers to dry on the bathroom counter, just sitting there on a towel. The butt plug from a few days ago was still sitting on the bathroom counter, too, jumbled around with the soft, fleshy cocks and the hand-washed elastic harness straps.

David had very carefully not touched them, only moving the corners of the towel when he needed to. He'd also been very careful to put up the sign on the door each morning saying that they didn't want the room cleaned.

“So you w-w-want m-me to g-g-g-get your c-cock?” David confirmed.

“Yeah. The one with the ridges on the back. Unless it weirds you out.”

David shook his head. “No, it's fine.” It wasn't like he hadn't done this a million times for himself. It was just very intimate. Personal.

He'd be touching Naftali's cock, even if he wasn't wearing it yet. Giving him this piece of himself that affirmed his identity and made David want to crowd in and touch him everywhere.

Naftali followed David into the bathroom, locking his arms around David's waist and humming absently. David carefully fit the thick cock through the ring, leaving the heavy balls and the flat, ridged base on the inside. “Do you n-need anything on this?” It would chafe without powder.

Naftali grinned. “Oh, definitely. But after I’m wearing it.”

David knelt so that Naftali could slide his feet in. There was a certain trick to keeping the weight outside so the top didn’t flip over while he slid the tight briefs up Naftali’s thighs. He pressed a kiss to Naftali’s knee.

Did Naftali understand what an honor it was to dress him like this? How much care David wanted to put into every movement?

“Now what?”

Naftali grabbed a tube of lube—also hanging out on the bathroom counter—and squirted a dollop into David’s hand. Then he pressed himself into David’s arms, back to chest, so they were both watching the mirror.

“Get me slick, Daddy. So I can feel you touching me.”

It shouldn’t have taken him this long to figure it out, but it did. That was what the ridges were for. David had known this was a possible option for strap-ons, but never wanted it for himself. It made perfect sense that Naftali would embrace it.

He reached into Naftali’s briefs, fingers angled back to protect the lube until he reached his target.

When he did, he drew an immediate moan from Naftali’s lips. God, he was gorgeous.

David stroked Naftali’s small, slippery cock. It was impossible not to.

Then Naftali pulled David’s other hand over the front of his briefs. Now he was touching Naftali’s dick both ways—one hand heavy with the weight of his packer, the other where Naftali was hot and silky and trembling.

He coordinated both hands together, the pressure from outside stroking within. Even on the back of David’s fingers, it felt good.

Naftali just melted into David’s arms, his hips thrusting forward.

“Is this what you did yesterday, baby boy? When I was touching you?”

“Mmmmm-hmmmm...” Naftali hummed, sounding barely coherent. “Any time I’m doing something sexy. You might want to try it, too.”

Maybe. But, uh, not while Naftali was watching. He wasn’t quite that comfortable yet.

And Naftali was still moaning in his arms. Such a delightful handful. All flushed and languid in the mirror, not even trying to maintain his own balance.

“If you come now, will you still want to go to this kinky thing?” David was only half joking.

“Yeah,” Naftali panted. “Still need to show off my hot Daddy. And I think you’ll want to see it.”

David stroked faster. Maybe he only wanted to watch the rapture on Naftali’s face. Maybe he didn’t want to be anywhere else. Ever.

Or maybe he wanted to do anything that Naftali wanted to do. Maybe he wanted, just for an evening, to be Naftali’s “hot Daddy” and explore this new world with Naftali by his side.

“Daddy...” Naftali moaned, fingers clenched tight around David’s arms, not to guide his movements but just clinging on.

“Yes, baby boy? Should I let you come?”

Naftali threw his head back, the long column of his neck exposed. “Please, Daddy.”

“Or should I bring you downstairs all hard and desperate for me?”

That forced a wail from Naftali’s mouth and a shudder from his body. There wasn’t any complaining, though.

“Daaadddyyyyyy....”

It was tempting.

But David didn’t actually want to stop. He could make Naftali come now *and* later.

So many times that maybe Naftali wouldn't even want to think of anyone else. Here or back in Philadelphia.

He slid Naftali's T-dick between two fingers, so that he could stroke the shaft while the sensitive head rubbed against the packer.

Naftali was trembling, his chest rising and falling in time to his rapid breaths and whimpers.

“Come, beautiful boy. My little songbird.”

David didn't know where all these nicknames were coming from. Well, he did. He'd been thinking them in his head all week, and tonight was the last time to let them out. To imagine what it would be like to have this last.

Naftali thrust against him with a final cry that was muffled as he sought out David's mouth for a kiss.

There was nothing like seeing his baby boy fall apart in his arms.

He slowly withdrew his hands, thinking about how Naftali would be dripping with cum all evening. Because David had gotten him off. No one else got to touch him like this.

The second David's hands were free, Naftali spun in his arms, collapsing against his chest like he'd forgotten he had bones.

“Sure you're s-still up for this Kinkmas thing?” David asked, kissing his head.

Naftali wriggled in closer, if such a thing was possible, and whispered against his ear. “Everyone down there is going to know you just made me come. I'm going to smell like sex and look like you just sent me into orbit. They'll know that I belong to you.”

Oh, fuck. Arousal coiled low in David's belly. What would that feel like?

He'd been thinking of this Kinkmas thing as a distraction from what he wanted—an unnecessary intrusion of other people. But he was starting to see how it could be another type of kink all by itself.

Showing off. Maybe not being the *center* of attention. But being seen. Being acknowledged. Maybe even making other people want what he had.

He looked back at the bed. “The-the-the collar. I read that it-that it-that it was like a m-marriage?”

Naftali shook his head. “Some kinksters *do* commit to each other with public collaring ceremonies that hold the same purpose as weddings. Others might use collars to indicate a D/s relationship that’s nothing like a marriage. Or just to start and end a scene. This would be a play collar. It would say that I agree to submit to you while I’m wearing it. Socially, other people would know to address you for questions regarding me, instead of communicating with me directly, until you gave permission.”

The idea of it was becoming more arousing. And David was feeling bolder. “W-W-Wait here.”

He crossed the room to pick up the collar. It was the same black leather, with a single metal ring in the front.

His fingers were trembling by the time he returned to Naftali in the bathroom. It wasn’t so different from the cuffs... and at the same time, it was.

He opened the buckle, only fumbling it once, then had Naftali face the mirror so he could slip it on.

His cock *pounded* looking at their reflections.

Naftali looked debauched and naughty and all *his*.

But even more surprising was how he saw himself. He *was* the Dom he’d imagined being for so long.

Naftali raised one hand to stroke along the collar. His touch was reverent.

This was the same strip of leather that Naftali had crammed into the bottom of his duffle bag, but it was clear that when David put it on him, it meant a lot more.

“Let’s go, baby boy.” David heard his own voice coming out husky and rough.

“Yes, Daddy.”

In the elevator, he took Naftali’s hand. Then he remembered that there was supposed to be some sort of protocol for this. Was Naftali supposed to walk behind him?

But Naftali didn’t say anything, just leaned in close to him, their arms brushing together.

The elevator dinged, and it was like they stepped into a different world.

It was... definitely kinky, in about every way that David had imagined.

He just hadn’t expected so many people.

He stopped and stared.

Everywhere he turned were wide expanses of skin, outlined by leather or lace. Or dressed in collars and leashes. One man wore nothing but a leather mask that completely covered his face.

It was erotic... and maybe a little overwhelming.

He turned in one direction and saw a man chained up to a large X, where his partner was striking him with a whip so long it nearly touched the ceiling on each swing. Each time it landed, a thin, red stripe appeared on his back, parallel to the collection he’d already accumulated.

On the other side, a woman was splayed out on a pool table that was... not being used for its intended purpose.

He counted six naked, sweaty bodies on a couch that was definitely only meant to hold three. He couldn’t even keep track of whose hands and body parts were whose.

Incongruously, three grown adults dressed in toddler onesies were building with children’s blocks in an alcove just past the couch. Right. Age play. Littles? A man handed one of them a juice box with a kiss on the forehead.

And that was only the things David’s eyes caught on right away. Spectators stood watching some of the displays. There was a table with drinks, and more chairs and corners where

people chatted or fucked or crawled or... Wow. Was that... electricity? Some sort of glowing light that crackled in the dim room further back before it touched down on the shadowed curve of someone's skin.

That dark room was where the music was coming from, a low, heavy beat that he had trouble distinguishing over the thrum of voices and cries of pleasure.

"Welcome to your first play party." Naftali's voice seemed to reach him from far away.

It took David a moment to turn and find Naftali's bright, mischievous eyes beaming up at him.

"There are a lot of people," he replied. And they'd barely stepped out of the elevator.

"Too much?" Naftali asked, without any sign of judgment. "Just say the word and we'll go back upstairs."

"No." It was true. He didn't *love* being crowded by so many people, but he could adjust to it. He just needed a moment.

There was a little table set up in front of the elevator, and Naftali pulled him over to it. There was information printed there on little half-page sheets with the Meadowlark's logo next to the Cuffd one.

Information was good. Information helped him to prepare.

It was a lot of rules, which he mostly hoped they wouldn't need. "We're just watching, right?" he asked Naftali.

Naftali leaned in to kiss his neck. "We're doing whatever feels comfortable for you. You already know my limits, and that I'm comfortable with pretty much anything that's permitted in this space. We can watch. We can make friends. We can ask for a lesson if we find the right person. Or we can sit in a corner somewhere, and I'll kneel at your feet and it'll just be us in our little bubble. No matter what we do, I'm here as your boy, and you're my Daddy. I'll follow your lead."

David felt his chest puff up. He knew it shouldn't have felt so significant. It was just that combination of Naftali

supporting his needs and still, somehow, handing back the reins of control. Because Naftali *wanted* David to be his Daddy.

Naftali looked over his shoulder for a moment and grabbed two red paper bands from the table.

“What are those?” David asked.

Naftali was already fastening one around David’s wrist. “Just says that we’re not open to being approached for play by anyone else. Right?”

David took the other one, a weight falling from his shoulders. He knew that Naftali wouldn’t be looking... but David didn’t want the awkward job of explaining that to anyone.

Why didn’t people walk around with these things all the time?

David looped the other one around Naftali’s wrist, removing the little paper to apply the adhesive. “Right.” It was loose enough to dangle just above the leather cuff that already proclaimed the same thing. Naftali was *his*.

“So, what do you want to see, Daddy?”

There were too many choices.

“How about we find a chair and just observe for a bit,” Naftali suggested.

David nodded. That was what he needed right now. He was curious, aroused, excited... and also just a little bit overwhelmed.

Naftali led them away from all the chaos of the orgy room and toward the relative quiet of the room where a man was being whipped.

David realized that the room must have been the official dungeon, as it held a range of padded furniture decked out with straps and rings. There were a few wide armchairs and couches scattered around, with people observing or having their own quiet conversations.

David chose one chair along the wall... and Naftali dropped gracefully to his knees, half turned to David and half looking out at the room.

David pulled in a breath.

Would it ever cease to amaze him how beautiful Naftali was in his submission? His back was straight, his feet folded under him. His hands crossed behind his back, the fingers of one circling the wrist of the other.

It was a practiced pose, and it said more than any words what Naftali had been telling him all along. It didn't matter that Naftali was a thousand times more experienced, because where he wanted to be was kneeling on the floor.

David could have watched him all night. Who cared about the demonstration?

Only... he was interested in watching that, too. He followed Naftali's gaze up to the two men. The Dom was a little shorter and slighter than his partner, dressed in a simple pair of black jeans with a wide belt. The sub had a good layer of padding to go around, his arms soft and thick where they were chained to the large X. He wore a triangle of leather that barely constrained his turgid cock, attached with metal chains that came up around his hips and between his butt cheeks.

But what really drew David's eyes was the rhythm they created. The whip cracked with each strike, followed by a grunted exhale and then a whimpering inhalation before the next one fell.

Thin, perfectly spaced parallel lines appeared up and down the sub's broad back and across his buttocks. There was hardly any room left.

Without warning, the Dom changed his grip, striking diagonally across the stripes already there.

The sub howled.

In a few more strokes, his gasps and moans reached a crescendo. The Dom's muscles bulged each time his arm drew back. Both men were sweating.

“Yellow,” the sub gasped out.

The Dom murmured a quiet question, and got a nod from the sub.

Then he laid two more stripes across his already reddened back.

David sucked in a breath. Because there was something... God, he didn't even know what. He'd thought that *yellow* was supposed to be a warning—a way to stop everything and discuss the problem so the Dom could fix things. No, even more than that, he'd thought of safewords as indicators of a mistake—places where the Dom hadn't understood the sub's needs well enough and had pushed them too far.

But this was completely different. This was finding the line... and then going just a bit over it.

He remembered Naftali's words from their own flogging scene. When Naftali had offered for David to push him until he said *yellow*. Or last night, in the contest where he and Sebastian had spanked both of their boys until Jamie said *red*.

What would it be like to push Naftali just that far?

David was already hard, just watching the demonstration and imagining himself in the Dom's place.

The trust and control in those decisions was breathtaking.

The Dom at the front set his whip on a side table and wrapped his arms around the drooping sub, dropping kisses and murmured words of encouragement along his shoulders. In a few minutes, he'd unhooked his wrists from the X and was leading him from the room.

The look on the sub's face was dreamy and lost, turned completely inward. The Dom watched him with careful attention.

Suddenly, David felt like Naftali was too far away. Watching him kneel was hot, but David needed to touch. Needed to give some outlet to all of these wicked thoughts and desires.

And wasn't David the one in charge? He tapped Naftali's shoulder and then pulled him onto his lap, sideways across the wide chair. He should have done this from the beginning.

Naftali flowed into his arms. "What did you think, Daddy?"

David answered with a kiss. It started out as a greedy battle of tongues and lips, but David fought for control, thrusting in and out like he was fucking Naftali's mouth until his boy hung limp and deliciously submissive in his arms.

"Fuck, Daddy," Naftali exhaled. "Let's get you signed up for more voyeurism."

David nodded his agreement. This was... so much more real and immediate than porn. He could see the way those two men looked at each other. Heard the sounds they made. See the trust between them.

That was how Naftali looked at him.

He wondered, for the millionth time, how Naftali could manage to do this casually.

David certainly couldn't. He knew, with certainty, that Naftali was the only one he trusted like this. The only one he wanted.

He couldn't imagine feeling this safe with anyone else.

With the whipping scene over, David turned more of his attention to other parts of the room. He hadn't even noticed, before, the couple in the corner. A tall, slender man was leaning back in his chair while a voluptuously heavy woman in shiny, plastic-y red dress was kneeling between his feet, sucking him off.

When he focused, he could hear the man's words. Calling her "little slut" and telling her to "take all of your master's cock."

Some of the observers had turned toward the couple. They weren't getting too close, just watching with hungry eyes, the way that he'd just watched the other scene.

What would it feel like to have those eyes on him? To have someone see how he commanded and touched Naftali?

He never would have imagined himself doing this a week ago. Usually he hated people watching him, always assuming that they were waiting for him to mess up.

But he'd done something like this yesterday, with the lodge owners on the other couch—even if he'd forgotten that they were there for a moment.

And... he realized that he wanted to be seen.

He wanted to be seen as a Dom, doing what he *knew* he could do to Naftali. What he'd done half an hour ago in their room.

He thought about asking Naftali first... but he already had that permission. He knew that Naftali wanted this.

“T-T-Turn around and face the room,” he instructed.

Naftali's eyes glinted in surprise and pleasure. “Yes, Daddy.” He swung around, nestling his ass into David's groin with more than the necessary movements.

Adorable little monster.

“Hands together,” David commanded. He was speaking so only Naftali could hear, but his voice came out strong.

Naftali's hands flew up, each hand loosely curled and pressed together.

David opened the clip to link the two cuffs. Then he guided Naftali's hands behind his own head. “Keep them there.”

Naftali shivered in pleasure.

David slid his hands down Naftali's thighs, spreading them apart to straddle his own legs. Naftali moaned.

Someone looked over at them. An older man, with a thick gut and leather pants. He had a flogger dangling from his belt and radiated command. His eyes swept over Naftali like he wanted to devour him.

But he didn't step any closer. He gave David a slight nod of respect, then leaned back against the wall to watch.

Oh, fuck. They were really doing this.

David was doing this. He was touching Naftali while a hot, older Dom looked on but couldn't touch.

It was a heady feeling.

David slowly ran his hands under Naftali's shirt, enjoying every inch of that sensitive skin until he reached one flat, pebbled nipple.

He circled it a few times, stroking and caressing, and then gave it a harsh pinch.

Naftali let out a soft cry, tossing his head back and arching his chest toward David's hand.

They gained another pair of admirers. One tattooed younger man who turned in his chair and a woman in a tight corset who watched them over the bald head of a sub kneeling at her feet.

"Everyone's watching you," David whispered to Naftali.

Naftali nodded, one hand rising to tangle in David's hair. "Use me, Daddy. Show me off."

Fuck, that was hot.

David circled the other nipple, slowly drawing up Naftali's shirt as he did. He'd thought, before, that he didn't want anyone else seeing what was his. But when he *controlled* it...

Naftali moaned again, and David drove him higher with another pinch.

He knew exactly how to touch Naftali. He knew what he enjoyed.

He lifted Naftali's shirt all the way, so that everyone else could see Naftali's reddened nipples, and the way David flicked them with both hands.

Naftali gasped and twisted.

David could sense more watchers, but he wasn't looking at any of them. It didn't matter anyway, and the last thing he wanted was to meet anyone's eyes.

They were... They were the *audience*. Impersonal. And yet he could sense their breathing. The way that their arousal grew and as their hearts beat faster as he played with Naftali's body.

He bit Naftali's shoulder, through the thin shirt.

Naftali arched and yelped, then fell back. "Daddy..." he called out.

The most beautiful word David had ever heard.

David slid one hand down, teasing around Naftali's thighs and belly. Naftali was trembling, muscles locked up as he waited for David's next move.

He ran one finger over Naftali's cock, concealed in those shimmery briefs.

"Damn," someone murmured. The audience must have been waiting, too.

He repeated those light touches. He knew Naftali couldn't feel it. But they could both see it. He could imagine how Naftali would feel, teased by the not-firm-enough touch.

Or maybe that was exactly what he was doing now.

He cupped his hand over Naftali's bulge, wanting to get this right for him. He had no idea what the best angle was.

Then again, he didn't have to.

He heard the words he wanted to say in his head. Dirty words that reminded him of illicit porn and daydreams that he'd kept to himself for so long. He rehearsed them a few times, until he knew he wouldn't stumble.

"Fuck my hand, baby boy. Show Daddy how desperate you are." It came out rough and throaty. Loud enough to hear across the room.

Naftali gave a strangled cry, then arched up against him.

All David did was apply pressure, feeling Naftali's thick cock and all his need, as he rocked under his hand.

David kept murmuring against his ear. "Show everyone w-what a good boy you are for Daddy. Show them how hard Daddy makes you."

Naftali was gasping now, soft whimpers making way for groans.

With each thrust, his round ass ground back against David's pelvis, giving him just a bit of stimulation, and a flood of images.

Naftali was nearly naked while David still wore his jeans. Naftali was spread open, ready to take David's cock if he should choose to whip it out.

That wasn't for this audience, though. But the knowledge that David *could* do it was enough.

Right now, he just wanted Naftali to come.

David returned to his nipple with his other hand, circling and pinching. He kissed along Naftali's neck.

He'd learned Naftali's rhythm now, pressing in with his thumb and the edge of his palm at the angle that made Naftali moan.

Now that he had it, he took over the motion, pulling Naftali back against him. "Daddy's gonna make you come, baby boy."

"Please, Daddy. Need you..."

David loved that everyone could hear him. Loved that *he* was Daddy. That *he* was the one making Naftali beg.

He pressed harder, stroked faster.

Somewhere in the room he heard a similar thumping of a hand over flesh. Maybe someone watching Naftali and getting themselves off. Maybe someone touching their own sub.

It didn't matter, because Naftali was squirming in David's lap. His fingers clenched in David's hair, just above his neck.

“Daaaaadddy...”

“Come, baby boy.”

Naftali bucked hard against his hand, turning his head to seek David’s mouth.

David swallowed his cries with a devouring kiss as he gave a few final strokes.

He couldn’t get enough of Naftali. Didn’t want this to end.

Naftali flopped against him, boneless. The perfect heavy weight within his arms.

For a long time they didn’t move, just breathing each other in. There were other sounds in the room, but David ignored them.

“Take me upstairs, Daddy?” Naftali asked, his voice small and needy.

David reached behind his own neck and brought Naftali’s hands down. He was about to unclip the cuffs, but Naftali shook his head. “Not yet, please...”

Arousal. Tenderness. Adoration. David didn’t know which was stronger as he helped Naftali to stand, and then slipped one arm around him to lead him back to the elevator.

In their room, Naftali stood there, hands locked together, while David got things ready for bed.

He didn’t ask David to remove the cuffs, even when David led him to the bathroom and urged him, with whispered words, to brush his teeth. When David gave Naftali a few minutes of privacy, and then used the toilet himself a few minutes later.

When he came out, Naftali was still standing by the bed, clad only in what David had dressed him in, his hands separated by that short length of chain. His eyes were gently closed, and he was swaying.

David didn’t want to interrupt him. He kissed down every inch of Naftali’s skin, gently removing Naftali’s underwear and, when he couldn’t put it off any longer, the cuffs, so that he could take off Naftali’s shirt.

He slid Naftali's pajama pants up his legs, then over his hips. He ended with the t-shirt, smoothing his hands down Naftali's warm chest.

He led Naftali to the bed, then removed his own clothing, such as it was. Was it really him who'd worn that leather harness and jerked Naftali off in front of an audience?

And yet it was.

Naftali was watching him, relaxed and happy. The only sound was the quiet whistle of wind and leaves outside.

He pulled back the blankets and touched Naftali's shoulder to guide him in.

David walked around to the other side, then pulled Naftali against him. Their bodies touched, warm and close under the covers.

Naftali's soft lips drifted up his neck. "That was spectacular, Daddy. You're an amazing Dom."

David shook his head. "I still can't believe I did that."

"I can. I knew it from the first time I saw you."

Pride blossomed in David's chest. He'd nailed this kinky exhibitionism thing... and Naftali had seen it in him from the beginning.

He felt like he could conquer the world.

It was almost inconceivable how much he'd changed this past week. The skills he'd learned. The things he'd tried.

The way he felt impossibly close to a man who he'd only met a handful of weeks ago.

And this felt like goodbye. They were getting on the plane tomorrow.

So he asked the thing he'd been dying to ask. "Are you..." he asked quietly. "Are you thinking that you s-still need more time before you consider a relationship?"

Naftali sighed. "Yeah." He looked miserable. "I think I need to learn to take care of myself first. I need to know what I

want.” He snuggled tighter into David’s arms.

David nodded. “I want you to be safe and happy and-and-and confident. You should take all the t-time you need.”

That was at the root of it. It didn’t matter that he wanted to take care of Naftali. It didn’t matter that he wanted to erase every harm that Noah had done, or that he would make Naftali the center of his world.

But he wanted to put it out there. Because maybe there was something they had both seen in each other from the beginning. “If y-y-you...” He took a deep breath. “If y-y-you d-d-decide that you were r-ready someday, I-I-I-I j-just wanted you to-to-to...”

Naftali twisted until he could press his lips to David’s, cutting off his words.

“Thank you,” Naftali whispered. “I still don’t know what I want, but...” He sighed. “Thank you. This week has been magical beyond my wildest dreams.”

So that was still a no. Or a maybe?

“Will you dress me in the morning, Daddy? And kiss me now?”

This boy was breaking David’s heart.

David kissed Naftali sweetly, sucking every whimper from his lips. Then dragged his mouth down Naftali’s neck. He knew what he wanted to do. Touch every inch of Naftali’s body. Then, make him come again. Maybe twice.

And with Naftali pressed against him, back to chest, David would get himself off, grinding against those perfect cheeks.

Then he would stay up for as long as he could, watching Naftali sleep in the moonlight.

NAFTALI

Naftali pushed the eggs around his plate. They were just as tasty as they'd been every other morning, but he didn't feel like eating.

Maybe it was because he was so full from all of the good food over the past two days.

Or maybe it was because they were getting on a plane in a few hours, and he didn't want to leave.

He *was* excited about everything he was going back to. He was starting a new Jewish urban nature curriculum project, and he had two students who he'd be spending extra time with next week to prep for their b'nei mitzvahs. He was leading services for two places out in the 'burbs while their regular staff were away, and both of them were down with him using guitar. He also had a ton to tell Zeev, and couldn't wait to catch up with him. A couple short phone calls and texts hadn't been enough.

And yet...

He looked over at David, who was eating his food in precisely measured bites. One piece of egg to each potato chunk, sometimes with a bit of onion added to the end. Naftali would bet that he finished the eggs and potatoes at exactly the same time.

David caught Naftali's glance and gave him a smile that warmed him down to his toes.

It was going to be really hard giving this up.

They were eating breakfast today in the atrium with some of the other kinksters who'd stayed the night. All around him, they were doing what kinksters did—teasing, touching, joking. People gave compliments on techniques or outfits from last night. Subs sat on the floor, or on their Doms' laps, or just in regular cozy benches like Naftali was.

Jamie slouched in, clinging to a coffee cup with sleep-rumpled hair. He was wearing a pajama shirt that read *Daddy knows best* and silky pink sleep pants. Since he'd been dressed masc and much more presentably last week around the vanilla guests, Naftali figured this was his last chance to be more "himself" for a while.

Jamie waved vaguely at Naftali before snuggling into Neil's lap.

Neil, too, looked droopy-eyed. Apparently, Daddy Sebastian had kept his boys up late.

Naftali knew exactly how they felt. He hadn't even *known* he could come that many times in a row.

He leaned into David's side, nuzzling up to his neck. Because he was feeling cuddly, dammit, and that was David's job.

David wrapped his arms around him and pressed a kiss to his forehead. "Hey, baby boy."

Would it be wrong to cut this off? Or would it be wrong to continue?

Naftali didn't know, so he just got as close to his Daddy as he could.

"Done eating?" Daddy asked.

"Yeah, but you should finish."

David took another bite. "I think I'm done, too. We should probably go pack."

By which he meant that Naftali should pack up. David always put his dirty clothes into the pocket of his suitcase when he was done with them.

Naftali still appreciated how David didn't make a big deal out of it. He would bet that David ended up packing half of his stuff anyway.

On the way to the elevator, David tangled their fingers together. And it was just so... boyfriend-y. Not kinky or sexual. Just this way of saying without words that he wanted to be closer than they already were.

What if this could be real?

When they got up to the room, Naftali couldn't wait any longer and pulled David into a kiss. David returned it with a quick peck, already shifting through the coats in the closet.

Coats were boring. Naftali tried to slide his hands up under to reach David's skin, but there were too many layers of fabric in the way.

David pulled back, laughing. "Hey, I'm trying to pack up."

Nope. Naftali didn't care. He needed one more time. Something to remember. Something to make this last for every beautiful second that he could have.

Naftali pulled off his sweater and dropped it to the floor behind him. Then he made it his mission to interfere as much as possible with David's progress. Naftali kissed along his jaw, nipping and licking while he dug under David's sweater and untucked his shirt.

David kissed him back, but his hands were still holding a jacket. "You're insatiable." His voice was fond. "Think you can wait for me to put this away?"

Naftali shook his head. "Nope." This was much more fun. He toed off his shoes, eager to get them both naked.

David put the jacket over his suitcase, then busied himself in the closet, laughing as he tried to push Naftali away. He started folding up a sweater. Who even hung their sweaters up in the first place? Naftali glommed onto David's chest, delighted when he gained access to more skin and generally made himself a nuisance.

"You're trouble," David growled.

“Who, me?” Naftali dragged his fingernails down David’s firm chest.

That must have been some sort of signal to David, because his fingers clawed into Naftali’s hair, holding him in place while David devoured his mouth. Naftali whimpered. Oh, God yes. All Naftali could do was cling to him, going almost limp as he took control.

David turned them both without breaking the hungry kiss. Naftali was pushed backward, nearly stumbling, until the back of his legs hit the bed. David kept moving though, pressing him down, his weight heavy above.

“My beautiful little monster,” David cooed, all while finding Naftali’s wrists and pinning them to the mattress.

Fuck. This was what he craved.

Naftali pressed up toward him, seeking more friction even though there was already no space between them. David nipped at his lips, pressing with his teeth until Naftali was gasping under the torrent of sharp pain and that soothing, seductive tongue. David ground into him and Naftali could feel every muscular line of his body.

There was a bulge in his jeans, the hard outline of a cock, and Naftali moaned as he worked his hips. Naftali already knew that this was the good packer. The one that could fuck right into him.

God, it was hot knowing that David had chosen that this morning, even though they were supposed to be traveling all day. Maybe David had been thinking, too, about fucking him one last time.

Naftali liked knowing that he made his Daddy hard.

Experimentally, Naftali started to struggle. Not because he wanted to get away. But because he wanted to feel David’s strength. He wanted to feel captured and possessed and owned. He wanted it etched into his soul.

Naftali braced one knee and tried to roll David onto his back. It didn’t work, but for a moment, David drew back, looking confused.

Naftali raised one eyebrow, making it into a dare. What they'd done all week had been amazing. Outstanding. But today Naftali wanted something different from David than that carefully controlled power.

David was still confused, but Naftali could see the realization dawning.

Naftali pushed against his chest, looking as naughty and defiant as he could manage. Better to be clear. "If you want me, you'll have to catch me."

For a moment, David didn't move, daring him in return. Something was growing between them. Something wild and wonderful.

Naftali pushed him again. Harder.

That's when David dropped his full weight on him. Naftali had thought he was heavy before, but now he truly couldn't expand his chest enough for a full breath.

Naftali struggled for real now, squirming and thrashing to get away. His heart was racing. David's teeth bit into his shoulder, sending electricity racing through him. Naftali tried to arch beneath him, only there was no room. Just David's body laying claim.

That hint of danger, the pressure on Naftali's ribs, made him feel alive. He kissed along David's neck, licking and biting. Filling his senses with David's taste. His heat. But then Naftali's arm was free on the same side as his leg. He pushed against David's hip and shoulder with all of his strength.

Naftali almost managed to flip him before he rocked back.

David grabbed his hand, wrenching it up over his head. "You're going to stay where I put you," he growled.

"Only if you can make me," Naftali taunted.

"I think I already am." He ground hard against Naftali's pelvis, making him whimper again.

Naftali ran his other hand up under David's shirt, then dragged his nails down his back. Maybe even drawing blood.

David's eyes grew wider as he gasped, whether in pleasure or pain, and then he was chasing after Naftali's other hand.

Naftali used the opportunity to try to free the first one, but David was kneeling over his chest now. He got both hands pinned, Naftali's wrists encircled by his wider hands.

Fuck, did Naftali love that crush. The feeling of trapped helplessness.

Even more, he loved David's feral delight and determination in pinning him down. They were grinning at each other, chests heaving, and euphoria bubbled through him. He felt feral and *alive*.

Naftali didn't know about David's experience, but when he'd been socialized as a child, this was something he was never allowed to do. To be rough. To tumble around. To kick and push and just be present in his body with another person. His parents had tried not to limit him because of his gender, but staying clean and calm was one of those unconscious expectations. He'd had to unlearn that as an adult.

David had a look of triumph in his eyes, but what he didn't know was that this was a classic position for flipping someone, something that Naftali had learned in a women and queer folk self-defense class.

Naftali curled one of his feet around David's, trapping it against his thigh. Then, with the other foot, he bucked up hard. In seconds, David was on his back, blinking at him in surprise.

Naftali took the opportunity to kiss him, hard and hungry. Their mouths battled and Naftali rubbed against David's cock through two layers of denim, seeking more friction for his own dick. Fuck, everything about David turned him on.

"So damn sexy," David murmured against him.

Naftali's heart sang. David was loving this as much as he was. Even more, David found him sexy when he was like this—defiant and rough and on top of him, at least for the moment.

David didn't yield control, though. Instead of pushing Naftali away, he used his grip on his wrists to pull him down.

Naftali went eagerly, moaning into his mouth. David's legs wrap around his, and he just wanted to soar in that feeling of being bound, every part of David's body keeping him trapped.

But he did have a few more tricks. Naftali checked where David's thumbs were—the weakest part of a grip—and sharply circled his wrists. The second they were free, he scrambled and wriggled to get away.

He almost made it out of the bed, but David grabbed his ankle. A primal fear shot through him as David dragged him back across the bed. He'd been caught. He was prey.

Naftali kicked his other foot, unable to remember how to get out of this as the adrenaline rushed through him. David grabbed that one too, but it was a poor grip and Naftali kicked one foot free. David started hauling him back.

David almost had him when he remembered that he could use the same move again. He twisted his ankle around past David's thumb, breaking the hold at the weakest point. In Naftali's haste to get away, he tumbled onto the floor. He landed hard on his elbow, but that jolt of pain just added to the rush.

Already, he was searching for places to run, to hide. But the room was small. The bathroom was on the other side of the bed, and he wasn't going into the hall. The closet would hardly be a deterrent, but he considered it.

Basically, he was trapped. His heart raced like a rabbit's. He stood, prepared to move in any direction.

But David didn't come after him. Instead, he rolled off the far side of the bed to dig frantically through Naftali's kink bag on top of the dresser. Naftali felt a swell of pride that David was feeling confident enough to do that. He'd come so far.

Naftali didn't know what he was planning on getting from it, but his new goal was to keep him from doing it. He raced across the room and launched onto his back.

“What???” David roared. He stumbled forward, crashing into the dresser.

Naftali bit his neck, sucking and licking at the same time. He wanted so much more of his Daddy. He wanted all of him.

David slung him around, pulling his arms from around his neck with sheer strength and the momentum of the turn. Naftali landed on the bed with a bounce. Damn, that was hot.

Naftali was already scrambling off, ready to run. But somehow David was on him. Heavy and solid, pinning Naftali's torso while his cock ground against his ass. The message was clear. Dangerous. *I'm going to fuck you.*

"Is this ok-k-kay?" David murmured against his ear. David's hands were wrapped around Naftali's wrists again, but there was an uneven tangle of fabric under one side. The velcro cuffs from the bag.

"Hell, yes."

David bit his ear. Hard. "You're perfect, baby boy. Gonna make you mine."

Fuck. Naftali knew he didn't really mean it, but right now there was nothing more he wanted in the world. He was burning to have David inside him. On top of him. Anywhere.

But he was still going to make him work for it. "Only if you can catch me."

David chuckled wickedly. "I think I already have."

Naftali flailed, arms swinging, trying to make himself a harder target. The bedspread got rucked up under him, but David had already grabbed one arm. A moment later he slipped a cuff over Naftali's wrist. He pulled it tight, the smooth fabric contrasting with the rough velcro where the straps didn't quite line up.

"Dammit, Daddy," Naftali swore out loud, mouth half muffled by the mattress. He tried to tear it off with his other hand, but that was his mistake. He got the velcro looser, but now David had his other arm. He pulled it to the other side and forced the second cuff on, the straps dangling behind. He still needed to attach them to something, though, if they were going to do any good.

David licked his ear again, then searched for his mouth where it was pressed against the bed.

Naftali kissed him from that awkward angle, even as he tried to wriggle away. That only pressed Daddy's cock against his ass, though. Naftali was whimpering now, frantic with the need to fuck and fight and be claimed.

David eased back for just a moment, maybe because the straps were underneath them. Naftali took advantage, using the bedspread as a handhold to pull himself forward. He made it one foot. Two. Three. He grabbed a pillow and threw it behind him, kicking at the same time.

David landed on him again, giving a dark laugh. "Thought you were g-g-getting away, did you?" He grabbed one arm and finally hooked the strap onto one of the bars in the headboard, clipping it into place.

"You tricked me!" All this time Naftali had been going where David wanted him to go.

"I'd say I outsmarted you."

David flipped him over. Fuck was that hot. Then he clipped in the other cuff, spreading Naftali's arms above him by almost three feet. David was sitting on his chest now, far too high up on Naftali's torso to flip him again, even if his arms weren't stretched so wide. The seam of David's jeans was almost touching his chin.

Naftali kicked anyway, flailing pointlessly underneath him.

"Got any more tricks?" he asked. His eyes were blazing, and his chest heaved.

"Maybe..." Naftali taunted him. But it was a lie. David well and truly had him captured.

David smirked. "I don't think so. I think you're trapped. And I think you're right where you want to be."

"Maybe," Naftali said again with a saucy wink. "Guess you'll have to find out."

David looked away from him to inspect his bound wrists, then pulled him down another foot until his arms were

stretched out tight. “I think I already did. You’re mine now.”

Oh, please let that be true. “And what are you going to do about it?”

David stroked his fingers through Naftali’s hair, and he leaned into the caress. Then he did it again. God, Naftali just couldn’t get enough of him.

“I think you want to be a good boy, don’t you?” David’s voice is still commanding, but it was gentler now.

Naftali nodded against his hand. If that was what Daddy wanted, he wanted it, too. “Yeah,” he whispered. Daddy was towering over him, his dark hair falling down around his face.

Naftali’s body was still singing, but in a very different way. Daddy traced his wide hand through his hair again. “Please,” Naftali murmured, nuzzling against him.

“Such a good boy,” Daddy praised. “My little songbird. You just needed to be caught and tamed.”

Yeah. That’s exactly what he was. “I’m yours.” This is all part of the fantasy. That right now, Naftali belonged to his Daddy.

Daddy moaned, as affected by Naftali’s words as he was. “And what do you want, sweet boy?”

Daddy was still kneeling over him, his knees pressing against Naftali’s armpits, his ass resting over his heart.

“Let me suck you.”

Daddy gasped and almost drew back. Naftali could see a dozen thoughts and feelings fly across his face. Had he truly never had a blowjob since transitioning?

“I’ve been thinking about your cock all morning.” Naftali wanted Daddy to hear the need in his voice. He leaned forward as high as he could, just brushing the seam of Daddy’s jeans with his nose. “Please let me taste you.”

When David spoke again, he sounded hesitant, with none of the dominance that he’d been wearing so well since they stepped into the room. “You mean my...”

“Your cock,” Naftali confirmed. However David wanted to interpret that. “I want it. Want to taste it.”

David paused again, and Naftali wondered if he’d gone too far. Maybe he needed to check in. He didn’t want to pressure him into something he wasn’t ready for.

Then that look of conviction crossed his face. The same one that he wore that first day when he volunteered to do that demonstration. He was all in.

David leaned forward on his knees and Naftali mouthed at the fabric that was stretched across his face, breathing in the clean, musky smell. David eased his zipper down, then opened his button. He didn’t make any move to take more clothing off, and at this point, Naftali didn’t expect him to. Instead, he reached into the opening of his briefs and drew his cock through.

Naftali licked his lips, letting Daddy see his enjoyment. This was the first time he’d seen David’s cock up close, too, in the full light of day. He’d chosen a reasonable width, not too thick or thin, and just right for his body. It had a natural flesh color, just a bit darker than his hands, where he gripped it loosely. He was circumcised, the smooth round head a gentle tapered shape. There was a very quiet clicking sound as he snapped the rod inside into place to maintain his erection.

Naftali leaned forward again, angling for a taste.

“You really w-w-w, w-want this, don’t you?” David sounded like he was trying to tease, but there was something uncertain under there.

“Please,” Naftali begged. “So hot.” He’d tell David as many times as he needed to hear it. He’d tell him until he believed it.

“Lay back,” David commanded.

Naftali fell back with a sigh. David ran the tip over his lips and Naftali let him, stealing kittenish licks of the spongy tip when he could. It felt soft and delicate, this precious part of him.

“Does it taste weird?” David asked.

Naftali giggled. “No weirder than a condom. But much hotter because I can see and feel everything.” Naftali mouthed at him again. “I don’t think you know what you look like right now, looming over me like this. So virile and dominant. About to fuck my mouth.”

David’s breath caught and his eyes went wide. “That’s what you want, baby boy?” Now his voice was growing husky. He was back in the game.

“I want to savor you. I want to lick you like a lollipop. And yes, I want you to fuck my mouth. Though it’ll work better if you put a pillow under my head and angle your cock to have more of a downward curve. You may want to brace your hand at the base. I want you to feel everything.”

David took all of that in for a moment, then made the adjustments. As he tucked the pillow behind Naftali’s head, he ran gentle kisses down his cheek and up his lips. “Thank you,” he murmured against his mouth.

This had started out as something rough and raw, but it was becoming something sweet and vulnerable instead. Just as raw, but in a very different way.

David ran his hands through Naftali’s hair again, like he was something precious. Like he was a miracle.

David’s cock bobbed against his lips and Naftali circled the tip with his tongue. This part was all about getting David off by communicating his enjoyment. Moaning until David’s breath hitched. Letting David see his lips closing around that delicious length and his throat bulge as he pulled him in deeper.

Their eyes locked. David’s pleasure was his pleasure.

“Fuck,” David whispered. Reverently.

Naftali smiled as much as he could with his mouth full. He loved that heavy feeling on his tongue. David pulled back enough for him to tease and lick, getting him shiny and wet. Naftali moaned when he pushed forward instinctively. He whimpered when David drew back.

Naftali wanted to touch him, and he strained against his bonds. His frustration at not being able to touch was overshadowed by the thrill of being David's to command.

"God, Naftali." He stroked his hair again.

Naftali hummed around his tip, taking him deeper again. In one way, this was all a show. Naftali knew David couldn't feel much of what he was doing. But at the same time, it was very real. He was sure David could feel it right down to his bones.

Naftali leaned his head forward, trying to take him a little deeper. To show him how much he could swallow.

"You're hungry for it." David's voice was gravely. Awed.

Naftali nodded as well as he could, and he shifted forward again. David's cock brushed the entrance to his throat, and he pushed down the gag reflex.

David was watching him like a hawk, cataloging every response. "Gonna give it to you," he warned.

Naftali couldn't answer in any way except increasing his noisy suction around the firm length. David's hand tightened in his hair, bringing an arch of pain that sparked through him. His other hand dropped to encircle the base of his cock, just like Naftali had suggested.

It was a trick that worked to give him more control and confidence with the placement, but it also meant that he could give himself the pressure to get off with Naftali's movements. If he wanted to. That was his choice. Naftali's only job was enjoying it. Giving him what he wanted to take.

When David plunged forward, Naftali's eyes rolled back. He couldn't help it. It was intense, the way David had him completely immobilized while he pushed himself inside. Naftali's throat burned, stretching to accommodate him. He felt dirty and so decadently owned.

"That's it," David whispered, voice strained. "Fuck, so close. Suck it for Daddy."

Fuck, yes. Any time. Just like this.

Naftali tried to tell him, with a garbled and joyous sound, to give him more.

David grunted as he rocked into him again. His mouth was open and his neck muscles tight. His speed increased and Naftali gasped for breath between thrusts. Daddy was chasing his bliss and there was nothing hotter in the world.

David gave him a little break to breathe, but after the first gasp, Naftali kept the suction tight with his lips. David pistoned into his ready mouth, not as deep but picking up speed.

Naftali pulled again against his cuffs, wanting to touch. To cup his ass. To feel his muscles tremble. But he still couldn't move, and that knowledge zinged through him.

David's thrusts were growing erratic. His breath was sharp and rapid. Naftali's jaw was getting tired, since he was clenching hard to provide the right resistance.

With a hoarse shout, David rocked against him a few more times, then went still. He leaned against the bars of the headboard, panting. He was gorgeous, so open and flushed with his orgasm.

"Hold me, Daddy," Naftali begged.

David moved instantly, lying beside him so that the whole lengths of their bodies were tangled together. "Want these off?" he asked, still breathless. He traced up Naftali's arm.

Naftali nodded. He was still desperately horny, but that wasn't as important. What mattered was this beautiful thing that they'd shared. The second Naftali's first arm was free, he wrapped it around his Daddy. David loosened the band on the second one and then they were holding each other, kissing like it was the end of the world and they were going down in a blaze of glory.

"Was that good for you?" David asked.

"It was amazing, Daddy." Naftali just needed to say the name a few more times.

A smile played across his lips. "I thought *you* were amazing, baby boy. Are your arms sore?"

"A bit," Naftali admitted. "More my throat." He'd be talking with a rasp for a while. He stretched his arms experimentally. "Maybe my arms, too."

David looked concerned.

"It was so totally worth it," Naftali assured him, snuggling close.

"You didn't come." He frowned.

Naftali shook his head, nuzzling closer. "Not important right now. I mean, yes, I wouldn't mind it, but that was pretty intense. I want to come down a bit."

"How about if I draw you a bath. Maybe a bubble bath like you wanted? Let you relax your muscles?"

"Do we have time?"

David looked over at the clock. "I gave you an extra hour."

"Then please. But only if you're in it with me." He was feeling clingy. "Wear shorts if you want to."

David rolled off the bed, then extended a hand to pull Naftali after him. They walked to the tub and Naftali attached himself to David's back, cuddling and generally getting in the way as he adjusted the water temperature and put out the bathmat.

"Want to test the water?"

Naftali shook his head against David's back. "Don't care. Daddy's job"

He laughed. "Well, at least come over here so that I can take your clothes off."

That Naftali could definitely handle. "Daddy's job, too," he mumbled. He let Daddy strip him down, enjoying every soft caress. The care that David took as he pulled the shirt over his head.

David guided him to the water, and he stepped in. It felt lovely, but Naftali didn't want to let go of Daddy's hand.

He chuckled. "Sit down, baby boy."

Naftali did, but only because Daddy told him to, and he was feeling extra submissive right now. He wanted to please his Daddy. The hot water did feel exceptional, though.

"Good boy."

Naftali beamed. That was what he was looking for.

David dropped a soft kiss on his mouth. "I'll be right back. Let me just get undressed."

Naftali pouted, but he also knew David would want privacy to handle whatever situation he'd used to attach his packer, and maybe change into different underwear or swim shorts for the bath. "Hurry back."

Naftali slipped down under the water while Daddy was gone, but it was only a few moments. When David returned, he was completely naked.

Naftali tried to keep his eyes on his face, but he wanted to drink him in. Every line of him was gorgeously put together—the thickness of his belly, the firmness of his thighs, the strength of his arms. There was nothing dangling between his legs right now, but that wasn't what made someone a man. He was delicious.

"Move forward," David told him.

Naftali slid up, scrunching his knees until David slipped in behind him and pulled him to his chest.

Quietly, Daddy washed Naftali's hair, the movements slow and sensual. Naftali grabbed one of the hotel courtesy cups off the ledge when Daddy told him to, but otherwise he just relaxed. Daddy poured the water over his head, handing him a washcloth to keep it out of his eyes. It made Naftali almost want to cry, it felt so good. This was what he'd been missing in aftercare with anyone else he'd ever been with, but with David it didn't need to be aftercare.

It could be the main event.

At some point, Naftali must have run out of more places for Daddy to clean. Daddy pulled him backward, so that he was floating in his presence as much as the water. Naftali felt warm and enveloped. Safe. Pampered.

Daddy's voice was soft against his cheek. "This week has been the best sex I've ever h-h-h-had."

Naftali nodded, not wanting to break his bubble of peacefulness by mourning the loss ahead. "It was really far up there for me, too. Everything has been with you."

"Was that... consensual non-consent? That part at the beginning?" David stumbled over the unfamiliar words.

"I'd call it primal play. They can overlap though. Not everything needs a label, though. We could also just call it playing. Roughhousing."

He nodded, his beard a gentle rasp against Naftali's neck. "I liked it."

"I could tell." Naftali was smiling, but he hadn't really stopped smiling since this started.

Also, there was a chance that if he stopped smiling, he would cry.

"And what we did at the end... you really liked it?" David's hands were drifting slowly over Naftali's skin. Down his legs. Over his belly. Sensuous, but without any intent.

"I loved it. But if you don't believe me, I could do another demonstration sometime."

The suggestion had slipped out naturally. But now he held his breath, waiting for an answer.

"Yeah?" He could hear the hope in Daddy's voice.

But David had never been the one holding the two of them back. Which left the ball in Naftali's court. He knew he was being contradictory. That it wasn't fair to David.

God, it was all too confusing. This is why he *needed* a Daddy. So that he didn't have to make these kinds of decisions.

So Naftali just said, “yeah.” Because that could mean anything. But hopefully something that would end up just like this again.

Unless David got sick of waiting for him to make up his mind. Or found someone else who could commit.

David was quiet for a while, but his hands never stopped moving over Naftali’s skin. “I think it still confuses me how much I want to take care of you, and how much I also enjoyed forcing my cock down your throat. It’s hard to reconcile.”

Ah. New Dom worries. But Naftali liked how he said *cock*. With conviction. That had changed this week. “Believe me, you were taking care of me. You were giving me everything I needed. I’m still floating.”

“Yeah? That was taking care of you?”

Naftali turned his head to kiss him. Something soft and intimate. Soaking in every last touch. “No one’s ever taken such good care of me before. This Daddy thing is definitely my new favorite. I mean, sign me up!” They laughed together, but Naftali didn’t like the words coming off his tongue, even though he’d been the one to insert the distance into the equation.

Was it the Daddy play? Or was it David? What would happen if he took a risk? And what would happen if he didn’t?

Before this week, Naftali would have sworn he wasn’t ready for a full relationship, but now he wasn’t sure if he could give David up. It was like being around him made him more *himself*.

David hummed. “I’ll take-take-take that as a compliment.” One of his broad hands drifted down Naftali’s belly. “I believe we still have some other unfinished business, though.” His other hand gripped Naftali’s inner thigh, pulling his knee back.

“Mmmm... yeah?” It was hard to make words. He loved being manhandled. Loved being put wherever Daddy wanted him.

“I still haven’t gotten to make you come.”

“No,” Naftali gasped. “You haven’t.”

Daddy’s hands found his cock, working it expertly but slowly. Naftali moaned and arched up against him.

“Shhhh...” Daddy quieted him. “Relax. Let me take care of you.”

Naftali went limp in his arms. That one word was all he had to say.

Naftali let his Daddy take him away.

DAVID

David had managed to buy tickets for one of the fastest routes back to Philadelphia, and he was regretting it now. They'd had an hour-long layover in Denver, which was barely enough time to grab some lunch to eat on the plane.

And now he was counting down the hours until it was over.

Naftali was still cuddled up beside him, head resting on his shoulder. But he seemed distant. He gazed out the window, watching the unbroken blue of the sky above the clouds.

It only made sense.

This was the end of the trip. The end of what they'd committed to.

David was still clinging onto those words Naftali had said in the bathtub. *If you don't believe me, I could do another demonstration sometime.*

Not quite the same as *be my Daddy forever* or even *let's start dating*.

No, Naftali had been very clear on that.

But it was something. It meant this wasn't the end.

What would that look like, though? Sending Naftali a text to ask if he was up for another round of throat fucking?

That had been the actual offer, but there was no way David could ever send that text.

Could he ask him to dinner, then? Offer to order plates so that they could share them? Or was that out of bounds?

It seemed unfair. There were so many things they hadn't even done yet.

There were coils of rope in David's luggage—and Naftali's, too—that he'd never gotten a chance to use. So many more toys that he'd never gotten to apply to his baby boy's body to see how he'd moan and whimper. They'd had the option to use the dungeon all week, but all they'd done was sit in a chair.

Even more, David had planned to take Naftali to a holiday market, like Zeev had suggested. They hadn't gone snowboarding or cross-country skiing. They'd never even made it to the Christmas day hike they'd planned. They hadn't cooked a meal together. He'd had so many plans.

How could this possibly be over now?

The flight attendant came by to take their drink orders.

“One c-c-cranberry juice and one Sprite,” David replied. It was a bittersweet request. On the flight there, Naftali had requested cranberry juice and asked David to get Sprite so he could make “DIY mocktails.”

When the flight attendant moved on, Naftali leaned up against his ear. “Thank you, Daddy.”

But he wasn't Naftali's Daddy anymore. Was he? Still, he nuzzled against his neck, inhaling his clean, masculine scent one more time. “Of course, baby boy. Do you want to mix them?”

Naftali poured, and the swirling colors were still just as bold.

He raised a glass, and they touched the cheap plastic rims together in a toast.

David thought of all the things he could say. All the promises he could make.

If they hadn't liked each other much, that would be one thing. Or even if Naftali wanted to take things slow.

But Naftali's commitment to take care of himself after getting out of a bad relationship—that was something David really respected.

As much as he wanted to wrap Naftali up and keep him away from every harm, to swear that he would never treat his gorgeous baby boy the way his ex had—he wasn't going to take away Naftali's time to heal.

He believed in self-care and mental health.

So maybe they could... see each other occasionally? And he could ask about a relationship next summer?

Except that he knew Naftali would be doing scenes with other people, and he wasn't sure he could stomach that.

He wasn't sure he could stomach being Naftali's Daddy for just a single evening and then calling it off the next morning.

“Hey, um...” David reached around the little beverage tray to his carry on. This was probably stupid.

Naftali's eyes lit up, probably for the first time since they'd boarded the plane. He moved David's drink to his own tray so David could maneuver.

“I g-g-got you something.” He unzipped his bag, identifying the bumpy surface by feel. “For Hanukkah, I guess.”

Naftali's face still held a little wariness, but mostly excitement.

David placed the round pinecone in his hand. It was a deep brown and perfectly formed, unfurled and sturdy. “It's from one of the trees in front of the lodge. I think the one that-that-that smelled like cookies.”

Naftali cradled it in his hands, then hugged it to his chest. “*Thank* you, Daddy.” He pulled it away to look at it again, then stroked the woody petal-things down his cheek. “Thank you,” he said again.

David could feel himself grinning. He'd gotten this exactly right.

Naftali curled the pinecone into one hand, then burrowed into David's side until he was twisted around in his seat. He had one leg overlapping David's knee, one arm around his waist, and his head resting on David's chest.

David couldn't have asked for a better reward.

Even if it was temporary.

He dropped kisses in Naftali's hair and stroked slow fingers down his back. Because he could. Because Naftali was still snuggled up against him.

When the plane landed, Naftali didn't even turn to watch out the window.

"We're here, baby boy," David whispered.

At baggage claim, Naftali continued to cling to him.

In the taxi, Naftali held his hand. He clasped the pinecone on the other side.

They stopped by Naftali's place first, and David got out to help Naftali with his bags.

Naftali ignored all the luggage and held David tightly. "Thank you for the best vacation ever, Daddy. It was perfect."

David wanted to scream. If it was perfect, why wasn't Naftali staying?

He gathered his courage. "Can I see you again?"

Naftali's eyes gleamed. "I'd love that."

So he wanted that. "But not... n-n-n-n-not dating, right?"

Naftali's face screwed up. David didn't know the words for that emotion. "I don't think so. But not because..."

David knew the end of that sentence. *It's not you, it's me.* But even if it was true, he was losing his baby boy. Who might find some other Daddy to play with by the end of the week, now that he knew what he was looking for. Who might not even be available by the summer, when his year was up.

So instead, David kissed him, devouring Naftali's mouth. Pulling his hair to get him right where he wanted him.

He poured all of his care and longing into that kiss. Even when it was long past the time when he should have gotten back in the cab. Even when his head got light because he couldn't pull away long enough to breathe.

He finally stepped back, panting. He had to respect what Naftali wanted. He wanted to see Naftali bloom and grow. To be confident in who he was.

“Goodbye, baby b-b-b, b-b-b-boy. Th-th-th-thank you.” He wanted to say more, but his tongue was tangling up his words. That was the most important part.

“Bye, Daddy.”

Then Naftali picked up his luggage and trudged up the slushy curb to his house.

David got back in the cab to return to his empty apartment.

Alone.

NAFTALI

Naftali threw the Koosh ball at the living room ceiling. Koosh balls were the best. They were springy and bouncy and felt all weird and tickly on your fingers.

It bounced back and landed on his chest. It was kind of hard to grab it when he was laying down on the couch.

He tossed it up again, watching the swirl of purple and neon green. He'd always loved playing with these. They seemed to gravitate toward his hands.

Which made him wonder if he really did have ADHD. Probably.

It made sense.

And it might help him to find out.

Only that made him think about David.

It had been two weeks since that last kiss in the street. Two weeks since they'd agreed that they could still see each other.

Two weeks since he'd gotten to snuggle in his Daddy's arms, or hear Daddy call him *baby boy*.

There were other nicknames, too. Ones that had come out that last morning. Like *songbird* and *my beautiful little monster*.

Maybe Daddy would have other nicknames for him, too.

Zeev snorted. "Just call him already."

Naftali rolled the squiggly ball between his hands. “How do you know what I’m thinking about?” he demanded.

Zeev gave him some major side eye from the other couch where they were trying to study. It was especially impressive with the silver eyeliner and extra-long lashes.

“I said a year,” Naftali pointed out. Even though he’d had this conversation with Zeev a dozen times, and hundred more with just himself. He threw the Koosh ball at the ceiling again. He was supposed to be practicing the Torah portion that he was laying tomorrow, but he could always pick it up on the fly.

“You did,” Zeev agreed. “Because you didn’t want to date someone like Noah again.”

“And David’s... not like Noah.” He was repeating this because he needed to say it. They were fast-forwarding through a bunch of steps in the argument, but they were all spinning away in his head.

“Apparently not.”

“So I should date him.” Naftali proposed.

“I can’t decide that for you.”

“Why not?” Naftali whined.

He knew it was immature. He wouldn’t *really* want Zeev to decide that for him. In all honesty, they deserved an award for not getting sick of him.

“But I do think you should call him.”

Naftali shook his head. “Text. He likes texts better.” So David had time to think, and didn’t have to worry about his stutter. Naftali felt incredibly protective about that.

Zeev nodded. “You should text him.”

“Okay so... I’m just going to text him.”

Zeev gave an impressively slow and pointed nod.

“He could still be my Daddy,” Naftali argued, “even if he doesn’t buy me things, right? I’ll just tell him that.”

“Mmm-hmmm...” Now Zeev was back to studying and not really listening to him.

That was alright, though.

Naftali found that loopy part of the Koosh ball that you could slip over your finger and then sling the ball around with a little thwacking sound.

“And he won’t expect me to be organized, because he knows I have ADHD. Or some sort of executive dysfunction with my organizational skills.”

Zeev looked up. “Sweetheart, I love you, and you have ADHD.”

Cool. Which meant it wasn’t his fault. And maybe he couldn’t get better. Or maybe he’d gotten as better as he could already. His coping skills generally worked.

So... David wouldn’t be disappointed with him. Because David had shown that he didn’t mind. Plus, he was neurodivergent too. If anyone would understand, it would be David.

Naftali knew he hadn’t been the right kind of sub for Noah... but what if he was actually the right kind of sub for David?

It was a thought he’d had a thousand times over the past two weeks.

Now all he had to do was... text David and figure it out.

He threw the Koosh ball at the ceiling and it landed on his head.

Zeev crossed the room and Naftali mostly ignored him until Zeev plucked up the Koosh ball and exchanged it for Naftali’s phone. “Text him,” they glared down at him. “Now.”

Well, okay then.

Naftali pulled up David’s contact. Their last message had been about some small details—meeting in the airport after Naftali filled the water bottles. Then before that, reminding Naftali to bring down his gloves.

Both times Naftali had written back, *Yes, Daddy!*

Alright, here went nothing.

Naftali typed the words and then hit enter.

Hey Daddy.

Want to hang out sometime?

That should be a good start, right?

Only David didn't write back.

For a really, really, really, really, *really* long time.

Fourteen minutes.

The Koosh ball that he'd reclaimed from Zeev was no longer so entertaining.

What if David didn't want to see him?

What if he'd turned down a relationship, and now David wasn't interested anymore?

"He's probably at work," Zeev commented. "He might be in a meeting."

Right. It was the middle of a Friday afternoon. David would be at work.

Only by the time David was done, the sun would have already set, and Naftali would have turned off his phone for Shabbat.

Well, it didn't matter. He abstained from technology on Shabbat as a spiritual practice to center himself and connect with community and tradition, not because he believed in a smite-y vengeful God. He would answer a text on Shabbat if it was from David.

"Go make dinner," Zeev told him. "You've got two hours."

There. Something productive he could do. "What should I make?" This was always the worst part. He loved pouring over menus and recipes, but actually choosing something was hard.

"Um... You wanted to make that lentil salad. With all the herbs."

“Yes! Parsley and mint.” Zeev was a genius. That would take his mind off of everything *and* be useful. He could start making dinner *right away*. “Thank you, Zeev!”

Half his mind was still on David—he had to write back, right?—and the other half went through the familiar motion of boiling and chopping, rinsing and mixing.

When the phone rang, he nearly dropped a carton of tomatoes. He dried his hands quickly and caught it just before it went to voicemail. “Daddy!”

Oops. So, maybe he shouldn’t have started that way. But then again, he kind of already had with the text.

“H-H-Hey, Naftali.”

Alright, it wasn’t *baby boy*, but David’s voice sounded warm.

“Hi!” He couldn’t think of anything to say. And then all the words came tumbling out. “Do you want to hang out sometime? We said we would, right? And, we’re...” Alright, he didn’t know what they were. “We could go on a hike or something, or brunch again? Or, you know, your place or mine. Whatever you want. I’m, um, I could visit you on Shabbat, but we should arrange it now, or on Sunday I could call you. Would that be better? Sorry, I know you’re at work. Sorry to interrupt your day.”

David’s warm chuckle filled the phone. “Relax, Naftali.”

Naftali took a huge breath. Daddy was magical.

“I w-w-would l-l-l-l-love to see you t-tonight, b-but I already have d-d-d-dinner plans.”

That was disappointing. “That’s okay. I was going to shul anyway.” And as long as Daddy wanted to see him some time, it didn’t really matter when.

“H-H-How about S-Sunday morning? That was g-g-good for your-your-your schedule last time.”

“Perfect. We could meet at your place again?” Naftali just said that out of nowhere. But there would be a lot more

privacy there than at home. And Naftali really hoped they'd end up doing something that required privacy.

“Okay. Ten?”

Naftali was already nodding his head. “Ten. And I'll be on time. Promise.”

“I'll see you when you a-a-arrive. Don't worry about the-the-the time.”

That was probably for the best. “Okay. Um... it's getting dark, so I should get off the phone. But I'll be there on Sunday! Can't wait!”

“See you soon, Nafti.”

And a nickname, too!

“Bye!” Naftali felt like he was floating on air.

He didn't know what it all meant yet. He didn't even really know what he wanted. But now he was running toward something instead of away.

DAVID

David stood by the door, then went back to the couch. It was still a quarter till ten, and he knew that Naftali might not arrive on time.

That was fine.

It was completely fine.

He was just probably going to pace until then.

He'd gotten everything ready. There were fresh bagels in the paper bag on the counter if Naftali wanted to eat right away, or if they decided to go on a walk. His fridge was fully stocked if Naftali wanted to make brunch with him.

And in the bedroom...

David had laid out the coils of rope in his closet. Then a few other things that he'd bought. They were all sitting in a row.

Just in case that was what Naftali wanted. Not that David was trying to pressure him.

He just kept thinking that Naftali had still called him Daddy. Twice. Once on the phone and once over text.

He had no clue what that meant. Were they picking up where they left off? Was he just supposed to be Naftali's Daddy for a few hours and then say goodbye for the next few weeks?

He was already cursing himself for suggesting a Sunday morning. He knew Naftali taught Torah School in the

afternoons, so Naftali would inevitably be leaving before too long. If he'd suggested an evening, Naftali could have stayed the night.

He paced back to the door, then practically jumped out of his skin when the doorbell rang.

It was nine-fifty. But the doorman confirmed that it was Naftali. Who'd actually arrived early.

David didn't have it in him to walk away from the door again, so he just opened it and waited for the elevator.

Naftali walked out a few minutes later and caught sight of him immediately. His smile grew. "Hey, Daddy."

David was completely at a loss for words. He wanted this to mean so much.

Naftali's face dimmed as he got closer. "Is it still okay for me to call you that?"

David's mouth was completely dry. So many words were swirling around in his brain, like *baby boy* and *I missed you* and *what does this mean?*, but none of them came out. He finally nodded.

Naftali slipped through his front door. He set his backpack on the floor and shrugged out of his coat. David took it automatically. He should hang it up.

He also felt like he should pull Naftali into his arms. Kiss him until their lungs burned.

He didn't do any of that either.

He hung up the coat.

"David?" Naftali asked, more cautiously.

That wasn't the name he wanted to be called.

Was he just deluding himself this whole time? Naftali had said from the beginning that he'd call him anything—it was about respect to a Dom, right? Maybe not so different from respecting people's pronouns or something.

He should probably close the closet door. He couldn't hide in there forever.

Drawing in a breath, he turned to Naftali, who was even more gorgeous than ever. He wore a long-sleeved brown shirt that shouldn't have been sexy, but it clung to his chest, highlighting his collarbones. David couldn't look away.

“W-W-W-W-W, W-W-W-What do you w-w-w-w-want to d-do?” Stupid fucking tongue.

Naftali stepped a little closer. “Hey,” he soothed. “It's just me. And I want...” He exhaled, maybe a little shakily. Was that possible?

David's head jerked up.

Naftali looked tired. His eyes shone, but there were dark bruises beneath them. “I guess I want what I've always wanted. I want to submit. I want the joy and freedom of letting you make all the decisions.” He quirked a smile. “Maybe I want to be pampered.”

That wasn't quite the same as a long term, exclusive relationship. But maybe if David could give this to Naftali... If he could meet Naftali's needs for long enough with something casual, maybe it could turn into something real.

Joy and freedom and pampering. He could give Naftali that. Even if it was just for a few hours on a Sunday morning.

“Are you h-hungry?”

Naftali shook his head, but his eyes crinkled. “Zeev made me eat breakfast.”

David couldn't decide if he was jealous of Zeev for that privilege or grateful that they were there to take care of Naftali when he couldn't.

Either way, if Naftali wasn't hungry, that left just two choices. David looked at Naftali again. The dark circles under his eyes. The way he twitched just a little.

Maybe he needed movies on the couch. Or even a nap, cuddled up together. That was pampering. And if that was all Naftali wanted, David would be happy to give it to him.

Command him to do it, even, in the way that felt so familiar that he ached for it.

But Naftali could do that with anyone. Zeev, for example.

No, there was something more important that David could give him. The place where Naftali found his joy and freedom.

“Go to my b-bedr-r-room and st-st-strip. Kneel on the floor.”

Naftali gave him a look of such pleasure and gratitude that it almost had David floating. He’d gotten it right.

“Yes, Daddy!” Naftali practically tripped over his shoes as he toed them off to race down the hall. Then, comically, David heard two different doors open and close to Naftali’s confused murmurs before he apparently found the right room. David had forgotten that he hadn’t seen half of the apartment yet.

David trailed more slowly behind, forcing his thoughts to slow even as his heart raced. He wanted to get everything perfect. He wanted to savor this.

Since Friday night, he’d been practicing knots and memorizing rope patterns harder than he’d ever studied for a test.

He knew just what he wanted.

Naftali hadn’t even closed the door to the bedroom, and his clothing was strewn across the floor. God, did he know how much joy he’d already brought to David just by being here?

He was kneeling, perfectly posed. Back straight, hands loosely clasped behind him at the wrist, head down.

He was also quivering with excitement.

Gorgeous, beautiful baby boy. David’s songbird. His precious little monster.

David kept all the pet names inside.

He crossed to the closet, then laid out all the ropes on the bed.

Naftali’s breath picked up.

“How are your joints today?” David asked. “Or anything I should know about your body?”

Naftali gave him a sunny smile. “Everything’s perfect. I can handle some stress positions. Though... maybe I should go to the bathroom and stretch first?”

Maybe not as sexy as a fantasy, but even better, because it was real.

“Go ahead, baby boy.” The pet names weren’t staying inside.

Naftali rose at once and raced to the bathroom. He didn’t seem capable of doing anything slowly right now. His excitement was contagious.

David picked up Naftali’s clothes while he waited, folding them on the corner of his dresser. He unlooped four of the loosely coiled ropes and found the bight, before laying them over the back of his chair. After a moment’s thought, he folded the blankets back to the foot of the bed.

The toilet flushed and Naftali returned, swinging his arms and twisting his neck. He bent gracefully to touch his toes, then hopped with far less dignity as he tried to pull one foot up behind him without slowing down from his walk.

David rushed up to steady him as he stretched the other hamstring.

David couldn’t possibly be worried when Naftali was so delightfully himself.

“Sit on the bed when you’re ready,” he instructed softly.

“Yes, Daddy.” Naftali bounced in, naked and happy, his legs crossed with knees wide.

“I want to try reverse prayer position,” David told him. “If that’s-if that’s okay with you.”

Naftali raised his eyebrows. “That’s not a beginner pose.” He wasn’t objecting, though. He sounded more impressed.

“I’ve been p-p-p-p-practicing.” With a chair and a rolled-up blanket and his headboard, which wasn’t quite the same.

But he knew every step. He could do them even faster than the videos.

“I trust you,” Naftali said easily. “Tie me up, boy scout.”

They’d come full circle. But now David knew so much more. He knew how Naftali sang in the car. How he nuzzled into David’s neck when they cuddled. What he looked like when he came.

So David began. He ran soothing hands down Naftali’s arms, massaging and relaxing his shoulders. Then he pulled Naftali’s arms back, running his hands up them until Naftali’s palms met over his spine, just below his neck.

The first tie was a simple loop around Naftali’s bicep, just above the elbow.

Naftali released a pleased hum as soon as it was in place. He seemed to be settling into himself. His breath evened out.

The next step incorporated the other elbow, drawing them a bit closer together, but not too far. Too much strain could dislocate shoulders or cause nerve damage. David made sure there was still some give. The distance that Naftali could comfortably maintain on his own was more than enough.

Then David added more loops. Around the elbows again. Around Naftali’s front, below the ribs. Then, crossing the upper arms and around the chest.

Throughout it all, he let his free hand run over Naftali’s skin, reacquainting himself with all of the parts he wanted to touch.

He added in a second rope to loop over each shoulder and down to the lines in front, distributing the weight of the arms.

All of this time, neither of them spoke. It was peaceful. Serene. Like he imagined artists must feel with their masterpieces, externally calm but swept up with the euphoria of inspiration on the inside.

Naftali was his masterpiece.

Only when David tied off the end of the rope did he break the silence. “How are you doing?”

“Good, Daddy.” Naftali sounded floaty and far away.

David double and triple checked his circulation and mobility. Everything was pink and healthy. “Can you handle a hog tie?”

Naftali shivered. “Yes, Daddy.”

So gorgeous. Lost in it.

David carefully eased Naftali onto his belly. Now that he was there, though, David reconsidered his options. Not a hog tie, with the feet pulled toward the buttocks and the knees together, but a frog tie to keep Naftali’s knees apart.

That is, to make him accessible.

“I’m going to do a double column tie on your thighs and-and-ankles,” David informed him.

Naftali gave a happy hum.

One rope for each side, looping around the thigh, tying off, then connecting the ankle with another loop. Then repeat. The symmetry was beautiful. Four straight lines circling each column, joined by a constellation of careful knots.

Naftali was truly immobilized, hands and feet trapped behind him.

David stroked down his body, running his hands over warm flesh and rough rope alike. He tried to take a picture in his mind, so he could remember this forever. Just wide expanses of skin bound by bright hemp coils where he’d placed them.

“How are you doing, baby boy?”

“Sooooo goooooood...” Naftali exhaled.

David kissed a path down one of his hands, following it down to his elbow, and then the little gap of spine before his feet intervened. “Tell me if you need a break or if it’s starting to be too much.”

Naftali nodded with an affirmative hum. Maybe it wasn’t a good idea to ask him to talk now anyway.

But David still wanted to play.

He situated himself between Naftali's bound knees and began to kiss him. That luscious swell of ass. The dip of his spine. The sweet crevice where his ass parted to accept David's tongue.

David had thought he'd known what Naftali sounded like when he was being pleased, but this was completely different.

His moans and hums came slowly, like he was under water. Even when David bit the fleshy swell of his butt, all he received was a drawn-out *ohhhhhhhhh*.

David pushed Naftali's knees farther apart and licked lower until he reached Naftali's tight hole, tasting his musky flavor. There was that pause again, and then a long, rising note from Naftali's chest.

It sounded like Naftali was floating on a cloud, the sensations only reaching him with a delay, before driving him to some new level of ecstasy.

David kept licking, thrusting with his tongue and kissing around Naftali's rim. It was like playing a musical instrument, Naftali's moans and hums echoing through the room.

David bit Naftali's thigh. "My beautiful songbird," he murmured. Maybe Naftali wasn't his forever, but right now, he could claim him.

He dove back in, pulling more gorgeous sounds from Naftali. His hole was starting to soften, and David reached across the bed for the lube.

There was something intoxicating about making the choice. About knowing that Naftali had given over all control—of his limbs, of his movements, of what David would do to him next.

David traced around Naftali's hole with two slick fingers, and then entered him. Naftali quivered, rocking onto David's hand with what little space he had.

His hums turned to breathy cries, but there was still something melodic about them. Something of that space his mind went to when his body was bound. Every thrust brought a new, rhythmic tone.

David added more lube and another finger, making his rim stretch tight. Naftali was so decadently smooth and hot inside, just swallowing him up.

David could have kept fingering him all day. Maybe stretching him further. Seeing how long he could drive those deep moans from Naftali's chest before he was shaking and wrung out, begging to come.

But he also knew that Naftali wouldn't be comfortable in the ropes forever. He'd chosen a less comfortable position because he wanted to push Naftali... but never too far.

Still thrusting with his fingers, he reached between Naftali's spread legs until his fingertips met Naftali's small, hard cock.

Naftali's moans rose, high and needy.

He started stroking, three fingers forming a tunnel for Naftali's dick to slide through. Now he could work both hands in tandem, with Naftali's wails as his orchestra.

"Come on, baby boy," David urged. "Come for me."

There was a long pause, and for a moment David wasn't even sure Naftali had heard him.

And then Naftali was bucking and squirming, his cries turning to gasps and his hole clenching tight on David's fingers.

Naftali shook and shook and *shook* as he fell apart under David's hands, his voice now turned to little helpless whimpers.

He sounded absolutely shattered, and David felt like something had shattered inside himself too.

He was gone for this boy. He never wanted anyone else.

He stroked Naftali through the end of his lingering orgasm, then gently withdrew. Naftali whimpered again.

Time to undo all of these knots, and fast. He loosened as much as he could from the chest and shoulder harness without rolling Naftali over, his knots behaving exactly as he'd hoped. "Can you sit up for me, baby boy?"

Naftali hummed a nod, and David pulled him onto his side, and then upwards so they were back-to-chest. He kissed every inch of skin he could reach while he unwound the lengths of rope from around Naftali's chest and finally untied the final few at his back. With just the one loop around Naftali's left arm, he coaxed both of Naftali's arms around to his front, hugging and stroking sensation back into the bent limbs.

Naftali rolled his head back against David's shoulder, then turned his head so their lips could meet in a soft, endless kiss.

Naftali was so precious like this. Floppy like a ragdoll, for David to pose and protect.

"Lay down for me one more time, baby boy."

Naftali made a sound of disappointment, not even a full pout. It was like David was communicating directly with Naftali's emotions, with no input from his conscious mind.

"I'm not g-g-g-g-going anywhere," he soothed. "I need to free your legs."

Naftali made that disappointed sound again. Maybe he was hoping to keep the bondage going longer. Or maybe he just didn't want to let go.

Either way, he was in a vulnerable place where David needed to look out for him.

He eased Naftali down to the bed, and steadily unwound both legs, easing them slowly down and smoothing out the muscles.

As soon as he was done, he tossed the ropes to the floor to coil up later and pulled Naftali into his chest. He dragged the blanket up to cover them both.

Naftali burrowed in, throwing one leg over David's hip and, sweetly, gripping his shirt with one hand.

David wished now that he'd thought to take off more of his clothes. He wanted to press every inch of their skin together.

Instead, he settled for kissing Naftali's face. His hair. His ear. Any bit of him he could reach in soft, tender caresses.

"Daddy?" Naftali asked muzzily.

"Sleep, darling boy. Daddy's got you. Just rest."

Naftali made a sleepy little hum and snuggled in tighter. A few minutes later, his breath evened out as he slept.

All David could feel was a sense of awe.

And determination. He was going to ask Naftali again. Whatever it took to convince him, he was going to do it.

They could take the relationship as slow as Naftali needed to, but David was going to be his Daddy.

NAFTALI

Naftali woke up surrounded by warmth and with a smile on his face. He wasn't even sure why he was smiling at first, until he inhaled David's unique scent and realized that the steady beat under his ear must be David's heart.

Perfect. He didn't want to move ever again.

He could feel, now, the aches in his limbs where he'd been bound, a tiny tinge of over-stretching that only brought back remembered pleasure.

Most of their bondage session was a kaleidoscope of sensation in his mind, unmoored from time or even the physical room.

He'd gone under *deep*.

Especially to fall asleep afterward.

Maybe his body knew more than his mind had been willing to admit.

He stirred and David instantly gathered him closer. Mmmmm... He hadn't really wanted to move away, just stretch, so that was perfect.

"You awake, baby boy?"

God, he loved being *baby boy*. And *songbird*. That word shone in his memory from earlier like a jewel amidst the waves of silk.

"I'm awake, Daddy." Somehow, that name had stopped being a title and become more like a... a comfort. His source

of security. Something that was for him, as much as it was for Daddy.

He wished, so much, that he could trust it. That it really meant everything he wanted to imagine.

“How are you feeling?” David asked, his voice a rumble under Naftali’s ear.

“Amazing. Thank you.”

David kissed his head. “You never need to thank me.”

He liked that word, *never*. It was related to more words like *ever* and *always*, if he wasn’t being too naive to think that it could all work out.

“What do you need now?” David asked him. “Food? Shower? More sleep?”

Naftali finally broke far enough away for a real stretch. “Food?” If he could have it without letting David go.

“I’ve got brunch food. Bagels or eggs?”

He grinned up at David. “What kind of a question is that?”

David kissed his nose. “I’ll make both.”

Naftali nodded happily. It was like being back in their little vacation bubble, where David took care of everything.

He let David roll out of bed on his side, then popped up to join him as they walked down the hall. Well, not so much join him as glom onto his side like a barnacle, even if it did make it difficult to walk.

David chuckled. “Are you planning to let go of me?”

“Nope!”

“Or put on c-c-c-clothes?”

“Nuh-uh.” Not unless Daddy made him. Maybe he could entice Daddy into even more fun.

David shook his head fondly and squeezed around Naftali’s waist. “You’re incorrigible.”

And yet Daddy didn’t seem to mind this at all.

They detoured to the couch, where David picked up a blanket, and then wrapped it around Naftali before settling him into a kitchen chair. Mmmm... He could deal with this.

David was quick in the kitchen, tossing bagel halves onto a baking sheet in the oven—he didn't seem to have a toaster—and dicing up a pepper and half an onion to fry on the stove.

Naftali usually couldn't stop talking, but there was a quiet domesticity to this that he didn't want to interrupt. Daddy had perched him in a chair, and his only job was to stay there and snuggle in the blanket.

So he just watched David move around the kitchen, until he set two steaming plates of bagels and omelets on the table. He returned a moment later with forks, knives, and glasses of water, then took a seat across from him.

Everything smelled delicious. This would be his first time eating David's cooking, too. Another small, sweet, first.

Naftali arranged half his omelet on the bagel and took a generous bite. "Mmmmm... You *do* know how to cook." There were a host of complex seasonings in there, making his taste buds tingle. He'd seen David sprinkle in a few different spice jars, and now he wondered what they all were.

David smiled. "I told you. Maybe next time we can cook together."

Next time. Naftali wanted there to be a next time. Maybe brunch could be their thing?

They chatted about the last two weeks, keeping things light. Naftali talked about some of his students. David had gone out to dinner with his ex, Mike... and the woman Mike was now dating.

There was such an easy comfort in the way that David spoke about both of them that Naftali couldn't even feel jealous. Especially since the two of them had apparently been the reason David posted his request on Cuffd in the first place.

When they were down to the last scraps and crumbs, David neatly aligned his knife and fork on his plate, then set it aside.

“S-S-S-S...” David started, then shook his head. Something twitched across his face. His fingers worked rhythmically across the bottom of his shirt. “I w-w-w-was hoping to-to-to talk w-w-w-with you.”

Naftali’s heart raced, and his appetite failed. If David was this nervous, this didn’t sound good. Or... potentially not good.

This was where everything could fall apart.

Naftali narrowed his eyes. “Worst opening for a conversation ever, Daddy.”

When all else failed, fall back on humor.

David laughed, lightening up. “I’m sorry. You’re right. I was j-just...” He drew in a huge breath, even closing his eyes before he opened them again. His fingers rubbed faster. “I w-w-w-want to...”

He shook his head again, clearly irritated with himself. Or his tongue, more likely.

“I w-want to talk with-with-with with you about a r-r-r-relationship.” Then he added, after a moment, “Please.”

Naftali pulled the soft blanket, which had dropped to his lap, back around his shoulders. It was like an extra layer of soft, fuzzy protection. How could he want this so much, and be so terrified at the same time?

He already knew that David wanted more. It was just... What if they really were incompatible? And what if pressing on it like this made them both realize how wrong it could be?

Because it couldn’t be a vacation bubble all the time. He knew that. Coming over for bondage and brunch was very different from a relationship. That was where feelings could get hurt. Everything could come apart.

And if it all came to light that it wouldn’t work... he’d be giving up what they already had.

What was he supposed to do?

Well, obviously, talk about it like a grown up. He wrapped a swath of blanket around one fist and stroked the fuzz. “What would that look like?” he finally asked.

“W-W-W-Whatever you want. We c-c-c, c-can go as-as-as slow as you want. Maybe just meet l-l-l-l-l-, l-l-l-like this? E-every Sunday if you’re n-not busy?”

Naftali shook his head. Because that was what he *should* want—the guarantee of more no-strings-attached mornings like today. Going slow. Getting to set the pace.

But he knew that wasn’t what David wanted. And ultimately, if he did want a long-term relationship with David, a D/s relationship where David took charge of Naftali in any meaningful way, they couldn’t just float along in ignorance until it all unraveled.

No, better to know. “I might need some time to get there,” he offered. “But I want to know now. What do you envision this relationship looking like? What’s your ideal?” Because he had to be *sure* that he could deliver it. That it was actually what he wanted.

David nodded a few times before speaking. “I w-w-w-want... In my ideal? Even if it’s a few years from-from-from now?”

Naftali nodded.

“I’d w-want you to live with me. Doesn’t h-have to be here. I’d w-w-want to... to be your Daddy most of the time. To-to set rules for you. And m-m-m-m-make you happy.”

Naftali watched every muscle in David’s face, wishing he could use it like a crystal ball to know the future.

The idea of rules made him feel rebellious. Angry.

And somewhere deep inside, he wanted them more than anything.

As long as they were the right rules.

“What are the rules?” he asked. Because this might be their make or break.

David's eyes widened. "Can I get my notebook?"

Naftali smiled, even though he was trembling inside. He loved David's notebook, the way he was so thoughtful and methodical about everything. The fact that he'd already thought about rules, even if he didn't know what their relationship might become. "Sure."

David walked to his computer desk in the living room and opened a drawer. Naftali took the opportunity to move to the couch. They might as well be comfortable for this conversation.

Though he wished now that he was wearing more clothing. He pulled the blanket tighter around himself instead.

David sat down at the other end of the couch, facing him. He flipped between a few pages and cleared his throat.

"These are-are-are all negotiable," he started. "They're just some ideas."

Naftali nodded. He was coiled like a spring.

"The first rule is... I want you to call me each night if we aren't together." He paused, his shyness visibly growing. "So I can h-h-hear about your day and tuck you in."

That sounded alright so far. It was sweet. Only... "But what if it's Shabbat?" Then another thought struck him, the one he probably should have thought of first. "Or if my phone isn't charged?"

David's face softened. "On Friday nights, call me before Shabbat, and on Saturday call me after it's over. Or... I could maybe try going to shul with you, and we could spend the evening together?"

Naftali's chest flooded with warmth. Shabbat was central to his life and... David understood that. It wasn't his biggest concern, but... yeah. It was there. Interfaith relationships could be tricky, and if David was at least a little bit interested in exploring Judaism with him, that was more than he'd even hoped for.

Shabbat was such a special time, and sharing it with David would be perfect.

“As for charging your phone... I know it’s-it’s-it’s hard to remember. But I don’t think you’ll forget about calling me to say goodnight. So whenever you get ready for bed, even if you have to plug your phone in right then, you call me. Doesn’t matter how late.”

“What happens if I mess up?”

David shrugged. “You get a good night’s sleep and call me in the morning.”

Okay, okay. That wasn’t a punishment. David didn’t even sound like he’d be angry.

“What’s the next rule?”

David consulted his notebook. “I want you to bring some clothes over here. For-for different occasions. So that I can ch-ch-choose your clothes and dress you.” He only looked up afterward. He seemed to be holding his breath.

“How would you know what clothes were appropriate?” Naftali wasn’t even sure why he was asking. He’d loved letting David dress him during their trip. It had been more naughty than practical the first time, but by the end, he’d just loved the intimacy.

It wasn’t really about the clothes anyway—it was a visible manifestation of Daddy taking care of him.

“You would tell me your schedule each day.” David sounded more confident now. “And if you needed to wear anything in particular. Then I would pick.”

Naftali bit his lip. “Would you want to change my style?”

David’s eyes crinkled. “Do you have more tight shirts like the one you wore today?”

Naftali laughed. “A few. You’ve already seen some of them.” The brown shirt he’d worn this morning was hardly high fashion. He hadn’t even realized that it was tight until David’s eyes were drifting over his collar bones.

“They might make m-m-more of an appearance. Especially if we’re spending the day together.”

Naftali let out a happy sigh. “I can agree to that.” So far, everything sounded perfect. But there had to be something about it that was hard. “What’s next?”

David looked down at his notes, then up, watching Naftali’s face as he spoke. “I would like you to give the responsibility of-of of organizing your belongings to me.”

Naftali froze, his mind going in little circles. Disappointment and failure and not being responsible enough. Leaving messes everywhere. David getting frustrated and giving up on him. *Noah* getting frustrated and giving up on him.

He wished he hadn’t eaten so much, because his stomach turned with nausea.

David placed a heavy hand on his knee. “I think I messed this up.” He sounded regretful.

But Naftali couldn’t see out of his own head. This was going to be it. The thing that sunk them both.

“Breathe, baby boy. Just relax for me, and then we can talk about it.”

Naftali wanted to do that.

David added his other hand, pressing firmly on both knees. “Relax.”

Naftali finally sucked in a breath. If Daddy wanted him to relax, he could do that. Maybe they could even figure it all out.

He inhaled again. Exhaled.

“Very good,” David praised. “So good for me. Let me know when you’re ready to talk.”

Naftali swallowed. “You just... You can’t be responsible for my stuff. I’m a mess. I’m going to leave it everywhere. I just... I know myself. I’m messy. And you’re going to get annoyed. You’ll create systems, and I’ll use them for a couple

days, and then I'll get distracted, and then feel terrible, and then you'll..."

"No." David cut him off. "You misunderstood. *I* will use the systems. You can put your belongings wherever you choose, and I will clean them up."

"But that's... that's a huge amount of work. That's not fair to *you*. I can't just... have you be responsible for..." Naftali trailed off when he realized he was literally going to repeat the rule.

The proposed rule. There was no way that was fair. No way that he wouldn't be a burden.

Zeev had helped him clean his room once, and it had taken them six hours. Then, it had reverted to a disaster zone in days.

David looked him in the eye. There was steel behind the velvet in his tone. "This is where I'd like to assert my prerogative as your Daddy. And it's okay if you struggle with this rule, but I'd like for you to try it. Your role is to give over responsibility *and any guilt* for organizing your-your-your things to me."

Wow. That was going to be a doozy. "I can try, but..." He wasn't even sure what his argument was. Or when they'd started talking about these rules as something that was going to happen, instead of some distant hypothetical.

David massaged his thighs through the blanket. "It is my privilege as your Daddy to take care of you this way. Exactly like dressing you in the morning. It's just the same putting your things away at night."

Alright, that made a little more sense. Actually, a lot of sense. If he saw it as a kink, rather than a personal failing... He could maybe wrap his mind around it.

"If it helps," David added, "I've read that some Daddies make their boys a lunch to take to work each day. Sorting through your things to put them where you can find them wouldn't take any more time, but I think it would be more useful to you. And it-and it-and it would feel special to me. I know it would represent a huge amount of trust from you."

Dammit. What was Naftali supposed to do when David was so... so perfect? When he saw him so well? When, for some crazy reason, he wanted to do the thing that would actually probably both support Naftali the most and balance out David's own need for order?

It seemed too good to be true. "What about money?" he asked. That was probably what he should have started with.

David answered promptly. "I want to manage your financial reporting. Including sending receipts to Shira, for as long as you're doing the communal grocery shopping."

Well... yes. And that was amazing. But they'd already kind of agreed on that a little bit. "I mean... what about... buying me things?"

God. He hoped that didn't sound like he actually *wanted* David to buy him things. He opened his mouth to clarify, just in case there was any...

"Presents, you mean?" David blinked. "I know you don't have expensive tastes. But I'd like to reserve the right to spoil you with little gifts sometimes."

"*Little* gifts," Naftali stressed.

"Only the finest pinecones," David agreed. "I might add in some rocks if they're extra special."

Naftali could feel himself grinning. He loved that pinecone so damn hard.

"You're sure you don't mind about... I mean, you make a lot more money than me. How would that work out?"

"If you're asking if I want to be your Sugar Daddy... I don't. And I know you don't want that either. I think that if we ever moved in together, perhaps we could... I don't know... split the rent equitably, in proportion to our incomes. Or maybe... well, that's getting ahead of things."

Naftali didn't have to do too much guess work. If they got *married* or something crazy, maybe their finances would be merged. They weren't anywhere close to that.

But splitting rent in proportion to their incomes... that was... well, probably reasonable. He could work with that. Or figure out the details later. It was more the thought that was important. David didn't want to buy him everything or take away his autonomy. "Okay," he finally replied.

David got an adorably bashful look on his face. "Could it maybe still be my role to take you out to dinner and order for you? I mean, not too often. But for romantic dates? And, um, plan a trip for us once a year?"

Good God. This man was too much.

Just... just... Fuck. Perfect.

Somehow, he'd found just that right line between the pampering that Naftali craved and the independence that he needed to feel confident. And somehow *David* was the one begging for the right to give that to him.

"Yes," Naftali breathed.

"Yes?"

"Yes, *Daddy*." Naftali slid to the floor, shedding the blanket so that he could kneel, naked, giving every beat of his submissive heart to his Daddy.

"God," David whispered. Then he was tugging at Naftali's arm. "Come up here, baby boy."

Naftali scrambled into his lap. That was what they both loved best.

"I can't believe you're still naked," David told him, running hands over his skin.

Every part of him tingled where Daddy touched. The apartment was cool, but Daddy's hands were so warm as they circled around his nipples. And damn did he love being naked while Daddy was fully clothed. It made him feel so sexy and available and exposed.

"I think we need a rule about this, Daddy," Naftali suggested.

David laughed. "Oh yeah? What would that rule be?"

“That I should be naked all the time.”

David kissed his temple, which was the closest bit to him. “Not a chance. Your rule for nakedness is *listen to what Daddy says.*”

Naftali pouted. With the big lip and quivery eyes.

David was still laughing. “Or you can ignore me and earn yourself a punishment.”

“That’s not going to be a deterrent.”

David looked delighted, though he got more serious as he spoke. “I actually thought about this a lot. And that’s the only kind of punishment I want to give you. For breaking little rules, n-n-n-not big ones.” He wrinkled his forehead. “Unless I think you’re not taking care of yourself or letting me take care of you. Or if you’re feeling guilty about the rules and start to think you’re a burden. Then there might be a punishment just to-just to-just to remember that Daddy’s in charge.”

Naftali collapsed against David’s chest. He hadn’t even known that was what he wanted, but that was exactly it. He wanted to play. He wanted to tease. He wanted to earn his spankings.

But if he was really running off the rails... he wanted to know that Daddy would step in and fix it.

Daddy, who would punish him if he started to feel guilty, but not if he messed up.

“Can we start now?” Naftali asked.

David tipped back Naftali’s head. “I never stopped. I was just waiting for you to be ready.”

“I think... I think I’m ready now. At least to try.”

David nodded. “We’ll talk about everything. Check in that it’s working for you. But I want you to know that as l-l-l-long as you’re mine, you’ll never disappoint me. I don’t want you to change.”

Naftali had to reward that with a kiss. Everything about David was so different from what he’d had with his ex.

Perhaps what Naftali had needed wasn't time, but the right kind of relationship. One that supported and encouraged who he was instead of forcing him to hold it back.

“I don't want you to change either, Daddy.” Naftali hoped that David knew how true that was. “You're perfect. And I hope that you realize that now that you've offered me your bed, I might never go home again.”

David's eyes shone. “I wouldn't mind that at all. I can even get you a key right now.” He moved forward, like he was going to stand.

Naftali really wanted that key. But... “Get it later, Daddy. I need kisses right now.”

David grinned. “Oh you do, do you? And who put you in charge?”

“I did!” Naftali announced, gleefully.

Naftali was still giggling when David flipped him over and began spanking his naked ass.

EPILOGUE

NAFTALI

Naftali turned the key—his very own key, which was still exciting even three months later—and slipped into David’s apartment. David’s brother and his family were flying in tonight, so this would be their last bit of alone time for a few days.

David was sitting at the desk in the living room, completely engrossed in his spreadsheets with music playing in the background. He was still dressed for work, but it looked like he’d already taken off his tie. His posture was perfect, just like the alignment of each of the six items on the desk.

Naftali’s heart fluttered.

Because he was just so *Daddy*.

It was no wonder Naftali was totally in...

Er...

Okay, he was totally head over heels and Zeev had just been teasing him about it, but he wasn’t going to say anything yet. Maybe in a few months when he was definitely, totally sure that everything was going to be this perfect forever.

Naftali silently closed the door, wondering how long he could get away with sneaking in before Daddy noticed him.

He leaned his guitar case against the wall just as quietly. Then he set his backpack in the bin that David had set up by the door for just this purpose. With it went all of Naftali’s concerns from the day. His schedule for the weekend. The SEPTA pass that he needed to renew before he got on the train

again. The tax forms he wasn't even going to look at before handing them over to Daddy.

Because that was what he could do now... just hand everything over.

At some point, David would ask him about his day, go through his backpack for anything important, and make sure he had everything he needed for tomorrow.

Those were Daddy's rules for him. Because Daddy enjoyed taking care of him.

What *wasn't* in the rules was what he did next.

He noiselessly slipped off his spring jacket and toed off his shoes. He had to suppress his giggles as he carefully shucked off every single article of clothing and tossed it into the jumbled bin.

He strutted across the room, stark naked. David still hadn't noticed him, so he squirmed his way onto Daddy's lap, straddling him.

"Oh!" David startled, before drawing his arms around Naftali's waist.

"Hi, Daddy."

"Hi, baby boy. You seem to have misplaced your clothes again."

"Oops." He rubbed up against Daddy's junk, feeling the soft, thick rod beneath Daddy's pressed pants. He sometimes wondered what the dry cleaners thought of their laundry.

David gave him a mock glare. "What did we say about your-your-your clothing?"

Naftali pretended to think. "That I should be naked in your lap all the time?"

"No, little monster." Daddy shook his head. "That wasn't it. It was *Daddy gets to decide what you wear.*"

It had taken Naftali a while to really understand David's rules. How much Daddy wanted to take control in Naftali's life... and how peaceful it was to let him. How supported he

felt each day when he truly gave all of the difficult things to Daddy.

Sometimes it still left him surprised and awed.

He'd figured out more quickly which rules were serious and which ones were just for show. As far as he could tell, the one about Daddy deciding when he could take his clothes off was basically put in place for him to flout it at every occasion.

Yet David would have been hurt if he actually dressed himself in the morning and walked out the door without their special time together. It was *always* Daddy's job to pick out his clothes, even if he was at his own place, on the phone.

Whereas flinging off his clothes in the evenings just led to spankings. The *good* kind of spankings.

"Sorry, Daddy," Naftali apologized with mock-sincerity. "I'm really trying. It's just, I saw you and I started thinking about how your cock would fill me up if you bent me over the desk, and my clothes just..." He waved his hands around. "They disappeared."

Daddy couldn't quite hold back his amusement, but he gave it a good fight. His lips twitched and his eyes sparkled, but he was still scowling.

"They disappeared," Daddy repeated skeptically, fingers massaging down to Naftali's ass.

"Yep, because you..."

Daddy put one finger over his lips, shutting him up. "On your knees."

Oh, *hell* yeah.

Naftali slithered to the floor. He'd never be graceful, but he felt like he made up for it with sheer enthusiasm. The wood was already hard under his knees, and he knew it would get worse, but that was part of the joy.

"If you're just going to make excuses," Daddy warned, "maybe your mouth should be put to better use." He stood, towering over Naftali like a living god. Naftali would be more than happy to worship at his feet.

But what he said was, “I’m not making excuses, Daddy, I was just telling you what happened. I was just innocently coming home from work and my clothes just flew away when I came inside the door.”

Daddy unzipped his jeans, just inches from Naftali’s face. Damn, did he just want to dive in there and suck on anything he could get his mouth on. He was probably drooling.

And if he kept up his inane babble for long enough, Daddy would shut him up with his cock.

But what happened next was beyond any of his expectations. Instead of pulling out his packer and snapping it erect... Daddy pushed all of the scrunched fabric down together, almost to his knees. There was nothing between them.

Lust shuddered through Naftali’s body. He *never* got to touch Daddy like this. He moaned in anticipation, swaying forward. “Daddy,” he exhaled.

He could see the pink tip of Daddy’s dick peeking out, and he wanted to look longer, wanted to touch... but he turned his head up instead.

David’s eyes were dark and predatory, only the tension around his mouth betraying his nerves. Naftali knew this was a big moment, a huge demonstration of trust and self-acceptance.

Daddy only hesitated a few seconds while they searched each other’s faces. Naftali tried to put every ounce of his desire into his expression. “Want your cock, Daddy.”

Then Daddy was hauling him forward, mashing Naftali’s face against his dick. “Suck me, baby boy.”

Naftali was more than happy to comply. Daddy’s cock was... God, Naftali was whimpering already. The head was smooth and hard, the perfect rounded cone to suck between his lips and tease with his tongue.

Daddy pushed him in further, scarcely giving him space to breathe. Daddy’s cock nestled at the front of his mouth, the loose skin dragging over the shaft from above, like foreskin.

Naftali sucked hard, whipping his tongue from side to side to stroke the mushroom head.

“Fuck, Nafti,” Daddy ground out, fingers tightening in Naftali’s hair until he could barely move. “How-how-how did you...”

Naftali’s lips rose in a smirk. Daddy better not think that was all he had in store. Naftali dragged his teeth down Daddy’s plump length, biting gently on the head while his tongue kept up the rapid beat.

Daddy fucked into his mouth, pelvic bone banging against his face. Spit ran down Naftali’s jaw. Daddy smelled good. Tasted better. Felt heavenly on his tongue, with those rough hands making his scalp tingle and directing him just where Daddy wanted him.

Naftali wanted to do this every fucking day.

Daddy was moaning, so Naftali picked up the pressure and pace. This was going to be fast and dirty. He only pulled back just enough to speak. “Want your cum all over me, Daddy. Want it in my mouth.”

Daddy’s voice rose to a shout. “Damn, Nafti. You’re gonna... Gonna take it all. Everyth-th-thing I give you.”

Naftali moaned in return, tightening down with his teeth. Daddy seemed to like a little pain, thrusting in faster. Naftali’s tongue would get tired before too long, but he threw everything into pleasing his Daddy.

Suddenly, Daddy’s hands tightened, crushingly hard, and then he was coming with a roar, jerking against Naftali’s lips.

Naftali groaned with him, feeling the echo of that orgasm down to his toes. He hadn’t come, but feeling Daddy explode in his mouth was almost the same.

Daddy leaned over him, sucking in great, heaving breaths as his hands shakily went to Naftali’s shoulders.

Naftali nuzzled against Daddy’s dick, making sure not to move his chin any farther down. “Thank you, Daddy,” he murmured.

David finally stumbled back a step, pulled briefs and pants back up, and slumped back into his chair. He gestured, barely closing his fingers, and Naftali scrambled into his lap.

“That was so hot,” Naftali said, before Daddy could even begin to doubt.

“Yeah? I don’t think... I c-couldn’t have done that with anyone but you.”

Naftali knew it was true. But he wanted to keep things light. Make this just like any other part of their already incredible sex life. He kissed along David’s jaw. “It was soooo hot. God, any time you want to shut me up again, just put me on my knees.”

David laughed. “And yet, it doesn’t seem to have worked at all. You’re still talking.”

“That’s because you love me,” Naftali answered back, flying in the thrill of the moment, and secure in the knowledge that he could tease just as much as he wanted.

Then he realized what he said. “I mean...”

It was still too soon to say those words to each other, right? It had only been four months. Nearly five if you counted the demonstration class, which he kind of did.

And what if Daddy didn’t really feel that way yet? Or what if he kind of did, like Naftali totally, definitely did, but wasn’t sure if he should say it?

Or what if...

David cupped Naftali’s cheeks, his eyes searching and serious. “I d-d-d-d, d-d-do love you, N-N-Nafti.”

Naftali’s heart was pounding out of his chest. He knew he didn’t have to say it back. But he’d also never been happier.

Part of it was how easily he sunk into the role of being Daddy’s baby boy. And part of it was just David himself.

Naftali pulled in a deep breath. “I love you too, Daddy.”

“Yeah?” David asked, like he couldn’t quite believe it.

“Yeah.” He dotted Daddy’s face with kisses. “I. Love. You. And you love me too!” He threw his arms around David, which didn’t interfere *at all* with the happy dance the rest of his body was doing on Daddy’s lap.

Daddy chuckled. “I see you approve of this development.”

“Yeah.” He snuggled down into Daddy’s lap. “Does this mean I don’t have to wear clothes?”

Daddy’s laughter rang through the room.

David

David relaxed against the couch, belly comfortably full, letting the voices in the room wash over him. Sean and Alicia were quietly debating over how late the kids should stay up since the time zones were two hours later. Jorah was leaning against David and playing a video game, the soft pings barely audible.

And Naftali was singing a ridiculous song with Kenzie about how Pharoah woke up with frogs on his head. It involved a lot of jumping and giggling, and Naftali had insisted it was a necessary part of the Passover experience.

David had been to two Seders this week, Wednesday night with Naftali's immensely enjoyable family in New Jersey and Thursday night with his queer housemates and two dozen more friends, all squeezed into a living room meant for half that many.

It had been illuminating, experiencing the rich traditions of another culture, where each food had a deep symbolism, drawing up conversations about slavery, freedom, and justice from ancient and current contexts. The dinner table conversation was about the modern plagues of homophobia, transmisogyny, pollution, racism, and systems of government that insisted that poverty was inevitable.

It was invigorating and connecting in a way that David hadn't expected, even though he couldn't follow along with the Hebrew or even some of the freedom songs in English.

Naftali had informed him that they didn't need to have Seders for the next six nights, which was good because David's own family was here for spring break, which overlapped with Easter.

Just having them around was... really nice. He should have thought of it before, but as with so many things, he'd needed Naftali in his life to figure it out.

"Is it time for dessert now, Uncle David?" Jorah asked suddenly.

David grinned down at him. His shy nephew had become a lot more comfortable with him over the past two days. They'd geeked out together on Pokémon cards—awakening memories of a two-year obsession from David's childhood—and David already had plans for video call games set up for when he went back to Albuquerque.

“You'll have to ask Naftali if it's ready.”

Kenzie must have overheard, because she tugged at his hand, still jumping. “Unco Naftawi! Is it weady yet?”

David's heart just about burst. None of them had told the kids to call Naftali that.

Naftali smiled at David over Kenzie's head, eyebrows raised in question and delight.

It was way too soon... but David certainly wasn't going to correct her.

“Let's go check,” Naftali told them.

While David usually would have mostly gone out to eat while he had guests in town, Naftali was avoiding all leavened bread to keep Kosher for Passover, or *K for P* as people apparently called it.

David had been lucky enough to overhear that a neighboring family was moving out of a furnished two-bedroom apartment on his floor, and he'd asked if he could sublet it for the rest of the month so they wouldn't have to break the lease.

The solution meant that David and Naftali, along with David's family, had been cooking up a storm, and getting a crash course in *K for P* along the way.

Tonight Naftali and the kids had made matzoh toffee—butter and sugar melted on the stove, spread over large, bland squares of matzoh on a cookie sheet, and then sprinkled with chocolate chips to melt in the oven until they could be spread easily over the top. The kids had then festooned the different squares with various toppings.

The result was currently hardening in the freezer.

Kenzie danced over to the kitchen, Jorah not-quite-bouncing along behind her. At age seven, it looked like he was trying to be mature, but his excitement was apparent.

Naftali pulled out the cookie sheet with a flourish. “Success! Great work, team! Now we just have to break it!” This was followed by shrieks of glee as he handed them each a wide serving bowl.

Sean looked over at David. “Naftali’s like an amusement park all by himself.”

David laughed. “He really is. I don’t think he ever gets tired.” Today Naftali and the kids had already put on a play, painted pictures for the fridge, and gone on a “nature hunt” in the manicured lawns of Rittenhouse Square, which Naftali had assured them was just as exciting as an Easter egg hunt. Since they were already clamoring for another one, he seemed to have been correct.

“Lucky for us,” Alicia agreed. “I didn’t even know how we were going to make it through the week. It’s hard when they have such different interests. But apparently not around your boyfriend.”

David beamed. Even four months in, it was still exciting to be a couple with Naftali. To be *acknowledged* as a couple with Naftali. And to have the family members who he cared about approve.

“You know,” Sean offered, “the kids will be off school all summer. You two could come to Albuquerque.”

Like it wasn’t even a question if Naftali would come, too.

Naftali must have overhead, because he looked up from the matzoh-toffee crumbling. “I vote yes! But I have to check my camp schedule.”

“I’ll send it to them,” David replied. He’d synced their calendars—not to control Naftali’s work, but to help them both plan for it together.

It was going to be hard to be away from his baby boy for most of the summer, but apparently assistant directors had the privacy and internet access for online calls every night. And

David had surprised himself by signing up to teach a week of outdoors-y skills with Naftali when one of the counselors wasn't available.

"Thanks, Da... David," Naftali responded, eyes wide and amused at his almost-mistake.

The kids didn't seem to notice any of it, coming out of the kitchen a few minutes later with chocolate-smearred hands and faces to match the chocolate that was still in the bowls.

"Tell everyone what you made," Naftali instructed.

"This one has dried cranberries on top," Jorah announced proudly. "And that one is nuts."

"Dis one is..." Kenzie looked at Naftali for help.

"Sea salt."

"Sea sawt," she repeated. "But it wooks wike pink sparkos."

It did, indeed, look like pink sparkles. And it tasted delicious.

David ate far, far too many pieces, after sampling each flavor and then going back for seconds. It was basically a cavity waiting to happen, but it was *really* good.

The kids were visibly beginning to wilt, Jorah getting lethargic and grumpy, and Kenzie running faster around the room until she inevitably bumped into something and started to cry.

Alicia gave Sean a look. "I think that just answered our debate..."

Sean snorted. "Bedtime in two minutes!"

There was the predictable wailing, until Naftali reminded them, "You get to sleep in your new bedroom tonight! With your new stuffies!"

The announcement didn't solve everything, but David and Naftali at least got hugs from the kids before they tromped down the hallway with their parents.

As the room quieted, Naftali came to nestle against David's side. "I like your family. I'm so glad you were able to get this apartment, too."

David brushed a kiss across Naftali's lips. Not to start anything, but because he was just so kissably close. "Do you like the-the-the apartment?"

Naftali looked around. "Um... yeah. I think it worked out well. The bigger balcony is nice." They'd all been able to squeeze onto it with a small table for breakfast.

"There are two bathrooms, too," David noted.

Naftali narrowed his eyes. "Ummmm... yeah?"

Right. Because he wasn't making any sense. David let out a breath. "I know this is probably too soon, but my l-l-l-l-lease is up at the end of the month. And this apartment is-is-is-is going to be open. So I th-th-th-thought th-th-th, thought that if I h-had a bigger p-p-place that m-m-m-maybe y-y-you would w-w-w-want to move in?"

Naftali's eyes lit up. And then his face fell.

Oh, fuck. Had David screwed it all up? He'd thought... hoped... that it had been enough time. That Naftali was finally starting to heal from all the damage Noah had done. And then last night, when they'd confessed their love for the first time, well, he'd thought it was time.

Naftali rarely spent a night apart from him. Even on Shabbat when they went to Naftali's neighborhood shul, they slept together in Naftali's untidy bedroom and woke up to breakfast and a day of hanging out with his friends.

It didn't make sense for them to have two separate addresses.

But this wasn't about logic. It was about what Naftali needed to feel safe and secure.

"W-W-W-We can for-for-forget I s-said anything if it's t-t-too soon," David told him, already wishing the words hadn't come out of his mouth.

Naftali looked up and was he... crying? And smiling at the same time?

David brushed his tears away. "I'm so s-s-s-s-sorry, b-baby boy."

Naftali shook his head. "No, Daddy. I just realized that I feel ready for this." His cheeks glistened. The corners of his mouth were drawn up so high that it looked like it was almost hard for him to talk. "I never felt this comfortable with anyone else before. And I would love to live anywhere that you were. I don't want my own place if you want me with you."

Oh! So that was... that was very good! David almost couldn't believe it was true.

"But..." Naftali paused.

David's chest grew tight again. He wasn't going to breathe until Naftali finished the sentence.

"Would you consider a house? Maybe with a garden? In West Philly so I can walk to shul and see Zeev? I mean, maybe not now, but if things are going well, then in a few years..."

David kissed him to stop the flow of words. And because Naftali was delicious and adorable and all his.

Of course, he should have thought of a house. Naftali's community was everything to him. So were Shabbat walks. And gardening. David could take the trolley into Center City for work far more easily than Naftali could access everything that was important to him from the other direction.

"We'll get a house," he promised. "M-Maybe not right away. We'll have to f-find the right one. And we'll figure it out so we're both contributing financially." It wouldn't be at all equal, with their disparate incomes, but he would never devalue Naftali's contributions.

He had more thoughts on the matter, brain already spinning with real estate possibilities and lists he needed to make.

But Naftali was pulling him down for a kiss, salt still on his lips.

Lists could wait.

Their tongues intertwined, as if they could just kiss deeply enough that their bodies would never be separated.

He ran his hand under Naftali's shirt, needing to feel more skin. Needing to re-learn every inch of his baby boy's body.

The sound of a throat clearing pulled them apart.

They broke away, panting, to find Sean was watching them with amusement. "I guess I missed out on my little brother making out on the couch when I left for college."

David's face heated. He actually hadn't dated *anyone* while he lived at home. His gender identity and sexual orientation were all too much to puzzle out.

But this did feel *exactly* like getting caught by his older brother.

Naftali was undeterred. "We're moving in together!"

Sean's eyebrows rose. "Congratulations!"

David waited for some sort of warning or concern, but it never came. "You don't th-think it's t-t-too soon?"

Sean shrugged. "Only you can judge that. But by what I've seen, you two are a great match. You complement each other well, and he makes you smile. Not to mention that the kids are big fans of Uncle Naftali. We'll come visit sometime in your new place."

It was a family blessing that David hadn't even been looking for. "Th-thanks. I'd love that." Naftali nudged him, so he corrected. "*We'd* love that."

"If you're not done making out, though, I'll just remind you that you have your own apartment down the hall."

David buried his head in Naftali's shoulder. This felt like one of those things that he was never going to live down.

Which, to be honest, he didn't mind so much. It was nice getting to know Sean as an adult. To become friends with his brother on equal terms.

“What?” Naftali asked innocently. “You don’t want to watch?”

David’s mouth dropped open. Naftali couldn’t possibly... He couldn’t mean... This wasn’t some crazy Kinkmas thing, and this was David’s own, very straight brother who...

Sean threw his head back, laughing.

Because that had obviously been a joke.

Sean had no idea how degenerate David’s little monster could be. That a sentence like this coming out of his mouth wouldn’t even raise eyebrows some places that they went.

And David wouldn’t want him any other way.

Except, well, around his brother.

David started laughing, too.

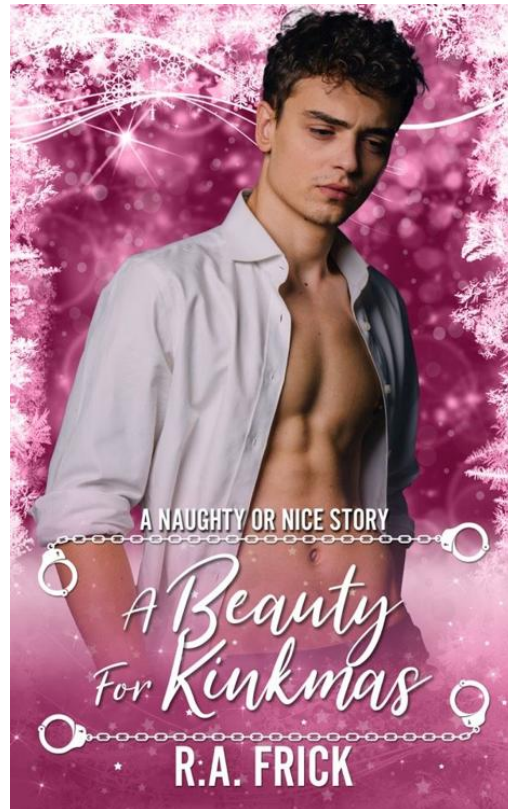
Naftali was his.

The End



Thank you for reading *A Daddy for Kinkmas*. I hope you enjoyed David and Naftali’s story. Please consider leaving a review on Amazon.

Don’t forget to check out the next book in *Naughty or Nice Season Three*, [*A Beauty for Kinkmas*](#) by R.A. Frick.



“Daddies want beautiful little boys, not scarred men.”

After being scarred in a fire as a teen, Lance ran away from the ghosts of his tiny town. He finds acceptance and a calling as a Firefighter in San Francisco, but is he willing to admit he needs more?

Danny Williams saw himself in Lance, the fastest runner on his track team, and suspected the boy was closeted like him. He worried when Lance disappeared but never believed the town’s gossip: they said Lance had set the fire that killed his father...

When a Kinkmas masquerade ball brings the former coach and a scarred young man back together, sparks fly. Can they admit their feelings and deepest kinky desires, or will they end up spending another holiday season alone?

***A Beauty for Kinkmas* is a MM Daddy/little novella and part of the *Naughty or Nice Season Three* multi-author series. Each book can be read as a standalone, but there are so many Daddies and boys finding their happily-ever-afters, why not grab them all?**

BOOKS BY REESE MORRISON

If you liked this book, I hope you'll check out some more!

All my books have characters who play with gender, gender identity, and gender expression. Some identify as trans, some as genderfluid, genderflexible, or agender.

It's also important to me to represent a range of cultural backgrounds and dis/abilities. But mostly, I love writing about people falling in love, with a little bit of angst, a lot of care, and a guaranteed happily ever after.

Naughty or Nice (Cuffd multi-author Daddy kink universe)

[Dear Daddy, Please Want Me](#)

(orgasm control, impact play)

[A Daddy for Kinkmas](#)

(new Dom, neurodivergence, bondage, impact play, primal play)

Destination Daddies (Cuffd multi-author Daddy kink universe)

[All Tied Up](#)

(one Daddy/two boys, hurt/comfort, older sub, physical dis/ability, exhibitionism, impact play, wax play)

[A Little Bit Naughty](#)

(chronic illness, adorable age play)

[Pretty 'n Peak](#)

(coming out, vision impairment, mental health, lingerie, impact play, CBT)

Hummingbird Tales (shifter, kinky)

[Hummingbird and Kraken](#)

(spankings, bondage, sounding, denial... and tentacles)

[The Hummingbird's Gift](#)

(about as close as my books come to Alpha/omega, impact play)

Stand-Alone Short Stories

[Whirlwind](#)

(short story collection, too many kinks to list...)

[Jesse's Girl](#)

(coming of age, *not* kinky)

Holiday

[His for Hanukkah](#)

(anxiety disorder, food play, orgasm control, impact play)

Love Language (Deaf characters, ASL, and Daddy kink)

[Love Language](#)

(hurt/comfort, younger Dom/older sub, shibari, wax play, predicament bondage, CNC role play, public scenes)

[Love Lessons](#)

(Daddy/middle, impact play, sensory deprivation, electrical play)

[Love Limits](#)

(age play, puppy play)

[Love Unlimited](#)

(two Daddies, two subs, age play, puppy play, impact play, and a whole lot more...)

CUFFD COLLECTION

Naughty or Nice Season One:

Dear Daddy, Please Love Me by Gianni Holmes

Dear Daddy, Please Spank Me by Chara Croft

Dear Daddy, Please Hold Us by Colette Davison

Dear Daddy, Please Want Me by Reese Morrison

Dear Daddy, Please Praise Me by Luna David & Amy
Bellows

Dear Daddy, Please Trust Me by Rheland Richmond

Dear Daddy, Please Keep Me by Morticia Knight

Dear Daddy, Please Punish Me by Skyler Snow

Destination Daddies Season One:

Reel Love by Kate Hawthorne

All Tied Up by Reese Morrison

Living in Zin by G.R. Lyons

Sink or Swim by Chloe Gray

Jam Packed by R.J. Moray

Greeking Out by Colette Davison

Tourist Attraction by Luna David and Honey London

All Dolled Up by Chara Croft

S'more to Love by Lila Wilde and Andi James

Trulli, Madly, Deeply by JJ Harper

A Little Bit Naughty by Reese Morrison

All the Queen's Men by Chara Croft and Harlow Hayes

Naughty or Nice Season Two:

His Boy to Hold by G.R. Lyons

His Boy to Tease by JP Sayle

His Boy to Restore by Hayden Hall

His Boy to Treasure by Susan Hawke

His Boy to Cherish by Colette Davison

His Boy to Love by Chloe Gray

His Boy to Ride by Jamie Luther

His Boy to Tame by Skyler Snow

His Boy to Heal by Rheland Richmond

His Boy to Cuddle by Morticia Knight

Destination Daddies Season Two:

Love At First Sighting by Chloe Gray and A.M. Bellows

Crazy Little Thing Cold Love by Colette Davison

Agrippa My Heart by JP Sayle

A Monumental Love by Sammy Cee

Pretty 'N' Peak by Reese Morrison

You Had Me At Merlot by GR Lyons

Tide To You by JJ Harper

Love In Slow M'Ocean by Gianni Holmes

Suite Dreams by Jacki James

Naughty or Nice Season Three:

A Cutie for Kinkmas by Morticia Knight

A Kitten for Kinkmas by R.J. Moray

A Silver Fox For Kinkmas by Colette Davison

A Daddy for Kinkmas by Reese Morrison

A Beauty for Kinkmas by R.A. Frick

A Ginger for Kinkmas by Chara Croft

A Brat For Kinkmas by JP Sayle

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reese Morrison lives in Philadelphia with their partner, two precocious children, and intermittent housemates, guests, and homeless, queer teens. When they're not teaching graduate courses in education, they can be found volunteering on too many boards, making up songs for their kids, and planting gardens that they forget to water halfway through the summer.

Reese and their partner both identify as genderqueer and are part of a vibrant community of queer and trans folks. They started writing because they were dissatisfied with the lack of trans and genderqueer characters in what they were reading and finally decided to do something about it. Many, but not all, of their books are kinky (for a whole range of kinks...) and they feel that it's important to represent a range of backgrounds, dis/abilities, gender presentations/identities, and body types in their writing.

If you enjoyed this book, please leave a review! Amazon and GoodReads reviews mean a lot to authors for sharing their work with even more readers. Even taking a couple of minutes to rank the book and write a few words makes a big difference. :)

You can hang out with Reese on Facebook in [Reese Morrison's Rebels](#). Or sign up for their [newsletter](#) for updates about releases along with teasers and book recommendations.

THANK YOU!

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