

Lucky Moon

A  
Little  
PANCAKE DAY  
PARTY



🌀 HOLIDAYS AT RAWHIDE RANCH 🌀

# A LITTLE PANCAKE DAY PARTY

*A Holidays at  Ranch Story*

# LUCKY MOON



## CONTENTS

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Red Hot Romance](#)

[About the Author](#)

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Rawhide Ranch

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## CHAPTER 1

Princess Zara Emmeline Cecelia Bunty Sussex was, for the millionth time, biting her nails.

She was in one of the smaller rooms in the palace, but it was still sumptuous. Filigreed walls, solid marble Corinthian columns, an extravagant ceiling rosette, and carpet so thick you practically sank into it.

All this for a psychologist's office.

Well, it wasn't *always* a psychologist's office. But every time Zara came in here, there was a psychologist sitting across from her.

"Your Royal Highness," said the well-dressed, middle-aged woman on the other side of the mahogany desk, "do you know why your mother has asked for me to consult with you today?"

It was *always* her mother.

Queen Charlotte Dominique Sussex I. Loved by all. Queen Charlotte always had time for her subjects, her duties, and her nation. But that left precious little time for her own children. Especially her youngest.

Princess Zara was fourth in line to the throne. Sadly, that also meant she was fourth in line for her mother's affection. It

wasn't that her mother didn't love her—Zara knew her mom cared deeply for her—it was more that Queen Charlotte's idea of good parenting was to find the very, very best experts in the world, and pay them to parent for her.

“I don't,” Zara replied.

*She did.*

“No inkling at all?”

Zara sat on her hands. It was the only way she could avoid biting her nails.

“No inkling. No idea. Sorry, Dr. Mary.” Zara had the kind of accent that was dying out in England. It was prim, proper, perfectly enunciated. The kind of accent that took a team of speech therapists an entire young lifetime to create.

Dr. Mary smiled. Zara had always liked her. Their first meeting had been after *the incident*. Princess Zara had been sixteen at the time. She was now twenty-three and had been called into her psychologist's office with alarming regularity over the last seven years. Still, Dr. Mary Stanford was one of the good ones. She genuinely seemed to have Zara's best interests at heart, and was never judgmental, even though Zara had done some dumb things over the years.

Without uttering a word, Dr. Mary pulled out a manila folder from the desk's top drawer. It was printed with the crest of the Sussex family—the official insignia of the Royal Family of the United Kingdom. Whatever was in this folder would have been shared with her mother already.

As she pushed the folder over to Princess Zara, the psychologist said, “Your Highness, are you familiar with the term: *paraphilic infantilism*?”

The princess' blood turned to ice in her veins. She undid the thin cotton straps on the folder and opened it up. Inside were printouts of websites, all taken from her internet search history.

This was bad. No. This was worse than bad. This was the most shameful, embarrassing thing that had ever happened to her. And that was saying something.

*FetLife.*

*LittleSpaceOnline.*

*DDLG Playground.*

Then there were the articles. Dozens of them, taken from a variety of sites. Advice on finding a Daddy, on entering into a sub/Dom relationship, bedroom advice for Littles. The list went on and on.

She flicked through more.

*Oh no.*

There were screenshots of her Kindle. Explicit paragraphs from the age-play novels she'd been reading recently as well as erotic ABDL shorts she'd downloaded in the past.

The more she read, the more she felt her heart start to race. There was sweat on her brow, so much so she felt her dirty-blond hair start to stick to her forehead.

Zara had always been a disappointment. She'd never fitted in with the Sussex family. She'd never felt like a Royal. She hated the limelight, hated feeling as though she was special. All she wanted to do was be Little. At least she'd managed to somehow keep it private.

Until now.



Now, she'd be forever known as the Crown-Princess of the freaks. The Kinky Royal. The Dirty Duchess. The Pervert Princess. Ugh.

“P-paraphilic...” she finally managed.

“Infantilism. Yes. Some people call it autonepiophilia. Or psychosexual infantilism.”

*Being a Little. Most people call it being a Little.*

Zara bit her lip. What was the point in pretending? It was all here, in black and white. She let out a low, agonized moan. “Yes. I’ve heard of it. Of course I’ve heard of it.”

She slumped forward, letting her forehead rest on the table, squeezing her eyes tight. If she kept her eyes closed forever, maybe all of this would go away.

To her surprise, she felt the psychologist’s hand on her shoulder. “It’s okay. Everything’s going to be okay, Your Highness.”

Zara looked up. “Are you serious? How is it going to be okay? The whole world’s going to—”

“Believe me, Princess, the whole world is *not* going to know. Your mother made that abundantly clear.”

Of course. It was too shameful. There was no way she could ever actually *be* herself. No.

Zara felt the hot prickle of tears at her eyes. She sniffed. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Your Highness,” Dr. Mary said, her eyes kind and devoid of judgment, “just tell me the truth.”

“The truth?” She laughed the words out. What a ridiculous idea.

“That’s right... are you a Little?”

Zara sighed deeply. Was she really going to do this? She opened her mouth, but before she could speak, her psychologist held up a finger.

“To remind you,” she said, “everything you say in here is confidential. I may be here at the request of your mother, but first and foremost, I am a doctor. There is no camera in here.” She leaned in, conspiratorially. “If I may be frank, I find this invasion of your privacy to be outrageous. To think they’ve been monitoring every aspect of your digital life...”

Zara pursed her bow-shaped lips. “I *think* I’m a Little. I’ve always known I was... different. I like to act silly. Childish. Maybe *childlike*. And... I do have some... naughty thoughts about”—her brow furrowed and her eyes closed with the shame of it all—“dominant men.”

“All perfectly normal. And healthy.”

This stunned Zara. She’d been ready for the psychologist to diagnose her with a mental illness and prescribe her medication. Maybe a trip to rehab. “Really? Normal?”

“Well, maybe not statistically. But there’s nothing wrong with these feelings. If anything, I would say it’s a shame that, as a figure in the public eye, you won’t ever have the chance to openly explore that side of yourself.”

That was the crux of it. Zara would be a Little her whole life, but she would never, ever have the opportunity to live her truth. She had a vision of her life stretching out before her: unfulfilled, bitter, and repressed. “Well, that’s my destiny, I suppose. Waving at public events, getting married to someone I can never be myself around, being gossiped about by the rest of my family.”

“Actually,” said Dr. Mary, “you’re wrong. You may or may not know this, but I have full authority over your treatment plan. Your mother has her preference, of course. She wants to medicate the kinks out of you.”

Well, that was one way of putting it.

“I, on the other hand, take a more holistic approach. I believe that burying a part of yourself—an important part of your identity—can have a profound negative effect on mental health.”

*Burying a part of your identity.* It was what she had been doing her whole life. And she knew what it had led to.

She’d never forget that dreadful night. And she’d never forget the headlines the following day.

Her voice quavered as she asked, “Is there nothing I can do to just... change who I am? Maybe that would be for the best for everyone involved.”

Every day, she wished she was different. She wished with all her might that she didn’t dream about being spanked. About being disciplined. That she didn’t have a stack of secret coloring books under her antique bed. That she didn’t fantasize about all the inventive ways a Daddy could coddle and discipline her.

“Your Highness,” said her psychologist, with an intense, serious voice, “you can *never* change who you are. And you shouldn’t even try. Now, let me ask you a question. Have you ever heard of Rawhide Ranch?”

Instantly, her heartrate spiked. “Yes. Yes, I have.”

Rawhide Ranch was a legendary place. A dream for people like her. She’d pored over the website, agonizing about the fact that she’d never have the chance to attend.

“Well. I’m sending you there.”

Princess Zara’s jaw dropped. “Excuse me?”

“It’s my prescription. I’ve been in touch with Master Derek an—”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, *you’ve* been in touch with Master Derek?”

“Oh yes. He and I go way back.” There was a definite twinkle in her psychologist’s eyes.

“I’m struggling to get my head around this.”

“It’s simple. You will attend Rawhide Ranch for as long as you need to work out who you really are. It is my professional opinion that this is the very best treatment for your situation.”

“B-but, what about my mother?”

“Your mother will be told that you are attending a top-of-the-line treatment center. In other words, I will tell her the truth. Now, I won’t be divulging the details of the treatment, but I doubt that will be an issue.”

That was true enough. Her mother didn’t have time for details.

“W-what if I find out that I... definitely am a Little? That I like that lifestyle?”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Suddenly, a feeling of panic threatened to derail her excitement. “Wait, it’s January! Next month is the Princess Pancake Day Party. Can I wait until after Pancake Day to go to the Ranch?”

“I’m afraid not,” Dr. Mary replied. “Your pancake event will have to be canceled this year.”

Zara felt a deep wave of sadness, but she knew it was for the best. Surely, missing the highlight of her year was worth it for an experience that could be the highlight of her *life*. “Well, if there’s no other way.”

“Sadly not.”

“Dr. Mary... I just want to say thank you. This is incredibly kind of you.”

“Nonsense. I’m just doing my job. Speaking of which, we have some very, very important paperwork to go through.”

She pulled out another folder, this one *not* printed with the official logo of the palace. No, the logo on this folder was very different: two horseshoes linked underneath two “R”s. Zara instantly recognized it.

“I feel like my heart’s going to explode.”

Dr. Mary smiled. “Sadly, I’m not the kind of doctor who can help you with that, Your Highness.” She opened up the folder and took out a very long document. The title was: “Rawhide Ranch Guest Responsibilities, Rules, and Punishments”.

*Punishments.*

Suddenly, Princess Zara’s throat felt awfully dry. Once again, she bit her nails. But now she was biting them for a different reason.

\* \* \*

That night, all alone in her four-poster bed, in her historically-significant bedroom, she felt her hand, almost unconsciously, walk its way between her legs. Still wet from reading the intimidating list of rules, punishments, and hard and soft

limits, she touched herself, pushing her fingers into places that no man had ever explored.

As she found her way to a bone-shuddering climax, she dared to hope that maybe soon, a man would finally delve into her most intimate, yearning parts. Not just any man. A Daddy-Dom.

For the first time in months, the princess fell asleep with a hopeful smile on her face.

## CHAPTER 2

Jaben Roberts' scar was itchy. Tended to itch like hell when he got nervous, and right now, he was more nervous than he'd been for months.

As he walked past the double-sided fireplace in the lobby of Rawhide Ranch's main building, he scanned the area with a security guard's eye. The space was lofty and luxurious, with polished wood panels and huge windows looking out across idyllic pasturelands. But Jaben didn't see that.

He saw a fire hazard.

He saw easily-breachable glass.

He saw security concerns, everywhere.

*Maybe that's why Master Derek's called you in. He wants to take some of your concerns on board.*

Jaben huffed. He supposed it might be possible but was admittedly unlikely. Over the years, Derek had installed an excellent security system and a highly competent security staff headed by Lawson Berringer, the Ranch's Chief of Security. Both men put great trust in the infallibility of the security system. Jaben, however, knew that everything was fallible under the right conditions.

He scratched at his scar as he approached the imposing doors to Derek's office. It was barely a moment after he knocked that Derek's deep, resonant voice replied, "Enter."

Derek Hawkins' office was *always* immaculate. As an ex-military man, Jaben knew how difficult it was to keep even a small space in such perfect condition. The huge mahogany table never had a single set of fingerprints on its shiny surface. The pillows on the corner couch were always crease-free and plumped. It felt as though everything had been placed in *exactly* the spot Derek wanted it. And if anything ever got messed up... well, all hell would break loose.

"Good to see you, Jaben." Derek stood and offered his hand.

Jaben took it and gave a smile. "Back at you, Boss."

"Take a seat. It's a big day."

Jaben felt his heart hammer in his chest. He'd been working at Rawhide Ranch as Dungeon Security Coordinator for three years now. He'd previously done security—and some slightly more *unusual* roles—at a BDSM club in Butte called Straps. The job at Rawhide had been a big step up. Aside from an increase in pay, there were the obvious perks that employment at the world's finest age-play resort offered. But there were other bonuses too. The community was second to none. He'd met some of the best people of his life at the Ranch and had made friendships that would last forever.

None of that, though, was the real reason he'd taken the job.

Master Derek's skills for matchmaking were legendary. He'd known for years that if a Big or a Little was serious



about finding their forever partner, Rawhide Ranch was the place to come.

And that's what he wanted. His forever girl.

Was Master Derek about to reveal her to him?

"Glad to hear it," Jaben said. He took a seat, trying not to look too nervous. It was ridiculous, really. A fully grown, intimidating man like Jaben feeling nervous. But it was the truth.

"I've got an important job for you."

Instantly Jaben's heart sank. A job. Well, never mind. Maybe next time.

"Of course, Sir."

"You can drop the 'Sir,' Jaben. We've known each other long enough now, don't you think?"

"Of course... Boss." You could take the man out of the military, but you couldn't take the military out of the man.

Derek smiled, a twinkle in his eye. "We're taking on a new student. She'll be joining the Service Submissive program, and she may well be dabbling in some of the other facilities during her time here."

"I see." He didn't. Not really. Jaben did occasionally get involved with discipline—as did all the members of the Rawhide staff when and if required—but the new arrivals generally weren't his business.

"She's... special. A referral from a psychologist contact of mine in Britain. This is going to sound strange—it *is* strange—but... I don't know much about the girl."

"That's not like you, Sir."

Derek was sensitive enough not to mention the fact that Jaben had called him Sir again.

“True. I normally vet newcomers incredibly closely. The thing is, I trust Dr. Stanford. She tells me that this young lady is in jeopardy because of her lifestyle.” Derek’s brow furrowed. “Dr. Stanford went as far to say the poor girl’s life could be destroyed if she’s not taken in by the Ranch.”

“Then you’re doing the right thing by taking her,” Jaben said quickly.

“I’m glad you feel that way. I have, of course, closely examined her paperwork.” He took out a folder and handed it to Jaben.

Jaben gave the contents a quick look. Nothing jumped out as unusual, except for the handwriting. It was almost an impossibly perfect, elegant cursive. The whole document had no crossings-out or mistakes anywhere.

“Sir, I still don’t really understand what this has to do with me.”

“Jaben, I need you to be her bodyguard.”

“She’s in that much trouble?”

“Not exactly. She’s... in the public eye.”

“Famous?”

“The doctor requested I keep her identity on a need-to-know basis.”

Jaben raised an eyebrow. “You’re okay with that?”

“Somewhat, though my first instinct was to remind her who runs this Ranch. But eventually, I had to decide whether my pride was more important than a Little girl in need.”

“So, you want me to protect her, but I can’t know who she is?” Strangely enough, it didn’t bother Jaben so much. His job was to protect and serve all of the members of Rawhide Ranch, regardless of who they were.

“That’s the long and the short of it. Don’t worry about your duties at the dungeon. I’ll have Lawson hire a couple of part-time security guards to cover you. I know how important your work is to you.”

“Very true. So, when do I start?”

Derek glanced down at his watch. “If you head to Bozeman Yellowstone Airport right now, you should get there in time for her arrival.”

It was an interesting job. Jaben had never been a personal bodyguard before. Still, it was difficult to completely hide his disappointment. After all, he’d arrived at the office hoping to be matched.

“Everything all right?” Derek asked, his blue eyes keen. He didn’t miss much.

“Sir, I had a hope that today would be the day.”

Derek nodded. “I thought you might. I’m working on it, Jaben, believe me.”

*I bet you are. But no one would ever want someone like me as a Daddy. You wouldn’t want to inflict me upon them.*

“It must be hard,” Jaben said. “I’ve got a... unique look.”

It was partly the scar. Right across his lip. It cut into his silver-black beard, stopping hair from growing in a strip down to his chin. But there was more than just that. He looked... scary. Always had. Jaben had an intense stare, with big gray eyes and a heavy forehead. His jaw was broad—almost too

broad—and he had a small scar across the bridge of his nose, too.

It was a face only a mother could love.

“It’s not that, Jaben. Looks count for less than you’d think. There are no rules to love.”

“Yes, Sir.” He sighed. “I’d better get going.”

“Sure. Oh, a word of warning.”

Jaben’s eyes narrowed. “Yes?”

“She’s British. Very, very British.”

\* \* \*

When he arrived at the airport, Jaben checked the details Derek had passed to him before he left.

“Wait,” he said to himself, “she’s coming in on a private jet?”

He had to go through a bunch of security at the airport before he was allowed to go to the exclusive arrival gate where he was meeting his new client. The gate was extremely plush, decorated with tasteful flashes of gold, as well as a black marble floor that twinkled as the overhead lights struck it.

He looked up at the arrivals screen. There was the flight, coming in from London, England. According to the screen, the plane should have already been here. He looked out the floor-to-ceiling windows, and sure enough, there was a plane parked. It wasn’t like any kind of passenger jet he’d seen before. If he had to guess, he’d say it was an old military craft that had been repurposed.

He didn't have much time to think on it though, because the arrival gate door swung open.

Jaben had been expecting some security—clearly this client was someone wealthy and well-known across the pond—but the stream of black-suited guards that emerged from the docking tunnel took him by surprise. They flanked the door and waited until finally, a lone, small figure emerged.

He didn't know exactly what he'd been expecting, but he was taken aback by how beautiful she was. No, not just beautiful. Perfect.

Large, cerulean, almond-shaped eyes rimmed with long, almost ridiculously long, lashes. A button nose that was speckled with tan-colored freckles. Her dark blonde hair was wavy and was the only untidy thing about her, but there was perfection in that, too. The way it kissed her eyes, making her have to push it away with her slender fingers. The way it stopped just short of her shoulders, bouncing slightly as she walked.

And then, there were her lips. Small and pink and shaped like a bow. When she parted them and bit the lower one with a row of immaculate, bright-white teeth, Jaben felt an instant tightening in a part of him that made him feel extremely unprofessional.

Not only was she far, far too beautiful for someone like him, she was also much too young. There was no way a woman like that would have been interested in a dinosaur like Jaben. They'd have nothing in common. She'd probably just think that he was boring and slow, risk-averse and grouchy.

Maybe he could show her, though, maybe—

*Why are you even thinking about that, Jaben? She's not on the menu. Hell, she's not even food.*

The client was looking up at Jaben with big, scared-looking eyes. He felt an instant urge to reassure her, to let her know she was safe with him. One of the security guards stepped in between them, removing a pair of aviator shades.

“Mr. Roberts?” the guard asked in a broad British accent.

The combination of upper-crust voice and intimidating presence reminded Jaben of Lawson, although this guy sounded more like a butler than a bodyguard.

“One and the same.” Jaben took out his ID and passed it across to the man.

“Very good. I’m officially passing over protection of the package to you.”

The package? Funny way to describe a person.

The package stepped forward, still looking nervous, then she held out a hand.

“Pleased to make your a-acquaintance,” she said, her voice catching.

“Same,” he replied, curtly, taking her hand.

“I’m... Zoe,” she said.

“Zoe. My name’s Jaben.”

For a moment, Zoe looked confused. “Jaben? Is that your real name?”

“It is.” He held back from calling her “little girl”. Felt strange to “out” her in front of all this security.

“Jaben?”

“That’s right.”

“Jabe. En?”

Still holding her hand, he leaned in, just a couple inches. “Funny story. My mom made a typo when she registered my birth.”

“Really?”

He nodded. “My name was meant to be Jabenenenen.”

For the briefest moment, that anxious look was replaced with one of confusion, then, when she realized he was joking, a wide, generous smile spread across her lips.

Well, fuck.

In that moment, touching her skin, watching her smile, Jaben knew he was totally, impossibly, dangerously, lost in Zoe.

## CHAPTER 3

As the SUV rumbled its way along foreign roads, Zara felt as though she was caught in the eye of a ferocious tornado.

Dr. Stanford had created a fake identity for her. She was to play the part of Zoe Franks—a wealthy heiress and socialite from London. When they'd been speaking about it, it had seemed like a simple plan, but unfortunately, they hadn't planned for her meeting someone like Jaben.

Jaben. It was such a strange name, but it fitted him in a funny way. There was a toughness to it, but at the same time, it felt almost unfinished.

As she'd stared into his intense, gray eyes, she'd wondered for a moment whether he was going to greet her or *eat* her. He'd taken her hand—more like completely swallowed it up in his—and shaken it, and she'd felt his terrible strength. It was like being gripped by a tree, or an iron girder.

And the touch...

It had felt electric.

Would all the staff members at Rawhide Ranch be like Jaben? If so, she'd be in a permanent state of drooling shock for the entire length of her stay.



As he'd looked at her, exuding honesty and no-nonsense, American simplicity, she'd almost blurted out her real name. She'd never been good at lying—somehow, the truth always came out. But she knew what was at stake here. Not just her own reputation, but the reputation of the entire monarchy.

She *had* to play her part.

“You’ve visited Montana before?”

His voice was so deep. It was like it came from somewhere down low in his body, and traveled all the way up, echoing around his thick, barrel chest.

“No, Sir,” she replied. It was a thrill to call someone that. The last time she'd done it had been at school. “I’ve visited America before, but never this state.”

There was a rugged beauty to the landscape that was completely new to her. The closest touchpoint she had was the Highlands in Scotland, which felt wild and wide and carved by ancient forces. Montana was like that too, but bigger. Much, much bigger.

“We’re lucky here,” Jaben replied.

“It’s beautiful.”

When they arrived at the Ranch, they stopped at the security shack, and then drove through high, iron gates. For a brief moment she thought of how much the Ranch reminded her of Buckingham Palace. Well, except for the fact that instead of the Queen’s Guard standing rigidly at attention, huge trees stood like giant sentinels along both sides of the long drive.

Of course, everything else about Rawhide Ranch was about as different from the palace as you could possibly imagine. They parked in front of a multi-story building made

of beautiful massive logs instead of cold stones. A wide covered porch practically screamed, “Welcome! We’re so glad you’re here,” as she climbed the steps. Double doors opened to invite her inside and all thoughts of the palace evaporated.

Somehow, Jaben carried all her heavy, bulky luggage. He had to be as strong as an ox. It barely looked difficult for him. She tried not to stare as his muscles bulged.

They were greeted by a dark-skinned, smiling man. He had long, dark hair, worn back in a ponytail, and his eyes gleamed with kindness. Then, when he saw Zara—and clearly *recognized* her—they widened with surprise.

Zara felt her throat get dry.

Well, that was her secret identity blown, and it had barely been two minutes.

She had made *some* effort to mask who she was. She’d changed her hair. Normally, she kept it extremely neat in a tight ponytail. It was almost a trademark look for her—she’d worn it that way since childhood. Now though, she’d done everything she could to make her hair as wavy and unruly as possible. She’d also changed her makeup, leaving behind her normal, subtle style for something a little more in-your-face.

It had been fun, actually, seeing how far she could push the eyeliner, lipstick and blusher before she ended up looking like a Bratz doll. Pretty far, it turned out. Then, of course, there were her clothes. Gone was the formal attire of the palace, replaced by something much more fun, and—appropriately—much younger. It felt good to be wearing a pale-blue summer dress, much more *her* than the starchy, uncomfortable clothes she normally was forced to wear.

Zara felt as though even her best friends—even Millie, her very best friend, a champion dressage rider who was the one person who knew about her Littleness—wouldn't be able to recognize her right now.

But somehow, this guy had.

“This is Moses,” Jaben said. “He'll take your bags to your room.”

Moses had a small, silver trolley with him. Jaben passed him the luggage, and he carefully loaded each bag onto the trolley as though they were the most valuable items in the world.

“Pleased to meet you,” Zara said to Moses, who gave her a warm smile.

“Moses is deaf, so he needs to see your lips when you talk. You did fine, just wanted to make you aware.”

There was so much to learn. She was bound to make mistakes.

As Moses wheeled the luggage away, Jaben said, “Looks as though maybe he recognized you. Don't worry, Moses is very discreet. Now, follow me. Time to meet the big bossman.”

\* \* \*

It was a strange feeling to meet such a legendary figure as Master Derek Hawkins. She might be a princess, but Master Derek's reputation was just as impressive in the right circles.

A man of vast experience and wide-ranging talents. A man with the patience required to deal with countless pranks instigated by the Littles under his care. A man who, while able

to appreciate the humor of a bit of silliness, had a stern hand that was always ready to tan the hide of a misbehaving Little anytime they put themselves or others in harm's way.

“You’ll no doubt be feeling nervous.”

“That’s an understatement, Sir.”

“Understandable. It’s a big change. Don’t know of any places like this in Britain.”

“It’s my first time anywhere like this.”

“I’m aware. I’ve examined your file in microscopic detail.”

Jaben stood in the corner of the room. Far enough away to give them space, but— it felt—close enough to respond to any threat or need that Zara may have.

“You’re here to discover yourself, isn’t that right? To meet your Little. Help to get to know her?”

“Yes, Sir.”

He flashed her a bright white smile. “You’re polite. That’ll take you far in this place.”

Americans were so confident. She was used to dealing with more reserved, self-deprecating Brits. It was good to be among people who spoke their mind and did it freely.

“Thank you, Sir.”

“Obviously, you’ve met Jaben. He’ll be your bodyguard while you stay with us here. He won’t be by your side 24/7, but it might seem that way at times. Jaben will be a little *more* than your bodyguard. He’ll be a mentor for you. As well as having years of military and security experience, Jaben is one of the most knowledgeable Doms I’ve ever met. He worked

for years at a BDSM club, where he helped many young women enter the lifestyle.”

Zara’s heart fluttered. Jaben was her opposite in every way. He was experience to her innocence, strength to her fragility, confidence to her shyness, age to her youth.

“Yes, Sir.” It was amazing to feel, but just being here was bringing out her naturally submissive character. It was good to let Derek and Jaben take charge. She instinctively felt as though they had her very best interests at heart.

“If you have questions or concerns, you’re to ask Jaben. He will also be directly responsible for your discipline. You’ve signed the contract, and you’re aware that any member of staff can administer punishments?”

“I’m a good girl, Sir.”

“I’m sure. But everyone makes mistakes. There’s no shame in it.”

That word, *shame*, always made Zara blush.

“Your punishments will be carried out by Jaben. I find that with certain Littles, a single touchpoint is the best way. Especially as it seems as though you have limited practical experience of this world.”

She nodded. It felt as though her body was humming with both excitement and apprehension.

“You’ll be taking part in our Service Submissives’ program. That means Erika will be coordinating your chores and tasks.”

“Chores?” Zara had literally never done a single chore in her life.

“Yes. Washing linen. Changing beds. Cleaning. That sort of thing.”

Was it weird that Zara felt excited at the prospect?

“First though, you’ll be attending some basic classes in BDSM etiquette and culture. That will start tomorrow with Master Nathan Jenkins. Jaben, what are your thoughts on the best approach to take with Zoe’s regression?”

Pink cheeks again. *Regression*. She was really, truly going to be regressed. She’d signed the contract, after reading it all the way through. If she broke the rules now, she could be expelled. And she didn’t want that. Not one bit.

“I’d start her in the Middles program,” Jaben said. “See how she gets on. Then I’d lower the age. Do some time in Preschool. Finally, when she’s ready, dip her toes into the Nursery. Probably not worth spending any time in the College Program, seeing as she’s so young as it is. If we do it that way, she can ease into things, work out how old her Little is, and discover what elements of age-play she resonates with.”

*She’s so young as it is*. For some reason, that sentence stung. It felt as though she was being pulled out of the experience.

“Of course,” Jaben continued, “I will demand *complete* obedience at all times.”

“Very wise,” Derek said. “I can see you’ve been thinking about this. Zoe, how does it sound to you?”

It sounded terrifying.

Complete obedience. Sounded a bit like what her family demanded of her, and that didn’t always go well. In fact, it basically never went well.

Once again, her throat felt dry, and her skin was clammy. Maybe it was the jet lag starting to kick in. More likely though, it was the start of a panic attack.

*Breathe, Zara. Breathe.*

She looked at Jaben, at the long scar down his face. How had he gotten a scar like that? She was so young compared to him. With almost no life experience. And he didn't even know the half of it. How protected and sheltered her life had been.

Zara could feel panic start to build in her. She was miles from home, among strangers. Her safety net was gone. And now, she was expected to immerse herself in a world that would bring total shame to her family.

This was a mistake, this had to be a mistake.

“It sounds f-fine,” she said.

She'd never been a good liar.

Master Derek's eyes narrowed. “Remember, Zoe, your health and safety are our number one concern at the Ranch. If you have any problems, you speak to Jaben. We want you to be happy. And, in the unlikely event there's something you can't share with Jaben, you come to me. My wife, Sadie, is also a good shoulder to cry on, as it were.”

“Thank you. It's just... I'm so far from home.”

“Of course. Please, consider this place your home now.”

When he smiled, she knew that he might have been stern, but he had a heart of gold.

## CHAPTER 4

High school. It had not been a happy time for Zara. Now, it felt as though she were right back there. In the thick of it. Even though she'd attended school on the other side of the Atlantic, it was amazing how universal the feeling seemed to be. Rawhide had done an incredible job of evoking the feeling of being at school, too. The smell of the place, all bubblegum and chalk dust, and the feeling of the light streaming in through big windows at the side of the room.

Last night had been difficult. Aside from adjusting to the new time zone, she'd found it difficult to get comfortable in her bed. Zara was staying in a Service Submissive suite. Normally, two service submissives would share a living space. However, because of the need for additional security, she was sharing a suite with Jaben. He was sleeping in a separate bedroom of course, but that didn't stop Zara from wondering about him all night long.

In the morning, she'd woken to the sound of him politely knocking on her bedroom door. She was going to have to get used to being around him all the time. In her cupboard, or closet as they referred to it here, she found a variety of different outfits. A school uniform, something akin to a maid's uniform, Little clothes, and a few sets of pajamas.



This morning, of course, she was in her school uniform. Complete with a starched collar, plaid skirt, and even a necktie. Even though it didn't bring back a ton of good memories to be wearing these clothes, it was definitely making her feel smaller.

As Jaben had escorted her through the labyrinthine corridors of the Ranch toward the classrooms in the Middles program, she'd decided she would do everything she could to be a good student. After living in the public eye for so long, she didn't want to do anything to draw attention to herself. With that in mind, she'd been making detailed notes on everything the teacher had been saying in the pages of the workbook she'd been given.

Yep. It was just like school all right.

The only thing that was unfamiliar was the content of the lessons.

"BDSM," said the stern-looking man at the front of the room, "isn't actually an acronym. It's more of an umbrella term. It was originally taken to include the words bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadism, and masochism."

"So, that's BDDSSM?"

The sarcastic question came from one of the girls in the front row. She was called Maisie and had serious *Mean Girls* energy. Every time she opened her mouth—normally to say something sly or sarcastic—a gaggle of her friends all burst into high-pitched laughter.

The teacher—who was in fact the headmaster of the program, Nathan Jenkins—gave Maisie a very stern look.

"Miss Perkins," he raised an eyebrow, "I'm becoming increasingly concerned about your attitude."

“It was an honest question!”

Her indignation was obviously fake. Zara had met a ton of girls like her over the years. Zara had attended a very expensive private school. Even so, her fame and reputation were not a guaranteed shield from the attention of mean girls. If anything, it was like she'd had a massive target painted on her head.

It didn't help that she'd brought a stuffie to every single lesson. No. That hadn't helped at all.

Ahhh, she missed Mister Sunshine. He was a little frog with big sunglasses. Her mother had eventually banned her from keeping the stuffie. When her mum had taken him away, it had broken Zara's heart. For a couple of months, she'd ask her mum where he was, but she soon gave up hope of ever seeing him again.

She wished she had him right now.

“This is a warning, Miss Perkins—to you and any other Little girls in my lesson—if there are any more interruptions, you won't be able to sit for the rest of the lesson. And it won't be from a lack of chairs.”

Jaben, who was standing in the corner of the room, shuffled from foot to foot. Then, he looked straight at Zara, before flicking his eyes away from hers. It sent electricity up her spine.

“The type of BDSM and power exchange relationship we promote here at Rawhide Ranch is based on safe, sane, and consensual intimacy.”

Over the course of the years Zara had spent researching age-play and the broader BDSM community, she'd come across most of the information that Master Jenkins was

sharing, but even so, it was useful to be told all of these things in this setting. It felt natural and normal, which is exactly how she wanted to feel.

“We have Master Jaben Roberts with us today. He’s in charge of security in the dungeon here at the Ranch. He is also an excellent example of—”

“A gorilla.”

When Maisie said this, there were gasps of shock from the other girls around the room. Clearly, she had gone too far.

Zara couldn’t help but glance at Jaben. Was there a touch of sadness on that hard face?

“Miss Perkins.” Master Jenkin’s voice was different. Resolute. Implacable. “Come here immediately.”

The atmosphere in the room had changed. Gone was the jokey, friendly tone, replaced by one of stern punishment.

“But, Sir,” Maisie pleaded, “I just meant that he *looks* like a gorilla. Not that he actually *is* a g—”

“Here. Now.”

Maisie stood up with a huff and shuffled toward the front of the room.

“Over my desk.” It was a command, not to be argued with.

“But, Sir, you’re not going to punish me in front of everyone, are you?”

“Miss Perkins, I have read and reread the contract of every single person in this room, and I know yours like the back of my hand. I believe public humiliation is not one of your hard limits, and I also know it is a punishment you don’t explicitly enjoy. Your behavior and rudeness this morning have been

entirely unacceptable, therefore, I have no option but to apply swift discipline which will not be forgotten. Now, lay over my desk.”

As Zara watched Maisie lay herself across the desk, her head turned to the side, her eyes facing those of her watching classmates, she couldn't help but feel a burn of something inside. It was fascination—a primal, unstoppable need to see what was about to unfold.

Master Jenkins walked across to a double-doored armoire in the corner of the classroom and opened it before pulling out a wicked-looking pointer. He tested the flex of the rod. It looked a little stiffer than Zara was expecting, with less give than a riding crop would have.

Zara felt warmth spread through her body as Master Jenkins tugged down Maisie's panties. Zara's eyes followed the skimpy fabric as it collected around the bad girl's ankles. Now, there was definite wetness in Zara's pussy. She'd never seen anyone be disciplined like this except for on the internet, and it was causing a powerful reaction in her. She tried not to squirm, worrying that the other students might notice, but she needn't have worried. Everyone's eyes were on Maisie.

Master Jenkins rested the length of the pointer against Maisie's buttocks, and she bit her lip, screwing up her face, flinching, preparing for discomfort. “I'm sorry, Sir, I didn't—” she began, but her words fell on deaf ears. Master Jenkins cracked the pointer against her bare flesh. The sound was tremendous, like a powerful static discharge. Maisie's eyes widened and her mouth made an “O” shape as she registered the blow, and then, as more blows came, she grimaced and moaned with discomfort.

Those moans, though, were so close to moans of pleasure, which is exactly what Zara was feeling. She knew it was wrong, she knew it was bad—dirty, even—to be getting off on watching someone else get smacked like that. But she couldn't help it. The longer the discipline lasted, the warmer and wetter her pussy became.

Just as she was starting to feel the pleasure overwhelm her, it happened: thoughts of duty, of responsibility, of family, completely shut it all down. She was left with a feeling of deep guilt and shame.

Then, without meaning to, without thinking, she glanced again at Jaben.

He was looking right at her, with a look of fiery intensity on his face.

\* \* \*

Had she been thinking the same thing he'd been thinking? That morning, as Maisie had been punished in front of the class, Zoe's eyes had met his.

Of course, he'd been imagining what it might be like to feel her naked flesh under his. As the pointer had left bright red lines on Maisie's buttocks, Jaben had fantasized about leaving deep red handprints on Zara's perfect backside.

*Jaben, she's not into you. Who would be into a scarred, old, gorilla?*

He was standing outside the door to Zoe's personal room, going over the events of the day in his head. Most of the time had been fairly nondescript. Turns out Zoe was a very well-behaved, quiet girl. He wondered whether she enjoyed the day.

After the first lesson, Zoe had had lunch at the cafeteria. She'd sat by herself, which had worried him a little, but he knew the busy, noisy cafeteria could be a little overwhelming. He might suggest that she eat in the classroom next time. Maybe he could pick up a packed lunch for her from Chef Connor.

He should have sat with her, should have talked over what had happened in the lesson. He just didn't want to overstep his boundaries.

The afternoon's lesson had been less eventful. Maisie had kept quiet as Master Jenkins had gone over a variety of BDSM toys, and their correct usage. He'd also re-iterated the importance of safe sex to the whole class. Zoe seemed to be taking it all in—she was almost constantly scribbling in her workbook, but she'd been extremely quiet. He wondered what was going on inside her head.

Jaben breathed in deep, trying to put himself in the position of a new resident of the Ranch. It had to be such a big change, such a crazy new lifestyle. Mind you, he had no idea what kind of life Zoe had been living before.

Suddenly, he heard something. It was quiet at first but grew in volume.

Sobbing.

He didn't even hesitate. He knew he had to be with her. He was terrible at emotional stuff, but he had to try his best.

Jaben knocked on the door. "Zoe? Can I come in?"

She replied weakly. "Yes."

Inside, she sat on her bed, still in her school uniform. There were tears streaming down her cheeks, and she was

furiously biting her nails. To his surprise, when she saw him, she smiled slightly.

“Little girl,” Jaben said softly, sitting down next to her on the bed. “What’s the matter?”

“I’m sorry. This is so silly. So predictable.”

“Feelings aren’t silly.”

“You’re right. It’s just... I’m so far from home.”

He narrowed his eyes. She was telling the truth, but there was more going on here than that, he was certain of it.

“Is that it? You’re just homesick? You can tell me the truth. I’m not here to judge.”

She sighed deeply, turned to look at him, took her hand from her mouth. “There’s more. Today, in that classroom, it was... intense. Brought up a lot of feelings.”

“I can understand that.”

“I just... I don’t know if this is who I am.”

Jaben nodded. “Right. But you know, it could be a way to find out who you are. You’re here for a reason, Zoe. Maybe you don’t fit into the Middles program. That’s all right. We can try more. We have plenty of time.” He had an overwhelming urge to put his arm around her, to wipe away those tears. He wanted to take all the hurt away, all the uncertainty. But he couldn’t. He was here to guard her, not be her Daddy.

Her face brightened. “It might be nice to experiment.”

“Right.”

“B-but... what if I enjoy it?”

Jaben tried to understand. “Isn’t that a good thing?”

The pain returned. “Not for me. I should just go home.”

“Is that what you want?”

“I don’t know.”

“What’s stopping you?”

She thought about this for a moment. “My family.”

So *that’s* what this was about. Finally, they were getting somewhere.

“Families can be tough,” Jaben said, nodding in agreement. “Especially for people like us.”

“Not as tough as mine,” she said, tears returning to her eyes. “You don’t know what it’s like. I have to act a certain way all the time. I have to be someone I’m not. I have to guard myself. It’s exhausting.”

She was still holding back. He could feel it. But he also knew now wasn’t the time to push it. She’d opened up a little, and he was grateful for that.

“That sounds very difficult,” Jaben said, fighting the urge to take her hand, to stroke her soft skin.

“If I go back now, my family will disown me. And they’re my safety blanket.”

“I can be your blanket, while you’re here.”

She smiled. “Funny-looking blanket.” Her face changed. “I don’t mean funny-looking like... funny, I just mean... you don’t look like a blanket.”

“It’s all right. I understand. I’m no Adonis.”

There was a look of pain on her face. “That’s the problem.”



“What?” he asked, confused.

“American pancakes.”

He stared at her, dumbfounded. Was this a British thing?

“Uhhh?” he tried.

“They’re not like British pancakes.” She was looking right at him, her eyes impossible pools of azure blue. “They’re... thick. And... strong. And they... don’t know anything!”

Then, to his surprise, she grabbed the duvet, and pulled it over herself.

“Zoe?”

“Leave me alone, please.”

Jaben left her room, even more confused than he’d been when he first arrived.

## CHAPTER 5

It was a difficult night. Zoe couldn't help but worry about her conversation with Jaben. He had been so, so nice to her, and all she'd given in return were cryptic half-answers and strange metaphors.

American pancakes.

What had she been thinking, talking about pancakes? He'd clearly completely missed the fact that she was talking about him. And then she'd got frustrated and asked him to leave, no doubt hurting his feelings even more.

Still, when she woke in the morning, she'd made a decision: she was going to give it one more day. If she didn't feel any better, she'd go back to England and face her family's wrath.

There was no point in being here if she was going to feel guilty the whole time. Might as well leave space for someone else in the program who'd actually appreciate it.

The Middles were lining up for the morning's lesson. It was her last day of schooling before she started in the Service Submissives program. They were doing a refresher on rules and expectations of the Ranch, which she thought would be useful.

Obviously, Jaben was here, too, standing at a respectful distance across the hall from her. He probably thought she was even more of an idiot this morning than he had when they'd first met.

The other students were lined up, waiting for the teacher to arrive. Most of them were in an orderly queue, but—obviously—Maisie was out of place. Her two close friends, who Zara had learned were called Clarissa and Angela, were standing nearby, and they were all talking about something or other.

Aside from the chat with Jaben, one other thing had been buzzing around Zara's mind. The public caning of Maisie yesterday. Maybe this didn't have to be like actual school. Maybe Zara could talk to the popular girls and not get teased for it. If she was going to give this place a try, she should probably see what would happen.

"Hey," Zara said, sheepishly, acutely aware of how different to everyone she sounded.

"Hi," said Clarissa. She was in her mid-twenties, with her dyed-silver hair in a short, choppy bob. "You're Zoe, right?"

Zara nodded. She felt as though she'd never get used to using a fake name. It made everything she said sound like a lie.

"And you're Clarissa."

"That's me!" Clarissa stuck out a hand, and Zara took it. Clarissa had a friendly, goofy vibe that Zara really liked. Shame she found all social interaction so intimidating, otherwise, they might just be friends.

"And you two are Maisie and Angela?"

Angela was one of those irritatingly perfect-looking girls who appeared impeccable, regardless of what they were doing.

She had on subtle but expertly applied makeup (which, according to the rules, wasn't allowed in the classroom) and a permanently bored expression. She blew out a big, pink bubble.

“And you're British?” she said, matter-of-factly.

“Is it that obvious?”

Maisie, who hadn't said a word yet, rolled her eyes so hard it was a miracle they didn't pop out of her head.

“Ignore her,” Clarissa said. “She's just jealous of your cute accent!”

“Like, which part of United Britain are you from?” Angela said, flicking her eyes up from her perfectly varnished nails for less than a second.

“London, actually.”

“Where the Queen lives?”

*Don't blush. Don't blush. Don't blush.*

“I suppose so. And about nine million other people.” She chuckled a goofy chuckle. Thank goodness she was only fourth in line to the throne. Her brothers and sister would almost certainly have been recognized by now. “Hey, Maisie, I wanted to ask you something.”

Maisie looked at her as though it was taking *way* too much effort for it to be worthwhile. “Oh?”

“Yeah. Yesterday, when Master Jenkins caned you—that looked really painful. This is a weird question.”

Maisie's eyebrow raised. “Shoot.”

“Did you want that to happen? Were you being naughty on purpose?”

“What do you think?”

Zara bit her lip. “Maybe.”

“I didn’t think he’d used the frigging cane on me.”

Cussing on the Ranch was strictly forbidden. Jaben, who up until now had been quiet, let out a small cough.

“What did it feel like? Did it hurt? Did it feel good?” Zara couldn’t help herself. She was so interested in what an actual spanking would be like, she let her curiosity get the better of her.

Maisie looked at her like she was a complete and utter freak. Then, in a clear attempt to be cruel to Zara, she said, in an ugly attempt at a British accent, “What’s the matter, princess? Never been spanked before? Pah. Of course you haven’t. Little Miss Perfect here would never do anything against the rules because she’s too afraid of getting her posterior reddened.” Maisie’s face twisted into a mask of cruelty. “Or maybe she’s worried she might enjoy it. That her... hmmm, what’s the word I’m looking for? What do they call a girl’s sexy bits across the pond?” She pretended to think seriously for a moment then snapped her fingers. “I’ve got it. Tell us, princess, are you afraid your front bottom might get all hot and bothered?” Not waiting for Zoe to answer, she turned her gaze to her besties. “Didn’t realize Brits were such a bunch of filthy perverts!”

Angela chuckled, but Clarissa looked disgusted.

It didn’t matter, though, because the damage had been done. They clearly didn’t want her here, and she didn’t want to inflict herself on them for a single moment longer. With red cheeks and a deflated soul, she turned from the classroom, and broke into a run.

\* \* \*

There was no way he could let Zoe run away. Not like this. Jaben was behind her in a moment, keeping pace with her as she tore down the hallways.

“Zoe!” he called out.

She glanced back at him but continued to run. “I’m leaving!”

“Stop this instant, young lady. There’s no running in the corridors!”

“I don’t want to be here!” she yelped, her voice breaking as she took a few more steps.

A crowd of concerned onlookers watched as she slowed down, coming to a stop a few yards from the front lobby. She stood there, hunched over, head down, body shaking.

“Baby,” Jaben said, forgetting himself for a moment, “aren’t you tired of running and crying?”

She nodded.

“You’re not going anywhere.”

Zoe turned and looked at him, fierce determination in her eyes. “Why not?”

“Because I’m in charge here.” Jaben knew that it was important that he take control of this situation. He was responsible for her wellbeing, and her discipline. He’d tried being comforting and sensitive, and it had worked to a certain extent. But now it was time for his Dom side to come to the fore.

He crossed his thick arms in front of him, very aware of the dominant, unshakeable image he was projecting.

“Yes, Sir.” The change in her was instant—suddenly, she couldn’t run because she wasn’t allowed.

“What happened to you just then—the way Maisie teased you—was a clear violation of the rules of the Ranch. It will not be happening again.”

“How do you know, Sir?”

“The matter will be brought to Master Derek’s attention.”

Zoe’s face turned suddenly ashen. “She’s going to get into trouble because of me? I don’t want to draw attention to myself.”

“No. She’s going to get into trouble because of her,” Jaben asserted. “You were the victim of bullying, pure and simple. And bullying will not be tolerated at the Ranch.”

“I shouldn’t have asked her about the spanking.”

“You’re curious. You’re a Little, for goodness sake.”

“Am I?” She snorted.

Jaben stepped closer to her. “Of course you are. I can see the Little inside you. A good girl. Eager to impress. Eager to make friends. Eager to have fun. Eager to play.” He stepped closer still, so close he could smell the scent of wildflowers on her, so close he could feel the warmth of her breath against his own skin. “Maybe the Middles program isn’t the right place for you. But together, we’re going to get to know your Little. I promise.” He lifted a hand and gently touched her chin. She bit her lip, trembling at his touch, but she didn’t pull away. She leaned into him. “I’m not going to let a bully derail your

regression, young lady. There's being a brat, that's one thing. But what Maisie did was very, very serious."

"Yes, Sir."

Her voice was a whisper. Hearing her call him that—Sir—made his gut twist with excitement. He'd like to hear her call him a lot more than that. He'd like to hear her voice, moaning his name, moaning Sir, moaning Daddy, moaning for him to play her like a fiddle.

Then, a realization hit him. "Young lady, I'm afraid to say that you did break a rule today."

A look of fear. "I did?"

"No running in the Ranch hallways."

Her lip trembled. "I was... trying to escape."

He shook his head, standing firm. "Not an excuse, I'm afraid. You could have hurt yourself, or someone else. There are Littles around—*little* Littles. Littles so lost in Little space that they wouldn't even think to dodge out of the way."

"A-am I going to get punished?"

"Little one, this is Rawhide Ranch."

\* \* \*

Thankfully, Jaben was taking her back to her room for the discipline. He'd made an excuse with Master Jenkins, who didn't question Jaben's authority at all. The whole way back, Zara had been kicking herself.

Why had she run like that? Couldn't she control herself even a little bit?



Clearly, she hadn't toughened up at all since secondary school. She was still a vulnerable cry-baby who was living proof that names did as much damage as sticks and stones.

That's what had led to her night of shame. The bullying. Sarah Greene. Oh, how she'd hated Sarah Greene. That girl had prodded her and poked her until Zara had just completely lost it. Like she had today, but much, much worse.

As they passed people—Littles, Bigs, staff members, anyone—Zara felt as though every single person knew where they were going. *Why* they were going.

"In we go," Jaben ordered.

She'd been unable to resist him since he'd taken control of the situation. Not only did she want to submit to everything he asked of her, she couldn't disobey him. It was like she was physically incapable.

That voice—so deep, so resonant, so demanding—was irresistible. If he'd asked her to strip naked in the hallway and dance the funky chicken, she'd have done it.

"You're new to this." It wasn't a question.

"Yes, Sir."

He walked to the navy couch in their shared living area. "In that case, I'll have you on my lap. It'll help you to be connected to me."

*I want to be connected to you. VERY connected to you. So connected we're never apart.*

"Yes, Sir."

The moment he sat on the couch, she walked to him. For a beat, she paused, taking in the enormity of the situation. This was why she was here. To explore herself. It wasn't the same

as losing her virginity—or at least she expected it wouldn't be. But it was big. A very big moment.

“Will it hurt?”

“It's your first time?”

She nodded.

*First time for so many things.*

“It will hurt. Next time you think about breaking a rule, remember the pain.”

It took only another moment before she was over his lap, her plaid skirt-covered butt pointing up toward the ceiling, up toward Jaben. She tried her best not to think about how close his cock was to her pussy, about how little fabric was between their private parts, about how easy it might be to feel him through her panties and his pants.

“I'm going to take your panties down. Don't worry, it's nothing I haven't seen before.”

He was speaking with such practiced confidence. It was a serious turn-on—this competent, unflappable man. In that moment, she considered that she *could* tell him that she was a damn princess, for real, and he wouldn't have batted an eyelid.

*Yeah, right, Zara. Of course he'd care. He'd be furious that you haven't told him yet.*

She felt a moment of terror—he was going to see her bottom. Maybe she should tell him that no guy had ever seen her bum before.

Oh god.

He would probably see much more than just her bottom. The way she was lying, he'd almost certainly see her pussy.

He'd see how wet she was, how much she was enjoying it. The guilt was overwhelming, but this time, it was a little bit different.

This time, she had no choice but to submit. It was a strangely reassuring realization.

She felt Jaben's thick, strong fingers slip under the fabric of her panties, and a moment later, he tugged them down.

"This is to remind you not to run in the corridors of the Ranch."

The first smack came, much harder than she was expecting, on her right buttock. The sting was instant, followed by a deep burn that intensified when, a moment later, he spanked her left buttock, quite high up. Zara let out a soft whimper as he spanked her twice more. The pain was growing, but so was a feeling of release, of submission.

There was nothing to worry about as he spanked her one final time, across the center of her butt, dangerously close to her pussy.

She burned, sighed, and felt at peace.

"Thank you," she said, in a dreamy voice. And she really, truly meant it.

## CHAPTER 6

During moments of high stress, all Zara wanted to do was bite her nails.

This morning, standing in Master Derek's office with Maisie, Clarissa, Angela, and Jaben, there was no way she could bite them. She kept her hands clenched tightly behind her back, just like she normally did at public events back home.

Home.

Seemed like it was a whole world away.

“So, Jaben, could you explain what all this is about?”

Master Derek was dressed formally today. The first time Zara had seen him, he'd been in a flannel shirt, jeans, and cowboy boots. This morning, though, he wore a white button-up with a curious-looking tie at his neck, the kind of thing you might see a lawman wearing in an old western movie. He presented a stern but fair image to the room.

“While waiting for a class yesterday, Zoe was the recipient of targeted, specific bullying.”

Derek raised his eyebrows. “I'm sorry to hear that. Very sorry indeed.”

Maisie blurted out, “Tattle-tale!”

“Quiet please,” Derek snapped, clearly in no mood to humor any kind of disrespect. “Miss Perkins, this isn’t the first time I’ve heard of your rule breaking. In fact, it’s not the first time I’ve heard about it this *week*.”

Maisie gave Zara a stinker of a look. Even though Zara hadn’t been the one to ask this be taken to Master Derek, she couldn’t help but feel a little guilty. It was irrational, but when did emotions ever listen to reason?

“For your information,” Derek continued, rising from his desk, “Zoe did not bring this rule-breaking to my attention. In fact, before you arrived, she spent a long time trying to convince me not to punish you at all.”

Zara felt herself blush. It was true. It wasn’t that she didn’t think Maisie had been cruel, it was more that she didn’t want to get anyone into trouble on her account. And she had a feeling that Maisie was going to get into a lot of trouble.

“Now, from what I understand, you mocked Zoe’s voice and manner. Is that true?” He was looking at Clarissa and Angela. They both nodded.

Maisie glanced at her friends, before saying, “Yes, Master Derek. I did.”

“Why did you do that?”

Maisie sighed, rolled her eyes. “Because I thought she was being mean to me.”

This surprised Zara. Had Maisie really thought that she was being mean?

“How so?”

“The day before I got punished in front of the whole class. Zoe asked me about it. I thought she was teasing me. So I

snapped. I know I can be mean sometimes. I'm... sorry."

The urge to bite her nails was stronger than ever. Had Zara totally misjudged Maisie?

"Thank you for your honesty," Derek said.

"Sir," Jaben interrupted, "with respect, I'm not sure how true that is."

"Nonetheless," Derek said, raising his hand, "it is feasible, so we have to give the benefit of the doubt. Of course, two wrongs don't make a right. All of us, including Miss Perkins, are here for a reason. Maisie, understand how serious this is. Under other circumstances, we would be considering expulsion for bullying like this. Rawhide Ranch is a safe space. A sanctuary for the vulnerable. No one, and I mean no one, is to feel nervous about being teased while they are here. I understand that there will always be personality clashes—particularly in the Middles program—but you must never resort to cruelty."

Zara breathed a sigh of relief. She didn't know how she would have felt about Maisie being expelled because of her.

"Yes, Sir," Maisie said. "I won't do it again, Sir." Then, she added slyly, "Why does Zoe have a bodyguard?"

"Anonymity is important," Derek said. "We'll have no more questions about anyone's life outside the Ranch unless they're invited. Understand?"

"Fine," Maisie spat.

"Miss Perkins, you are to be suspended from class."

Maisie's eyes widened. "B-but—"

"No buts, unless you want a red one."

That kept her quiet.

“While you build back our trust, you will join the Service Submissives program.”

Maisie made no secret of her disappointment. “Please, I just—”

“You just earned yourself a spanking, young lady. Now, Zoe is also in the program. The two of you will have plenty of time to make up.”

Zara’s heart thumped. This was not what she had been expecting. The last thing she wanted was to have to spend *more* time with Maisie.

“Now, the rest of you may leave. Miss Perkins, stay here. Spread your hands against the wall and await your punishment.”

\* \* \*

Clarissa and Angela said their goodbyes and headed off to their dorm rooms. As Jaben and Zara walked out of Derek’s office, they heard a sharp crack and a yelp of pain as Maisie’s punishment began before Jaben pulled the door shut.

“I don’t think she’ll enjoy that much,” Jaben said, walking closely beside Zara.

She was getting very used to his company. It was almost as though she was spending time with an old friend.

“I think she quite likes getting spanked.”

“Hmm. Master Derek’s discipline is legendary, though. Plus, I think Maisie is more into showing everyone how tough

she is, and how much she can take. A private punishment doesn't really serve her purposes."

It was a Saturday, so there were no classes today. Sunlight streamed into the high-ceilinged lobby of the Ranch, and Zara breathed in a big lungful of that good Montana air. It had been an eventful few days, but maybe things were about to calm down a bit. She could relax, send an email to Millie, and enjoy some free time.

Then, tomorrow, she'd be working her first day as a Service Submissive. It would be nice not to have to deal with the politics of the classroom for a while.

Jaben put his hands on his hips and looked at the view across the pastures with her. "Beautiful, isn't it? Sometimes I forget how lucky I am to work here."

"It's a remarkable place."

He turned to face her. "Zoe, I need to talk to you about something. Something serious."

She gulped, her throat instantly dry. "Something serious?"

"Pancakes."

\* \* \*

There was nothing quite like seeing a Little's eyes light up at the sight of junk food. And Zoe had eyes like no other Little.

She sat across the table from Jaben in the Cafe, one of the less formal dining options at the Ranch. It was early spring, so there were a variety of healthy, veg-focused selections on the menu. But today wasn't about vegetables.



“Okay,” Zoe said, her mouth watering in anticipation, “I wouldn’t even call these pancakes.”

“What would you call them?”

Jaben eyed the high stack of thick, light brown disks on the plate in front of Zoe. On top was a knob of fast-melting butter, and the stack was drenched in sticky, sweet maple syrup. A trio of multi-colored scoops of ice-cream sat temptingly next to the pancakes. There was even an elegant, curved smear of Nutella next to the pancakes. Somehow, Chef Conor had turned a kids’ treat into a symphony of fun, sweet decadence.

“Ummm. Bread plates.”

“Bread plates?”

“No good?”

Jaben couldn’t help but smile. “Not the most appetizing description.”

“Pan bread? Batter disks? Rubbery circles?”

“They’re pancakes, Zoe. Try.”

He’d been thinking a lot about the pancake incident. The other night, she’d been so upset talking about American pancakes. There had to be more to it than met the eye. Or met the mouth.

Zoe screwed up her mouth and stuck a fork into the pancakes before tearing out a fluffy chunk. She didn’t take her eyes off his as she wiped the doughy goodness around the syrup, kissed the edge of the strawberry ice-cream scoop, and added a lick of Nutella to the mouthful.

He’d never watched anyone eat with quite this level of intensity before. Zoe moved the forkful to her mouth and chewed. The instant the pancake hit her pink tongue, her eyes

widened, and she let out a barely audible whimper. He heard it, though.

“Good?” he asked, knowing full well that it was good.

“S’alright,” she said, still chewing. “I suppose. Considering.”

“Considering?”

“That they aren’t real pancakes.”

Jaben chuckled. “Come on, Zoe, what’s up with the pancakes? You gonna tell me? I can see that there’s something there. Something important.”

For a moment, she seemed to be thinking as she chewed. Then, after she’d swallowed the sweet mouthful, she let out a deep sigh.

“I’m not supposed to let anyone know who I am,” she said, nervously picking at a fingernail. “But I don’t think this will give it away.” Then, in a moment that surprised Jaben, she looked straight at him. “I wish I could tell you, Master Jaben. I feel as though I can trust you. I’m sorry.”

“Just know,” Jaben said, “that anything you do choose to share with me will go no further. That’s not me asking you to tell me anything you’re uncomfortable with. Just hoping to give you some reassurance.”

“Thank you. I appreciate it. Now. Pancakes.” She rubbed her face, then smiled widely, as though momentarily acknowledging how silly this all was. “English pancakes... Jaben, they are just so, *so* delicious.”

“What’re they like?”

“Thin. Thin as a doily. Do Americans have doilies? They don’t *sound* very American. Doilies are like, thin, lacy

ornamental white mats—”

“I know about doilies.”

Zoe burst into laughter. “Oh, Jaben, I’ve never heard such a big, scary man say doilies before.”

“Scary?”

“Well, you know, you’re a big guy.”

“You never have to be scared of me.”

“Thank you.” She shifted slightly in her chair. “Anyway, me and pancakes. We’re... involved.”

“Romantically?”

“It’s a long, committed relationship. We’ve had our ups and our downs, but we’ve been faithful to each other for twenty-three years.”

Twenty-three. She was basically half his age. There was no chance that she’d be interested in a guy like him. Zero.

“Back home, where I’m from, I have this annual tradition. Every year, on Pancake Day—”

“What’s Pancake Day?”

Zoe looked completely dumbfounded. Her jaw hung open, her eyes were as wide as he’d seen.

“Excuse me? *What’s Pancake Day?*”

Jaben grinned. “Sorry. Never heard of it.”

“It’s on Shrove Tuesday. Before the start of Lent? In the old days, people would use up all their good stuff—all the butter and eggs and sugar—before they fasted for Lent. They’d make pancakes with all that stuff, and so, Pancake Day was born.”

“Born?”

“Yeah, well, I dunno. Point is, it’s the best day of the year. Well, second-best, after Christmas. Okay, third best, after Christmas and my birthday.”

It was a thrill to see Zoe so animated. It was like this whole time she’d been waiting for this conversation so she could finally open up a tiny little bit. It was bringing her to life.

“Sounds good.”

“So, every Pancake Day, I’d host a competition. I’d have... people over to my... house. And they’d all cook pancakes for me.”

“How big is your house?”

“Bigger than average.” She looked almost ashamed. “Do you think I’m spoiled?”

“Nah. I just think you’re British.”

Zoe gave him a scandalized look that was about the cutest expression he’d ever seen on anyone’s face. “Charming!” she exclaimed, sarcastically, before playfully batting him on the arm.

“Careful, little one. That kind of behavior’s gonna get you over Daddy’s knee.” The word was out of his mouth before he’d even thought about it. Daddy. She noticed it, too, her breath hitching for a moment. “Sorry,” he said, “old habits die hard. Didn’t mean to make you feel weird.”

“It’s all right. Didn’t feel weird.”

He felt another urge—it was almost uncontrollable—to reach out and take her little hand in his. But he held back.

“So, it’s like a pancake competition. Different toppings. Different ways of flipping the pancakes. Different styles of batter. Secret ingredients.”

There was more there, so much more that he felt as though she was holding back. But he didn’t blame her.

“You’re missing that this year? Because of Rawhide?”

“Mhmm. It’s normally at the end of February or start of March. So, I’ll miss it while I’m here. I’m so spoiled. I should just be grateful for being here. This is the experience of a lifetime. But for some reason, I can’t let go. I can’t just enjoy myself. Because it feels like I’ve left the person I really am behind me.”

“Who is that person? Who *are* you, really?”

The biggest sigh yet. “I’m a person who pretends to be someone I’m not.”

He narrowed his eyes. “Doesn’t sound like that’s who you are. Not deeply. Not fundamentally.” Then, he reached across and put his hand on her heart. “Not in here.”

She quivered beneath his touch.

“So, who am I in there?”

“That’s what we’re gonna find out, sweetheart.” He pulled away. “You’ve got a long journey ahead of you. You know what the first step is?”

Zoe shook her head.

“Finish up those pancakes. Enjoy them. Enjoy the moment.”

“Now that I *can* do.” She grinned, then pushed another mouthful of pancake between her lips.

Jaben watched as a drop of syrup landed on her perfect little chin.

“I guess I do like American pancakes,” she said. “Even if they *are* too big for my mouth.”

## CHAPTER 7

The strangest thing about the morning wasn't her uniform. It wasn't that she had a meeting with the head of the Ranch's service staff, Erika, who would be doling out a list of chores that Zara would have to complete that day. It wasn't even the Montana sunlight, making everything in Zara's room glow with unearthly incandescence.

No.

It was that Jaben wasn't with her.

Before she'd tucked in for the night yesterday, he'd told her that he had a vacation day booked—something that he'd prearranged with Derek months ago, long before her trip to the Ranch had been agreed upon.

He'd been much more concerned about security than Zara was. He'd explained at length that she'd be safe, even though he wasn't going to be with her. She'd never once really felt as though her security was in question during her time at the Ranch, and honestly, sometimes she felt as though Jaben was surplus to requirements—as far as safety went, in any case.

Security at the Ranch was pretty tight in general—Zara had gotten used to the constant sensors and keycards everywhere—and she'd be in one of the most secure areas of the Ranch today, not leaving the buildings at all.

That wasn't the issue. Nope. The problem was how much she missed Jaben before he'd even left her.

"Be good," he'd warned her. "If you get into trouble today, it won't be me disciplining you. The other Doms won't be as lenient as me."

"You're kidding, right?" She blushed as she thought about the way he'd spanked her.

"Don't worry, I'll bet you won't get into any trouble. You're a good girl. And you'll be safe, I'm sure of that. Just don't do anything... British."

"How dare you!" she joked, in her poshest, most royal-sounding accent. "I'll have you thrown in the dungeon."

"Babygirl, I own the damn dungeon."

Sometimes she forgot that Jaben was—as well as a cuddly teddy bear—an immensely experienced Dom with a taste for serious kink. It was a delicious thrill to be reminded from time to time.

"Now, don't give Erika any lip. She's Derek's PA, and reports directly to him."

"I would never."

"Good." Then he smiled. It was a rare treat to see him express happiness like this. It was like he transformed; all the menace and hardness instantly disappeared, replaced by warmth and deep affection. "Make me proud."

As she looked at herself in the mirror, dressed in a maid's outfit, she concluded that most likely, Jaben would be the only person she knew who would be proud of her.

Maybe Millie. Yeah, definitely Millie. She could hear her best friend right now. She'd be all, "You *rock*, girl!" and



“Achievement unlocked: dress as a sexy maid!” Millie had these big white teeth and a gorgeous, gorgeous smile. She missed her friend terribly. Millie was the only person Zara knew who’d be jealous of her being at Rawhide Ranch.

There *was* something sexy about the outfit. She was wearing a frilly, black satin dress, with white lace detailing and suspenders. That was another reason that she was missing Jaben today. It would be fun to see his eyes widen as he saw her dressed like this. What would he say? Something like, “This outfit is a security liability.”

She giggled to herself as she fixed her face.

Time to serve other people for a change.

\* \* \*

“Good morning, Service Subs.”

Erika was as cute as a button, but Zara could tell she was as fierce as a falcon. She was short, slim, and had big, dark brown eyes and a pixie cut that perfectly framed her beautiful face. There was something of Audrey Hepburn about her, but it was a look that was also defiantly personal.

In some ways, Erika reminded Zara of Miss Jones who ran the service staff at the palace. In fact, the longer she stayed at the Ranch, the more it actually reminded her of Buckingham Palace. A sort of twisted, sexy version.

Just like at the palace, there was a huge amount of effort behind the scenes to maintain a facade of luxury, beauty, and good service. It was like a duck, floating serenely on the surface of a pond while its feet kicked like mad beneath the water.

“We have new faces today,” Erika continued, hands clasped behind her back. “Zoe and Maisie. Say hello to your fellow subs.” To her surprise and delight, Maisie hadn’t been giving Zara any dirty looks this morning. She looked a little fed up in her maid’s outfit, her arms sullenly crossed over her tummy. Clearly, she missed her gang of friends. Maybe she felt lucky to still be at the Ranch, though.

Zara waved sheepishly at the others. There were five of them in total. Erika explained that Luna, Mia, and Carrie were permanent members of the crew. They worked here in exchange for the right of residence at the Ranch. Carrie was petite, with short blonde hair and a ready smile. Mia was taller—she almost looked like a model in her maid’s outfit. Luna, finally, looked as though she was lost in a dream—she had a wide smile, soft blue eyes, and a feather duster tucked behind her back.

The other two, Cherry and Yasmin, were temporary members of staff. According to Erika, they’d been doing a very good job, but only for a week or so.

The meeting was taking place in a freakishly large broom closet. There was a schedule on the wall, with names and chores for different days filled in. As well as myriad brooms, there were industrial washing machines and tumble dryers, plus irons and boards, and a dizzying array of cleaning products.

“Most of you already know what you’ll be doing today,” Erika continued, walking up and down the space. “Carrie, you’ll be restocking the implements in the armoires around the Ranch. It’s a full, day-long job.”

Carrie nodded before grabbing a trolley from the corner of the room. It was big and looked heavy, but somehow Carrie

was managing to push it without too much effort.

“Make sure that you don’t skimp on the lube,” Erika said. “Oh, and Nanny J has requested some extra pacis for the Littles’ wing. They go through them like no one’s business.”

“Got it, Ma’am.” Carrie reached up on tiptoes to grab a cardboard box marked “Pacifiers”. She removed dozens of individually wrapped, adult-sized pacifiers from the box and stowed them in the implement trolley.

Zara was fascinated by the pacifiers. She wondered if Jabben would regress her so far that she’d use a paci. She’d often thought it would be nice to suck one, to let the troubles of the day go. Although they were individually wrapped for hygiene, she noted that the binkies came in a variety of shapes and colors.

*I want a pink one with rhinestones.*

Whoa. Where had that thought come from?

“Zoe, you’ll be pressing and distributing linen.”

Zara was snapped out of her pacifier fantasy by the reality of what she’d be doing that day. She’d secretly been hoping she might be the one to restock the armoires. It would have been nice to be up close and personal with all that delicious, kinky stuff. Never mind.

“Yes, Ma’am,” she echoed Carrie’s deferential tone. It was hard not to think of the hundreds—maybe thousands—of times she’d heard her own mother referred to as “Ma’am.”

“Luna and Mia will be helping to get you settled.”

That was good. It would be her first time pressing linen, of course. At the moment, it felt as though she was doing *everything* for the first time. First time she’d been spanked.

First time she'd eaten American pancakes. First time she'd pressed linen. First time she was falling for a bodyguard.

Okay, that was another stray, dangerous thought.

For a moment, she wondered if she'd be doing anything else for the first time during this trip. Something very... intimate.

“The rest of you will be working in the kitchens today and delivering room-service as and when required. Understood?”

There were general nods and “Yes, Ma’ams” from around the room.

“Very good. Let’s get ready to serve.”

\* \* \*

Pressing linen, it turned out, wasn't as glamorous as it sounds. Removing endless white sheets from a tumble drier and then feeding them into a linen press machine was hard work. It would have been boring, had it not been for the team she was working with.

“Arrgghhhh!” shouted Luna, “I’m being sucked into it!”

Zara yelped and looked around, only to see Luna doubled over with laughter. “You should see your faces!” she said, barely able to get her words out on account of her chuckles.

“Luna, that’s not funny,” Mia scolded. “This is dangerous equipment.”

“Dangerous if you’re a sheet.” Luna was still laughing.

In the hour or so they'd been working on the linen, there had been three “incidents”.

First, Luna had secretly wrapped herself up in sheets, and jumped out at Zara from a pile of clean laundry, moaning, pretending to be a spooky mummy.

“It’s not the mummies, it’s the *Daddies* you really want to watch out for,” she’d said, giggling as she’d slowly unwrapped herself.

Next, five minutes later, both Luna and Mia had conspired to tangle Zara up in a sheet, dropping it on her as she walked over to the press, then constricting her.

“Don’t worry, it’s just a little mild hazing,” Mia had said. “All the new girls have to learn to become one with the laundry.”

“It’s very spiritual,” Luna concurred.

Zara moaned something about attaining expanded consciousness through asphyxiation, but it sounded more like “Mmemmghmm bbmmmm mmmmasphxiammation.”

This third joke was clearly too much even for Mia. “You know,” she said, “sometimes I think about how much work we could get done if you weren’t constantly goofing around.”

“Haven’t you ever heard of the Pomodoro Technique?”

“What’s that?” Zara said, helping Mia feed another sheet into the press.

“It’s like, a time management thing. Basically, for every half hour of work, you goof off for five minutes.” Luna poured stain remover on a stubborn red blotch she’d been working on for about ten minutes. “It’s been proven to help with creativity and focus.”

“Only problem is this is about the least creative job in the world,” Mia countered.

It was good to feel like she was a part of a team. It was a rare experience for Zara, and one she intended to savor.

“How are you finding your time at Rawhide so far?” Mia asked Zara as they waited for the machine to press the new sheet.

“It’s... an experience. So different from the real world. I have to keep pinching myself to remind me this is actually happening.”

“Should be plenty of other people to pinch you, if you get tired of it.” Luna chuckled.

“I remember that feeling. The newness of it,” Mia said.

“How long have you been here?”

“Let’s see. Two years now. I love it. Never want to leave.”

“You live in a Service Submissive suite?”

“Mmmhmm. Thinking about taking up residence in Rawhide Ridge at some point. I’m saving up for it, actually. But for now, this works for me. It’s quick and easy to get to work. Plus, I get to have Luna as my roomie.”

“Mwahahaa, you will never leave me,” Luna piped up.

“What’s Rawhide Ridge?”

“A patch of land Derek bought. It was the neighboring ranch, but now it’s a gated community. It’s safe, quiet, and you can still access Rawhide. Heaven.”

It sounded wonderful. If only Zara didn’t have to go back home eventually.

Soon, the work was done. The linen was all folded and pressed and good to go. Mia was going to distribute the sheets in the resort and Little’s wing, and Luna was to do the college

dorms and the Big House. Finally, Zara had been tasked with changing the sheets in the guest rooms.

She was in luck—the guest rooms were right next to the service submissives’ suites. Her luck didn’t extend that far though, as there were a *lot* of guest rooms to change. She got down to work.

\* \* \*

Zara was surprised, over and over again, by how luxurious the rooms in the Ranch were. After she’d changed the linen in a couple of them, she decided that these really wouldn’t be out of place in the palace. The linen itself was second-to-none. She had a hunch that it was high-thread-count Egyptian cotton, and it felt wonderful to the touch, smooth but substantial.

Everything was tasteful and reeked of luxury. From the beamed ceilings to the hardwood floors, it had all been carefully thought through and designed. With each room she entered, she felt a little thrill of excitement.

She wondered what these walls had seen, what they’d heard, what they’d felt. Spinks, scents, and salacious seductions—bodies pressed up against the walls, fingers threaded together, nakedness, nipple-clamps, and nasty words whispered into trembling ears. Just being here was almost enough for her, in this famous, exclusive place—a place she thought she’d never get to visit in her life.

It was while she was tugging up a particularly stubborn sheet in her third room that there was a knock at the door.

“Room service!”

She recognized the voice immediately. It was Maisie.

For some reason, Zara had an instant urge to hide herself, to duck under the bed or step into a cupboard. Of course, she didn't. Instead, she opened the door. "Hello."

"Zoe. Oh. You're not Master Odin."

"What gave it away?"

"I thought he'd be in. Weird. We had an order for a raw steak packed in ice. I guess he's gonna be cooking it later?" She showed Zara the order. Sure enough—it was a raw steak, surrounded in ice, packed in a plastic tub. "Chef Connor will do whatever he can to fulfill the orders of the guests. Normally that involves *cooking* something, but still..."

There was something nice about seeing Maisie in a room service uniform. Made her seem less threatening, somehow.

"Come in," Zara said. "I'm just changing the sheets."

"You know," Maisie said as she walked into the room, "I'm glad I caught you. I've been wanting to apologize to you."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I have a tendency to act a little mean sometimes. Specially when I'm in high school mode. It brings out the bully in me. I got bullied when I was at school for real. It's self-defense or something. Sorry."

"I understand. I guess high school makes me act like... I dunno. A victim, I suppose." It was a hard thing to admit.

Maisie put the iced steak down on the table. "How are you finding linen duty? It's so boring, right?"

"You know, I kind of like it."



“Ugh, what’s wrong with you? Glutton for punishment, I guess.”

*Literally.*

“I don’t know. It’s mindless. You clean. You press. You fold. It’s sort of Zen, in a way. Meditative.”

“How are you coping with the weird knot thing?”

“What weird knot thing?”

“The Rawhide knot?”

Zara stared blankly. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Erika likes all the beds in the guest wing to be laid out with linen in a really particular way. I can’t believe they didn’t show you. Must have been in a real rush this morning. I can show you. Lucky you bumped into me. I just saved your ass from a *lot* of spanks.”

Maisie didn’t just help Zara with the knot, she made a video so that she could refer back to it for the rest of the day. It was just as well, because the Rawhide knot was extremely complicated, with lots of strange folds and twists. She had to admit, though, the bed looked fantastic when it was all made up.

“I saved your ass,” she said. “You owe me one now.”

“Thanks, Maisie.” Zara felt a surge of gratitude toward Maisie. Maybe things were going to turn out just fine between them, after all.



CHAPTER 8

Zara was having trouble falling asleep. Even though she'd spent the whole day on her feet and was physically exhausted, knowing that Jaben wasn't sleeping in the room next door made her feel on edge.

If only she had Mister Sunshine with her. For a while she'd tried to keep some stuffies in secret at the palace, but her mother always found out about them, then they'd mysteriously go missing.

Maybe she could ask Jaben about getting a stuffie when he was back. He'd help her, right?

Her bed was so snugly here at the Ranch. Sure, it wasn't a priceless, antique family heirloom, but it was comfy. It was big enough. It felt like a warm hug. She wriggled around, grateful for the fluffy pajamas that had been left in her cupboard to be used during her stay. Maybe if she just focused on enjoying the warmth and feel of the material and closed her eyes she might... she just might...

"Young lady?" The stern voice was accompanied by a knocking on the door. A firm, loud bang, administered by strong hands.

"Wh-who is it?"

“Master Derek. I’m going to need you to open this door immediately.”

She jumped out of bed, icy terror running through her veins. Had something awful happened? Had she been outed? Was one of her relatives sick? Had Jabben been hurt?

“What’s the matter?” Zoe asked, springing up, flicking on the light switch and heading for the door. “Is everything all right?” She opened the door, still cowering because of the brightness of the light.

“I’m afraid,” said Master Derek, a fearsome look on his face, “that everything is not all right.”

\* \* \*

“This is the second time you’ve been called into my office, isn’t it, Miss Franks?”

It took Zara a moment to register that Franks was her fake surname. She was grateful that Master Hawkins appeared not to have noticed.

“Yes, Sir.”

The two of them weren’t alone in here. Standing directly to Derek’s left was Erika, and to his right was another woman who had been introduced to her as Sadie. She was Derek’s Little as well as his wife.

“Shame that this time we’re here to discuss a disciplinary matter regarding your own behavior.”

“M-my behavior, Sir?”

“Don’t pretend like you don’t know what this is all about,” Erika huffed, hands on hips, clearly infuriated.

Sadie, on the other hand, could barely keep a straight face. It was like a smile was determined to bust out across her lips, no matter how hard she tried to keep it under control.

“I don’t follow,” Zara said.

“She’s a genius,” Sadie said, twirling her brown hair around her finger. “An evil genius.”

“Sadie, dear, I hardly think that short-sheeting the beds for all the guests classifies her as an evil genius.”

“Short... sheeting?” Zara asked, unfamiliar with the term.

“I think you call them apple-pye beds in Britain,” Derek clarified.

“Evil genius,” Sadie mouthed at Zara.

Oh. Oh no. Princess Zara’s blood ran cold as she realized that she’d been tricked by Maisie. How could she have been so stupid?

“It was chaos in every guest room. A number of the guests,” Erika said, her demeanor contrasting starkly with Sadie’s, “found it so difficult to enter their beds that they had to call room service.”

Sadie burst out laughing, making no effort to cover up her mirth.

“Dear oh dear,” Derek said. “These are paying customers of the Ranch, for the most part, Miss Franks. We rely on these customers to keep the Ranch operational.”

She had laid twenty beds that day. Images began to play out in her mind of all those stern, surly Doms, struggling with their sheets, trying to understand why they couldn’t get into bed. It was suddenly Zara who had to stop herself from laughing.

Of course Maisie had tricked her. Apple-pye beds. Zara hadn't encountered them since she'd been a boarder at secondary school. She'd been the victim of an apple-pye bed on more than one occasion but had never learned how to set one. It was a way of folding and tucking in the sheets which meant that a sort of shallow pocket was formed where a person would normally stretch out under the blankets. It meant the bed was virtually impossible to get into.

"You pranked a whole bunch of guests in one go," Sadie said. It looked as though actual tears were forming at the corners of her eyes.

"Sadie," Derek said, turning in exasperation toward his wife, "just why was it that you wanted to be a part of this meeting?"

"Are you kidding? I wouldn't miss this for the world! Zoe's pulled an amazing prank! It might not be spelled the same but from now on every time anyone orders apple-pie they won't know if they're going to get a slice of pie or a bed they can't get into. We're gonna be talking about this one for years to come. It's epic!"

"To your room, please, Sadie. I'll deal with you later."

"Oh, Daddy, please! I'm just—"

"*Now.*" It was one word, but the way Derek said it showed that it was the absolute final word on the subject.

"Yes, Sir."

After Sadie had left, Derek seemed a little calmer.

"Now, Zoe, do you have anything to say in your defense?"

All she had to do was explain that Maisie had tricked her. This whole thing was obviously her fault. Zara could easily,

quickly, clear the whole thing up. She wouldn't even need to face any punishment. She opened her mouth. "No, Sir. I did it... because I thought it would be funny."

There was no way that Zara could be responsible for Maisie getting expelled. There was more going on with that girl than met the eye. She had a feeling that the way she was acting toward Zara was a little more complex than just mindless hatred. And she felt fairly certain that what Maisie needed right now wasn't to be kicked out. It was love and forgiveness.

"Indeed," Derek said.

"This sort of prank deserves a stern punishment," Erika said. "Very stern."

"I'll be the one to decide what's in order," Derek said. "But I take your point."

A stern punishment. Zara wondered what that might mean.

"I'm sorry, Sir. I see now that what I did was wrong."

"I'm sure you knew *that* as you were doing it." Master Derek shook his head. "I hope this isn't an indication of the way you'll be behaving at the Ranch in the future, Zoe."

"No, Sir."

"For now, you're to head back to your room. Discipline in the morning."

\* \* \*

Later that night, sobbing in bed, Zara felt, for the first time since being at the ranch, scared. She needed some reassurance,

some love, some something. She turned on her phone and typed in her best friend Millie's email address.

\* \* \*

Jaben never much enjoyed taking time off, but yesterday had been a tougher day than most. He'd gone to visit his mom, who was in a care home near Great Falls. Things had been rough for his mom for a few years now, but recently it had felt as though everything was coming to a head.

He arrived back at the Ranch with memories of his mom's discomfort and anger in his mind. He wished there was more he could do for her, but she liked her independence, and had told him, point blank, that if he tried to live with her, she'd run off into the hills.

"I caused you enough problems when you were a kid, Jaben. I'm not gonna be a burden on you now you're a man."

He'd tried to explain she wasn't a burden, that he loved her, that being a single mom was the hardest thing in the world... but she wouldn't listen.

"Come on now, Jaben. Time to get your game face on."

Derek had sent him an email first thing this morning. Told him that he was required in the dungeon today, that being a bodyguard for Zoe could wait. Apparently, there was someone who'd pulled a big prank last night.

*I'm going to need you to give the miscreant in question a day in the dungeon she'll never forget. She saw fit to tangle up all our paying guests in short-sheeted beds last night. Seems only fitting that our Dungeon Security Coordinator finds a few ways to tangle her up for the day.*

Up until he'd met Zoe, Jaben would have relished a day like this in the dungeon. As he drove back through the Ranch's main gates, though, he realized that he'd trade all the naughty Littles in the world for a chance to spend time with Zoe.

"Short-sheeted beds," he chuckled to himself as he parked his pickup. "Who in the world would have the guts to pull a stunt like that?"

\* \* \*

"Well, well, well, Miss Franks. I did *not* expect to be seeing you here this morning."

Seeing his charge standing beside Drake outside the dungeon doors was truly quite the surprise. It was hard to get a read on Zoe. She clearly looked ashamed of herself, but there was something else in her expression, too.

*Excitement?*

Holy fuck, she looked hot. She was wearing an insanely tight, revealing maid's outfit. All the service subs wore variations on the classic satin and lace outfit of a French maid, but none of them looked even a tenth as gorgeous as Zoe did.

The soft curve of her generous, pert breasts as they threatened to bust the lace that held her bodice together. Her smooth, slim legs tanned dark brown by the sheen of her stockings. Up, under that skirt were the perfectly round, spankable buttocks that he *longed* to feel, touch, smack again.

"Thank you, Drake, I'll take it from here."

With a brief nod, Drake walked away and Jaben gave Zoe his entire attention. Master Derek had ensured that no other



guests were booked into the dungeon. Today it was just him and Zoe. Jaben cracked his knuckles.

*Let's see how this unfolds. Or rather, how this all gets tied up.*

Without saying a word, Jaben opened the door and gestured for her to step inside. He'd barely closed the door before she started her spiel.

"Sorry, Sir."

"I didn't have you down for the pranking type."

"Yeah. Well. I am."

Zoe's answer took him by surprise. Something felt off. Like she was acting. So mysterious, this Little.

"You think it's appropriate to prank all the paying guests of the Ranch? Tangling them up in bedsheets?"

"Mmmhmm. Serves them right."

"Not sure about this defiance, young lady. You know that I've done my fair share of *tangling* in my time, don't you?"

The dungeon was a large, impressive space. Although Jaben spent most of his time guarding the dungeon, he'd also spent plenty of time using the facilities, too. He knew this place inside out.

"Socks off, please."

Zoe did as he asked. She stood on the polished stone, shifting from foot to foot. "Floor's cold."

"That's the idea." Jaben gestured up to the lounge. "Normally, there would be a crowd of people up there, watching. Consider yourself lucky today. Derek decided that

someone with your level of experience would be better off alone.”

He watched the color drain from Zoe’s face. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me yet.”

Zoe glanced around her at all the equipment in the dungeon, no doubt trying to work out exactly what Jaben was going to do to her. This morning he’d gone over the paperwork Derek had given him listing the hard and soft limits of the prankster to make sure she was okay with everything he was going to do to her.

“You know, ever since you arrived at the Ranch, you’ve been getting special treatment. Personal security guard. No questions asked. Getting picked up from the airport. Anyone would think you were royalty.”

There was clear discomfort on her face. He remembered her asking him whether he thought she was spoiled. Obviously, privilege was a trigger for her.

“I think you need to be taken down a peg or two. Don’t you?”

“No.”

Defiance. That was a surprise. It had only been a day, but he’d missed her terribly. He felt a moment of tension. He thought about what he was about to ask. He’d been desperate to ask it since the first time he’d met her. Now he’d see if she’d really submit to him.

“Your clothes. Take them off.”

“All of them?”

“Be grateful no one else is watching.”

Her cheeks reddened, and he watched as she swallowed. Then, she said something else that surprised him. “I trust you, Jaben.”

## CHAPTER 9

This wasn't just lying across someone's lap. This was someone else seeing her completely naked. No one had ever seen her naked before. Not completely.

As she unbuttoned the back of her maid's outfit, she wondered for a moment why Derek had made her wait for Jaben to come back from his trip away for her punishment. Most of the other girls seemed to get punished by a variety of the Doms at the Ranch. Zara, though, seemed destined for Jaben.

Not that she minded, of course. Jaben was watching her like a hawk as she dropped the uniform to the ground. She'd almost worn normal clothes this morning, but she was glad she decided to stick with the maid's outfit in the end. Jaben's eyes had widened when he'd first seen her in it. There was something between the two of them. Zara was sure of it. And it felt as though the bonds between them there were about to get much deeper.

She stood in front of him, skin puckered from the cold, just wearing a black bra and panties.

“Underwear off, young lady.”

This was it.

For some reason, she fumbled with the bra strap, biting her lip as she struggled to unhook the fiddly thing. “Come on,” she hissed under her breath, until she worked it out, and she felt the fabric relax around her chest.

As she dropped the bra to the ground, she studied Jaben’s face. He didn’t glance down at her suddenly-hard, peach-pink nipples. No. He kept his eyes on hers.

“Panties.”

He didn’t need to say it. She wriggled her way out of them. For a moment, she felt self-conscious. She’d trimmed her pubic hair before she’d come to the Ranch, but she wasn’t completely nude down there. Maybe he’d be disgusted. Maybe this would put him off completely.

“Zoe,” he said, in a deep but strained voice. “You... you’re beautiful.” For just a moment, it felt like a transgression. He was playing a role—the part of the stern, unfeeling Dom. But he’d drawn back the veil. Let her know how he really felt.

She smiled, but just for a moment. She had to get back to her role—the sub. The instrument her Dom could play however he pleased.

“When I think about those guests, twisted up by your prank, it makes me think you need to know how that feels.”

He walked over to an armoire in the corner of the dungeon. There was so much equipment out already. Spanking benches, a cross with chains on it, cages, a rack of spanking paddles, and so much more. What else could he possibly need?

“These ropes are special. Made of silk, but strong as iron.”

So he *was* going to tie her up. This would be another first for her. The rope was crimson and quite thick. She shifted again from foot to foot.

“Have you ever been hog-tied before?”

Her pulse quickened. “No.”

She wondered whether any princess had ever been hog-tied before.

“Well, just remember your safeword is ‘red’. It shouldn’t hurt, but it will be uncomfortable. If you have any problems, especially with breathing, use your safeword immediately, understand? And if for whatever reason you feel like you can’t talk, you tap yourself twice. I have scissors and I can release you in a second. But don’t worry. Everything’s going to be fine. I know what I’m doing. You won’t be in pain. Except for the spanking, of course. The spanking will hurt. A lot.”

“You’re going to spank me too?”

“Down on the floor, please.”

She glanced down at the floor. “But it’s so cold.”

“Listen to me, sub. I’m only going to explain this once. I’m disciplining you today. That means I’m in charge. That means there are no more questions. No more buts. No more anything except your complete submission to me.”

There was something reassuring about realizing that she didn’t have a choice in the matter. She was going to do as he asked and there was no argument. Of course, she could use her safeword, but she was keen to see how this was going to make her feel. What was the point of this trip if she didn’t try to find out who she was? How much of this lifestyle she could take?

“Yes, Sir.”

“Good. Now, get down on the cold, hard floor, little girl. ”

There was something undeniably sexy about being ordered around by him. To her chagrin, she felt a flush of pleasure, and

knew that, despite her best efforts, her pussy would be throbbing and wet by the time she hit the floor.

She knelt and gasped at the cold.

“Cross-legged. Lean forward.”

Oh god. If she did that...

As she predicted, her pussy kissed the cold stone. She shivered, but at the same time, she felt moisture start to pour from her.

“Hands behind your back. Each hand gripping the opposite wrist.”

She obliged and felt the rope around her wrists. Jaben worked quickly. She felt a tight loop around her wrists, snug but not chafing. She could barely move, but she instinctively knew that there was no danger of blood flow being restricted.

Could she escape?

No. It was already too late. Jaben could do whatever he wanted to her.

“How are you doing?” he asked, looping the rope under her shoulder, then over the top.

“Good,” she whispered back, trying not to give away just how aroused she already was.

“I’m tying a chest harness now,” he said.

His fingers grazed her nipple as he threaded the rope next to her breast, around her chest, and under her other arm. As he pulled it more tightly, she felt it drag her arms up a little.

Yikes. There was no way she could even move her arms. She was having all her freedom taken away from her, and it was all her fault. Her pussy was going wild, and all she could

think about was how much she wanted this, how much she needed to feel completely at his disposal.

“You look good like this,” Jaben said. “Better than if you were in an apple-pye bed, I’ll bet.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Time for the legs, little girl.” He eased her forward, holding her by the rope as he pushed her body down onto the cold, hard floor.

Her nipples fizzed with sensation against the floor, and she pushed her cheek against the stone.

“Ankles up.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Her legs were tied in no time, and he bent them back before looping the rope through the chest harness. There was clearly a huge amount of skill in what Jaben was doing. Finally, he pulled the rope, and she felt mild discomfort as her shoulders were pulled down toward her ass.

“Good girl,” he said. “Breathing okay?”

“Yes, Sir,” she said.

There was a pause. “If you like,” Jaben said, his voice full of relish, “you may call me Daddy.”

\* \* \*

Why had he said that? The poor girl was naked and hog tied on the floor of a BDSM dungeon, for fuck’s sake. It was about the worst possible time to suggest something like addressing him as her Daddy. He’d gotten carried away.

And yet...



“I’d like that, Daddy.”

“Good girl.”

It was a good thing that Zoe was looking in the opposite direction. There would be no hiding the huge hard-on he had right now. Fucking thing was practically bursting out of his damn pants.

Zoe just looked... perfect. That muscular yet lithe back, pulled tight at the shoulder blades. Her flesh, gently constricted by the rope work, alabaster smooth but pinkening slightly where the silk slightly bit. And her ass, flexed hard because of the position, so ripe and ready for his discipline.

“I’m gonna use a crop on you, babygirl. One strike for each bed you pranked.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

He could stand here all day, looking at the perfection of her laid out on the floor like a sculpture. But that wouldn’t do. The crops were on display on a dungeon wall, and he chose one with a thin, velvet tip. He hoped that Zoe would use her safeword if she needed to—he knew this was a lot for her to take, but she had to have been asking for punishment with the prank she pulled, and she had to have known that it would be harsh.

“Ready?”

“Yes, Daddy,” she said, her voice trembling. He was sure he could sense arousal in the way she was speaking. It wasn’t a surprise—despite her defiance, he could tell that Zoe was a natural submissive. A natural Little, too. He made a vow as he weighed up the crop that he’d get to know her Little very, very soon.

He was careful with the strikes. He loved to hear her moan and yelp as he spanked her with the crop, loved to see the thin pink lines he left on her flesh with each swat.

“Thank you, Daddy,” she said. Hearing her use that word sent a rush of excitement through Jaben’s body.

“You’re doing well, babygirl,” he growled, pausing a moment to allow her to catch her breath. That’s when he heard it—in the silence. She was sobbing.

“Darling. Are you okay?”

“Mmmhmm,” she said, her voice soft and quiet.

“Do you need a break? Do you want me to stop?”

“No. No. Please. Don’t stop.” She sniffled as she spoke.

For a moment, Jaben considered stopping anyway, even though Zoe had told him not to. If she was crying, maybe she was in pain. Maybe it was too much for her.

But he knew he couldn’t. It would be taking the power away from her. Even though he was the Dom, Zoe was in charge here. She trusted him, and there was no way he’d ever betray that trust.

Five more smacks.

With each one, her body shook. She let out low, long moans. Then it was done.

“You did so well, babygirl,” Jaben said. Originally, he’d planned to leave her hog-tied for a while—nothing like surveying his handiwork. But now, that didn’t seem appropriate. Zoe needed aftercare, and she needed it now.

As he undid the ropes, he stroked her back, her neck, her cheek.

“That’s nice, Daddy,” she said, as he ran his fingers through her hair, and helped her up from the floor.

“What happened, sweetie? You were crying.”

It was obvious from her face. There were tear streaks down her cheeks, and her beautiful eyes were rimmed with red.

“Was the crop too much?”

“No,” she said, taking hold of his hand. There was something so intimate about this. She wasn’t just naked because of her lack of clothes. It was like her layers, her defenses, had been stripped away. “It was just right. I... I loved it, Daddy. I just... wish I had earned the punishment.”

“What do you mean?”

She bit her lip. “Ummm... nothing?”

He fixed her with a serious look. “Baby, don’t think that just because I’ve spanked you once today I won’t do it again.”

“Fine. I’ll tell you.”

“Good. No secrets, all right?”

She looked at him and nodded.

\* \* \*

Zara almost said it. She almost came right out and told Jaben that she was a princess. Hiding from her mother. Here on doctor’s orders.

But she didn’t. She couldn’t take the risk.

She did, however, tell him all about Maisie.

“That rat!” Jaben said, pouring wonderfully warm water over Zara’s hair.

“It’s okay,” Zara said. “She probably made a mistake.”

Jaben snorted. “No fucking chance. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t cuss. I just... I’m so angry on your behalf.”

She was in the tub back at their shared suite. Jaben had insisted that for a scene as intense as the one they’d shared, he had to make sure she was feeling good and cared for. The warm water *did* sting her butt a little, but it was so fantastic to be in the bubbly tub that she didn’t care.

“It’s okay, Daddy. I won’t spank you today. You’ve been a very good Daddy.”

He smiled. Of all the kindnesses he showed, his smile was the best. It felt so good to be silly with him.

“Derek’s gonna blow his top when he finds out about this.”

Zara’s pulse quickened. “Um, no, please. We can’t tell Derek. I really, really don’t want to be responsible for getting Maisie thrown out of Rawhide. I don’t want that on my conscience.”

Jaben took a huge sponge and ran it across her shoulders. “Hmm. I don’t know.”

“Please. I took the punishment. Maisie knows I didn’t snitch on her.”

Jaben snorted a laugh.

“What?”

“Something funny about you, the fanciest sounding lady I ever met, saying the word ‘snitch’.”

“Snitch,” she said, wrinkling up her nose. “Snitchy snitchy snitch snitch snitch!”

Laughter lines made endearing wrinkles at the corners of Jaben's hard eyes. "You're a special girl, you know that, Zoe?"

*Zara. My name's Zara.*

"I'm not." She couldn't meet his gaze.

He took her chin in his fingers. "You're special and you don't even know it." Her skin was covered in suds. Her hair was wet. But when their lips met, none of that mattered—not even a tiny little bit.

His lips were soft, but the kiss was hard. No one had ever, ever, kissed her like this. Jaben's passion, the depth of his feeling came straight through his lips, and then, as his breathing slowed, his lust grew. She could feel it on his tongue.

"You taste so good," he murmured. "Fresh as a strawberry."

Their faces were close, their eyes closed. He kissed her again, holding her cheek, holding her neck. She submitted to him, letting him guide her through what he wanted. She smelled him—salt and citrus and musk—good and clear and so, so sexy.

"Babygirl," he grunted. "You're special. Believe me."

With their foreheads pushed together, she believed him.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Tingly."

"I mean about the fact we kissed."

"I love it."

"Good. I love it, too. But... we gotta take this slow."

Her pussy had other ideas. “Really?” Zara definitely sounded bratty as she whined.

“For sure. You’re going through a lot right now. Gotta concentrate on Rawhide. Things with you and me... that’ll take time.”

“But I don’t wanna take my time!”

“Course you don’t. You’re a Little. You want it all. Everything. Right now. Right?”

She nodded.

“That reminds me. Tomorrow’s a big day.

“Tomorrow?”

“Yep. Tomorrow you start preschool. And there’s a special guest teacher.”

She *was* excited for preschool. “Who’s the guest?”

Jaben grinned. “I guess you’ll find out tomorrow.”

Preschool. Was. Amazing!

From the first moment Zara stepped into the brightly decorated space, she felt strangely at home. Everything about the room was just perfect. From the cute, patterned carpets to the walls, covered in bright and expressive paintings—clearly created by Littles—to the big, comfy beanbag chairs which were strewn about at convenient intervals.

The preschool teacher was Miss Price. In truth, when Zara had seen Miss Price for the first time, she'd been a little anxious. In contrast to the bright, bold room, Miss Price was a little... intimidating.

She wore a long, black skirt, and a starched white shirt.

Jaben had delivered her to the room for a prompt eight a.m. start, and Miss Price had bombarded them questions.

“Is she on solids? Does she need formula? Can she dress herself? How often does she have accidents?”

Jaben answered them all with a soft efficiency that made Zara feel cared for. She understood the teacher was making sure the Butterflies was the proper program for her instead of perhaps the Nursery. The answers to the questions were

straightforward, but he took his responsibility as her protector seriously.

“She’s come to you after some time in high school.”

Miss Price had raised an eyebrow. “From high school? Isn’t this little Butterfly too young for that?”

Obviously, Miss Price was talking about her Little age, not her actual age. But even so, it made Zara feel funny to think she was too young for high school. And kind of excited, too.

It was strange not to have a voice in a conversation that was all about her, but it was comforting, too. Last night, Jaben had explained that sometime soon, they’d sign a contract about him officially becoming her Daddy while she was at the Ranch. But for the time being, he’d be fulfilling that role in its entirety, unless she decided otherwise.

That meant he was completely responsible for her wellbeing. So he wasn’t just handing her over for a day at preschool.

“She’s trying to get to know her Little better,” Daddy explained.

“Little one,” Miss Price said, “in Butterflies, we nap in the afternoon. And, although your guardian says you don’t drink formula, you will be offered a cup or bottle of milk before your nap. Understood?”

“Yes, Miss Price.”

“Very good words,” Miss Price said.

Zara felt pride spread through her. Her Daddy looked happy, too. Being in this space, she could just *feel* her Littleness coming to the fore. There was none of the worrying



or bullying from high school. No. This was so much more... her.

“Are you ready to say goodbye to Daddy?”

She was gonna miss him so much again. She felt smitten, like a lovesick puppy. She looked up at her Daddy’s warm eyes. It was okay. She could do this.

“I think so.”

“Good girl,” Jaben said.

It would be easier to say bye to him if he wasn’t so gosh-darn handsome. Every time she saw him, he looked more and more gorgeous. It was so, so, so unfair that men seemed to get so much more handsome as they got older. Damn life!

“Come now, let’s meet some Littles and get you settled in with an activity for the morning. Then, we have a special guest, teaching a class on strangers.”

Strangers. That was interesting. She knew that the Ranch was originally set up as a refuge for vulnerable Littles. It was true that because of their trusting nature, Littles tended to be the target of unscrupulous people. It made sense that they’d be teaching the Butterflies about stranger danger.

After Daddy left, Miss Price introduced her to a group of three Littles playing with an oversized *Jenga* set near a bookcase.

“Joe, Patti, Ella, this is Zoe. Is there space for one more person in your game?”

Joe was a friendly looking Little boy who was wearing a diaper under his dinosaur-print pants, and he had adorable curls. Ella and Patti looked so similar that they *had* to be sisters, or even twins.

“Be on my team?” Joe asked, pointing at the blocks.

“Yes, please,” Zara said, her cheeks burning.

“Your voice is funny!” Ella said.

“I’m from England.”

Patti’s eyes widened. “That’s so cool! I want you on my team!”

“Wait,” Ella said, “are you the... Apple-Pye Bed Bandit?”

Zara blushed. She didn’t know that’s what people were calling her. It felt bad really, to take credit for a prank that Maisie had thought up. And in truth, she was anything but a prankster. “I... guess. Maybe?”

“She’s on my team, Patti,” Joe insisted.

“I’ll let you four sort this out,” Miss Price said, a kindly smile on her face. “The only apple-pies here are provided by Chef Connor. However, we do have snacks in that cabinet.” She pointed at a cupboard across the room. “If you get hungry, just ask me or one of the aides for a snack. We have potato chips, bananas, and snack cheese. And if you need a drink, you can use one of those sippy cups and that tap.” She gestured to a stack of thick plastic cups next to a sink installed lower than most. “But if you have trouble with the tap, do come ask me or one of the teaching assistants.”

“Tap gets sticky,” Joe said.

Miss Price checked her wristwatch. “Enjoy yourselves, little ones. We have an hour before the special talk.”

\* \* \*

Joe was relying on her. As she looked up at what was now a skeleton of a *Jenga* tower, Zara felt pressure like never before.

After an epic contest, they were tied. Patti and Ella had won two games, so had Joe and Zara. Every brick now could decide the fate of the grand competition.

“You got this, Zoe!” Joe was watching, the stress obvious on his face. He sucked his thumb.

“Looks wobbly,” Ella said. She’d been playing a psychological game throughout.

She was right, though. It did look wobbly.

“Don’t listen to her. It’s her eyes that are wobbly!”

Ella went purposefully cross-eyed. “How dare you!”

“Guys, shush!” Patti was such a sweetheart. She just wanted everyone to do well. “Let her concentrate.”

Zara bit her lip and carefully—really carefully—gripped the top and bottom edge of the brick that looked most likely not to bring the whole dang tower tumbling down. The moment she took hold of it, she could feel that this was the right block.

The feeling of relief as she started to gently slide the block out was overwhelming. They might not win the game outright, but she wouldn’t be the person to cause them to lose. Then, a second or two before the block was free of the tower, there was a click, and the door to preschool swung open.

“Daddy!” Zara yelped with excitement, all thought of the tower instantly forgotten. “What are you doing here?”

She barely heard the clatter of the bricks and Joe’s moan of anguish. Ella and Patti high-fiving each other didn’t even register. None of it mattered because her Daddy was back.

*Daddy.*

The word ricocheted around her mind. She'd thought she'd never find a Daddy, that she'd never have a chance. Now, she was within touching distance. She didn't know what it meant for the future, but for right now, it felt like everything was glowing.

It felt like something else was in control of her as she streaked across the multi-colored preschool carpet towards Jaben, who was smiling at her. Somewhere in the background, she heard a "No running, please!" from Miss Price, but before the words could have any effect, she'd thrown herself into Jaben's arms.

"I missed you!" she cried, realizing it was true. Somehow, even if she was distracted by something else, she still yearned for him, longed that he was with her.

"Missed you too. Have you had a good time? Hasn't been that long." He took a good look at her. "You seem happy enough."

She nodded. "I had a lovely time, Daddy! Is it time to go already? Time went so fast!"

"Mr. Roberts," Miss Price said, approaching them, "thank you for being so punctual. I know you're a busy man."

"Wouldn't miss it for the world."

"You have an appointment, Daddy?" Zara was confused.

"Who did you think would be teaching you guys about strangers?"

Her eyes widened. Her Daddy was going to be her teacher! This was the coolest day ever!

\* \* \*

“The most important thing you can do is to trust your instincts.”

Zara sat on a playmat, cross-legged, among a gaggle of other Littles. All of them were looking up at her Daddy as he walked back and forth in front of them. His hands were behind his back, clasped together, which made his already-thick arms bulge with muscle.

She felt so proud and so lucky that he was going to be hers and only hers.

“When you’re out with your Mommy or Daddy in a public place, make sure you stay close to them, no matter how fun or distracting it might be where you are.”

Miss Price stood at the edge of the room, watching as Jaben taught the preschoolers about the dangers of strangers.

“Most Caregivers will have a protocol for what to do if they get separated from their Little. But if for whatever reason you don’t, or you forget, remember this: find a responsible adult and ask for help. A responsible adult is normally someone in uniform. Who can tell me what to do if you get lost in a supermarket?”

Zara’s hand shot up, but so did a bunch of other arms.

“Pick me! Me!” she said, not able to control her excitement. She loved answering questions like this. Questions about the kinds of places that normal people—people who weren’t princesses—went. Zara had never set foot in a supermarket in all her life, but she felt confident she knew the answer.

Jaben tried not so smile. “Zoe, you’ve answered a couple questions. Ella, what’s the answer?”

“Go to the place people pay,” Ella said smugly. “Ask someone in a uniform.”

“Well done.”

No fair. That’s what Zara was going to say. She huffed and crossed her arms.

Jaben seemed to notice this, but he carried on speaking. “Now, I’m going to teach you something very important. Most people out there in the world are kind and trustworthy. But there are bad people, too. The scary thing is, for the most part, there’s no way to tell the good from the bad just by looking. That’s why trust has to be earned. You all understand?”

The whole class nodded. Jaben had done a great job of keeping their attention. Zara had thought that there would be hi-jinks or naughtiness. But every single pair of eyes were fixed on her Daddy.

“Now, for some of you, there may be a time when someone tries to make you do something you don’t want to do. Remember, you’re allowed to say no to anything you don’t want. If they don’t listen, you say, firmly: ‘I don’t like that’. And if they carry on... or touch you in a bad way, you fight however you need to in order to get away. Pull hair, poke eyes, knee them in the privates if you have to.”

There was a gasp from the class.

“Mr. Roberts?” Miss Price said. “Are you sure that sort of language is necessary?”

“For something as important as this, I feel as though, yes, it is necessary,” Jaben said firmly.

Zara put her hand up.

“Yes, Miss Franks?”

“Ummmm... do you need someone to demonstrate what that would look like?”

“Are you asking to knee me in the privates?”

“Only if it would be useful.”

There was a wave of laughter from the whole room.

“See me after class, young lady.”

Later that evening as Jaben spanked her ass for her cheekiness, she struggled to keep herself from smiling. For the first time in her life, she was starting to feel free. Free to be who she really was.



CHAPTER II

It was two weeks of heaven. Preschool turned out to be exactly the right spot for Zara. Not only did she fit right in, but she felt as though she was adding something to the group of Littles. It was early days, but they were starting to feel like her friends.

Zara had felt Little from the very first second she stepped into the space, but the longer she stayed there, the more and more Little she felt. She got used to using sippy cups for her milk in the afternoon, and soon learned to enjoy going down for a nap in the afternoon. She didn't always sleep, of course. Sometimes she'd just lie there, daydreaming about what her life used to be like, and what it was like now.

Zara sometimes imagined—most likely incorrectly—that her mother would be happy for her. Was it possible, that her mom, the Queen of England, could be pleased about her daughter dressed as a preschooler, sipping on milk, and spending her days coloring and practicing her letters?

Almost certainly not, but Zara tried it anyway. It was all she wanted, really, to be accepted for who she was by her family. But she knew that it would never happen.

Being accepted at Rawhide Ranch, however, was as easy as breathing.



When she wasn't in the preschool classroom with the other Butterflies, she was working her socks off with the Service Submissives. It had taken a couple of shifts before she'd been allowed to go back to linen duty, but after swearing never to fold a bedsheet the wrong way again, she'd eventually been let back.

Luckily, she hadn't seen much of Maisie. She'd been let back into high school. They'd bumped into each other a couple times in the corridors of the Ranch but hadn't spoken at all because there always seemed to be other people around.

Her favorite chore, it turned out, was working in the kitchen. She loved the fast pace of it as well as the creativity and hard work of the staff. Chef Connor, in particular, was a charismatic, charming, force of nature. The two of them struck up a warm rapport, and—to her great relief—she never fell afoul of his infamous wooden spoons, which seemed to terrify the other Service Subs into a state of near-panicked obedience.

After a couple shifts working in the kitchen peeling potatoes and sifting flour for Connor's ridiculously decadent chocolate puddings, Zara had plucked up the courage to ask him whether she could show him an English pancake.

"You want to cook for me?" he'd asked, his blue eyes twinkling with amusement.

"If you call flipping pancakes cooking."

"It's harder than it looks. But let's see what you've got."

However, when Zara had demonstrated the correct technique for cooking an English pancake—with a strong flick of the wrist required to flip the fragile treat high up in the air—he'd given her a begrudging grunt of approval.

“That’s actually not bad,” he had said, munching into a rolled-up, lemon and sugar pancake. “Like a crepe. I wasn’t sure about the lemon, but it works. Although, for me, it could do with a little chocolate.”

“Sacrilige!” Zara had gasped. “It has to be lemon and sugar on pancakes. Nothing else will do!”

Chef Connor tutted. “And that’s why the English lost the war of independence. No respect for chocolate.”

Besides getting to know Chef Connor, Zara had struck up a close friendship with Carrie, one of the other Services Subs, who was a friendly and reliable young lady who loved to serve the Doms on the Ranch.

“Just makes me feel good,” she’d always say, “to bring a little sunshine to their lives.”

Zara’s other best friend was Patti from the Butterfly room. She was such a sweet girl, and she always had a reassuring or encouraging word for Zara. There had been a couple times when Zara felt as though her Little might be slightly too old for preschool. She was starting to think that maybe she was about six years old.

“I’m just worried,” Zara had said to Patti one time when they were working on a painting together, “that if I tell Miss Price, she might stop me from coming to Butterflies. You know she’s always hot on how old everyone’s Little is.”

“She won’t stop you! If you enjoy your time in Butterflies, no one’s gonna stop you from coming, cutie.” Pattie smiled. Her Daddy was in Montana for a month-long business trip, so her time at the Ranch was limited. Zara was dreading the day she left.

“You think?”

“I’m sure!”

“Uhhh, why can’t you stay here with me forever, Patti?”

“How long are you staying at the Ranch?”

“Hmm. Dunno. Long as it takes, I guess.”

She’d had to send a couple of emails across to Doctor Stanford yesterday. Her psychologist had been asking questions about her progress at the Ranch, about how she was getting on with the various programs and whether there were any issues that needed to be addressed.

Of course, there was one big issue that Zara wouldn’t share with Doctor Stanford. A very large, very muscular, gruff-talking Dom who had completely taken over her heart.

Her relationship with Jaben, thankfully, was progressing slowly. Of course, he’d been right about that. There was so much going on in Zara’s life, what with adjusting to the rhythm of the Ranch, and spending so much time in Little space, that diving headlong into the whole new world of a fully-fledged sub/Dom relationship might have been a little too much for her to handle.

She still had hang-ups. Zara felt as though there was always a chance that Jaben might think she was too young for him. Too Little. It meant that she sometimes struggled to let go around him.

Whenever he came to pick her up from Butterflies, or was around her at the end of the day, she was less Little than normal. She wished she could relax, could be herself fully around him. There were times when it felt as though all she needed was his permission, but she didn’t dare ask for it.

In spite of all that, Zara was still certain that Jaben was the right guy for her. In their snatched moments of intimacy, she

was caught off-guard by his tenderness and passion. They'd spent a lot of time kissing and cuddling, pressed up against each other, but Jaben was resolute—they'd go no further until that contract was signed. Didn't matter how much she whined. How much she ground her private parts into him as their bodies touched. He couldn't be swayed.

The longer they spent together, the more she felt the burden of her secrets. It wasn't just that she was a princess. In fact, that was the least of her worries. She was also a virgin. She just *knew* it was important for him to know that. But she was so worried about it. Zara was already hung up on her youth—her lack of life experience. Throwing a lack of sexual experience into the mix might just tip the scales and make Jaben decide he was the wrong guy for her.

She would tell him. In fact, she planned to do it that very evening.

After a fun day of play in Butterflies, Zara was delighted to see Jaben come pick her up. As usual, he chatted to Miss Price about her day—what she had eaten, how long she'd napped. And as usual, because he was there, Zara felt as though she couldn't be truly Little anymore.

She peeled away from Joe and Patti, and picked out an older book to read, before plopping down on a beanbag and waiting for Jaben to come across. Her cheeks flushed a little with embarrassment until eventually, her Daddy came up to her and gave her a kiss on the forehead. She felt a flutter in her tummy as he kissed her—he always had such a strong physical effect on her.

“Hey there, babygirl.”

“Hi, Daddy.”

“Whatcha doing?”

“Just reading.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Mmhmm.”

“You know, I’ve noticed something.”

Her heart pounded. “What’s that?”

“Sometimes, when I come in, you stop playing and do something else.”

“Oh. Yeah. I guess.”

“It’s okay, little one. You’re not in trouble.”

She closed the book. “That’s good. My bot-bot still hurts from last night.” Yesterday, she’d gobbled down her dinner so fast she almost choked. Jaben hadn’t been happy with her.

“No spanking tonight, babygirl. In fact, I’ve got something special planned.”

“Oh?”

“Follow me.”

\* \* \*

It had been an epic wait. Two damn weeks of meetings with Derek and Jared Stark—the Ranch’s lawyer—to discuss the ins and outs of the contract. Back and forths about the wording and their rights and responsibilities. Jaben understood how important it was to get something like this just right, but it had still been agony to wait a full two weeks before he could officially claim his babygirl.

But tonight, finally, she was going to be his. His forever girl.

Jaben had also had discussions with Derek about long-term accommodation for Zoe. There were plans in place, but of course, he had to speak to Zoe about them.

He held her hand as they walked toward the library. He'd picked this spot because of how much his babygirl loved reading and being read to. He hoped that she appreciated it.

"I'm so excited," she said, squeezing his hand.

"I can tell."

"How?"

"The way you're walking."

"What! Seriously?"

"Mmmhmm. When you're excited you get off balance. It's like your heart wants to run, but your head's trying to walk. So you end up almost falling over."

"I suppose that would give the game away."

"Kinda like a duck."

"Hey!" she whined, but she was smiling, too.

"My excitable little duckling."

"Quack quack quack."

"Damn. I never took Duck Speak 101."

"I'll translate. It means: I think you're pretty cool."

It was his turn to squeeze her hand now.

At the library waited Master Derek, Sadie, and Jared Stark.

“Zoe, it’s so good to see you,” Derek said, smiling warmly. “I’m impressed by the way you’ve turned your behavior around.”

It had been strange to keep the secret of Maisie’s trick from Derek, but Jaben understood Zoe’s thinking.

“Thank you, Sir,” Zoe said.

“And I’m super-disappointed,” Sadie said with a sigh.

“Let’s get on with proceedings, shall we?” Derek asked. “Jared, do you have the contract?”

“I do.” Jared took out a manila envelope stamped with the Ranch’s logo and slid it onto a table. “The two of you should be fairly familiar with the wording by now. The final revisions are all underlined, should you wish to change them.”

There it was, in black and white.

*Contract of Daddy/Little Girl relationship between Jaben Roberts (Dom) and Zoe Franks (sub)*

“Never signed anything like this before,” Jaben admitted to Zoe.

“You haven’t?”

“Nope. Hope to only sign something like this once.”

She smiled the sweetest smile. “Me too.”

He’d never been as sure of anything in his whole life. This was the right thing to do. The only thing to do.

Two days ago, he’d cornered Derek.

“You planned this all along, didn’t you?” he’d asked.

“I... had an idea it might turn out this way.”

“I should have known.”

“It was imperative that the two of you didn’t think you were being set up. You’re both so different. You had to see it for yourselves, in your own way, without prejudice.”

It was so obvious now, looking back. How could he be good enough for her? This perfect creature, so kind and sweet, so innocent and sexy at the same time. He opened the contract, skimmed through it, holding his Little’s hand the whole time.

“All looks good to me.”

“Pukka,” Zoe said.

Everyone turned to look at her.

“Seriously? Americans don’t say ‘pukka’?”

“Pukka?” Sadie said. “Like... the noise a chicken makes?”

Zoe sighed. “It means like... *kosher*, I guess. All above board. Everything looks good.”

Jaben kissed her forehead. “Never change, Bandit.”

Even though she hadn’t pulled the prank, the nickname of Bandit had stuck. Sometimes, he even called her the full title—Apple-Pye Bed Bandit. It was too damn cute not to use. Seeing as he was none the wiser as to her actual identity and her past, it was nice to have something to call her that was just for them.

He’d asked her about where she was from one night. She’d said that when the time was right, she’d tell him. “It’s not that I don’t trust you. The thing is, it affects more people than just me. I’m sorry. But... you know who I am. I’m me.”

That’s when he decided he didn’t care where she was from. He just cared who she was.



He signed first, his full name. Then he passed the pen to her trembling hand.

“You sure about this?” he asked, giving her one final chance to back out.

“Never been surer.”

She signed. They kissed. It felt like the whole world clapped.

“And now,” he whispered into her ear, “I’ve got something very, *very* special planned. Just for you.”

CHAPTER 12

“Where are we going, Daddy?” Zara felt giddy—drunk on the emotion and intimacy of the ceremony they’d just completed together. They were now officially Daddy and Little, with rights and responsibilities.

As soon as she’d signed that piece of paper she’d known it for sure: she wasn’t going back to England. She didn’t want to. No. More than that, it felt like she couldn’t. Her soul belonged here, with the Littles and Bigs of Rawhide Ranch. There was a place for her here—her true self.

Not Her Royal Highness Princess Zara Emmeline Cecelia Bunty Sussex. No. There was a place for Zoe Franks.

Of course, it had felt a little strange signing a contract with a fake name. But the thing was, Zoe just didn’t feel like Zara anymore. Her life here was real. Zoe had become real.

“I’ve booked out a special room for the evening.”

Images of manacles and butt-plugs danced like drunken chickens in Zara’s brain. “A special room, huh, Daddy?” She wiggled her eyebrows at him.

“That’s right. But I don’t think it’s quite what you have in mind.”

“Oh really? And what do you think I have in mind?”

He stopped, looking her straight in the eye. “If I know you even a little bit—which I think I do, mystery woman—then right now, you’re imagining all the delicious ways I can truss you up and spank sixteen shades of—what do the English say? —*shite* out of you.”

“Daddy! How could you?” She paused as her pussy throbbed. “Is that what you have planned?”

He shook his head. “It is not.”

They walked up the staircase to the second floor of the resort. This was where the guest wing was, as well as some multipurpose rooms and the theater. For a moment, Zara wondered whether they were going to watch a movie together, and it did seem that was where they were headed. But they didn’t enter the theater. Instead, they walked down the corridor with the private age-play themed playrooms. They paused when they got to a doorway on the right.

“This evening, we’re gonna play. Together.”

“Play. As in *play* play? With toys?”

“That’s right.”

Instantly, her heart rate spiked. “Okay. That sounds fun.”

“You’re nervous, huh?”

“Maybe.”

“I thought you would be.”

“You did?”

“I know, Bandit. I know that you’re nervous to play around me.”

“How do you know?”

“I told you. I know you. A Daddy always knows his Little. So, why is it? How come you’re nervous?”

“It’s dumb. I’m dumb.”

“Uh-uh. Not allowed. Putting yourself down is against our rules. You literally just signed a contract saying you wouldn’t do it.”

“Sorry, Daddy. My bum still hurts from—”

“Don’t worry. We’re not in spanking territory right now. Just tell me why you’re nervous.”

She sighed. Here it was. “I’m scared that you’re going to think I’m silly. I’m... so much younger than you. You’re so experienced and knowledgeable—not just about age-play, but about life in general. And I’m just... not. When I think about playing in front of you, letting my Little out, it feels scary.”

Zara was expecting Jaben to be a little hurt or even a little angry about this admission, but to her surprise, he wasn’t.

“Babygirl, I totally understand. That makes perfect sense.”

“It does?”

“Of course. You know, I get a little worried about being too old for you. Too boring. Too set in my ways.”

“Never!”

“Point is, I understand. You don’t need to worry, though. Remember, I live this lifestyle. I *love* Littles. And I... care about you. I want you to be happy. I can see the tension in you—the need to be Little, the desire to impress me. Know that you can be yourself fully, and I’ll be all the happier for it.”

“I just... struggle to let go.”

“I understand. And that’s why there are gonna be rules to the game.”

“Rules?”

He pushed the door open. When Zara saw the toys he had out, her mouth dropped open in horror.

\* \* \*

As they entered the room, Jaben was pleased to see that the jumbo Princess Palace playset he’d asked for had been provided and assembled by the other Service Submissives. The palace was absolutely huge and intricately detailed—a doll’s house on steroids. There were hundreds of dolls provided with the set, as well as countless little accessories spread out across the palace.

He was pleased to see a look of total shock on Zoe’s face.

“You excited, little one?”

“Of course,” she said.

She didn’t sound excited. She sounded like she was about to pass out.

“I thought after our hog-tying and all the punishments you’ve been getting recently, it might be fun for me to remind you that you’ll always be Daddy’s little princess.” He pointed to the throne room in the castle, where a doll—the princess—who looked almost exactly like Zoe, sat on an ornate chair.

“That’s lovely,” Zoe said, still in that strangled tone of voice.

“Everything all right?”

“Yep. Just... never played at princess and palaces before.”

“Really? Thought every little girl loved to play it.”

“Not in my family.” She scratched her head sheepishly. “The Royal Family is super-serious to them, I suppose. My mum, especially, is like... *very* into the queen. Not really a game to her.”

“Must be a cultural thing.”

“Anyway,” Zoe said, picking up a horse from the royal carriage set outside the front of the palace, “what rules are we going to be playing with?”

“Glad you asked.”

In accordance with his request, there was a big blackboard on an easel in the corner of the room. He pulled it closer and grabbed a piece of chalk.

“Rule number one: Daddy and Little will *both*”—he underlined that word—“be silly during the game.”

“Silly?”

He had to show her that she could relax around him. And there was only one way to do that. He cleared his voice, before saying, in his absolute best effort at a posh, British accent, “Very, very silly, your Majesty.”

“Oh my gosh!” Zoe burst out laughing. “Is that what you think I sound like?” She covered her mouth as she carried on chuckling, her eyes clamped shut with mirth.

Jaben continued in his British voice, “That is precisely what you sound like, my inestimably perfect princess.”

Zoe was now holding her tummy as she carried on laughing. “I’m going to die. My cheeks hurt.”

“Rule number two: Absolutely no dying allowed.” He wrote this rule up on the board.

“Rule three,” Zoe said, “stop making Zoe laugh or she’ll pee herself.”

“Rule four: No peeing yourself.”

He’d never seen her laugh so hard—it was wonderful. All the tension that had been between them was evaporating like raindrops in the hot sun.

“One question,” Zoe said. “Who’s going to judge whether we’re being silly enough?”

“Daddy.”

“And what’s the punishment?”

“Do you need to ask? Even princesses have their bottoms spanked when they’re not silly enough.”

“Very well, my Lord,” Zoe said, putting on an even more hifalutin voice than normal. “Then let the Royal Pancake Day Party begin!”

“Pancake Day what?”

Zoe grabbed the princess doll. “Silence, peasant! Bring me pancakes. Thousands of pancakes! The princess hungers for lemon, sugar, butter, flour, and lots and lots of tossing.”

“Excuse me?”

“Tossing.”

“Young lady, that’s r—”

“Tossing the pancakes! Why, what did you think I meant?”

Jaben’s eyes narrowed. “I suppose you’re being silly, at least.”

“Pancakes! Now!”

\* \* \*

The game was absurd. It was also a *huge* amount of fun.

Zoe played the princess character, and Jaben played all the other parts. The idea was that the whole Royal Family, and all the subjects, and all the animals, and literally everyone who wasn't the princess, had to take turns to cook pancakes for the princess. Each character would do their best to outdo the recipe and toppings of the previous character. The princess would get excited at the prospect of each pancake. She'd grunt with impatience, salivate as the recipe was described, moan with hunger as the pancake was cooked in the Palace kitchen.

Then, as soon as she took the first bite, she'd vomit.

It happened over and over and over again, and each time it made the two of them laugh more than the last.

“Your Highness,” Jaben said, still in his atrocious British accent, “I have a... recipe suggestion.” He held up a tiny plastic frog doll.

“You may speak, Sir Frogston.”

“Very good, Ma'am. The batter, I shall make from powdered strawberries...”

“Yes!”

“Candy corn.”

“Go on, go on,” she said, licking her lips.

“Bound together with butterscotch and chocolate milkshake.”

“What about the topping, Frogston? What of the topping?”



“Reese’s peanut butter cups. Melted.”

“More.” She was practically drooling. “I need more!”

“Bananas and... mint?”

She screwed up her face. “Herbs are outlawed! Vegetables are outlawed! I’m the princess! My word is law!”

Jaben did his very best to avoid bursting into laughter at the pretend fury that Zoe was throwing right at the poor little plastic frog.

“Quite right, Your Magnificence. I’m nothing but a scrawny... dirty... lank... green...”

“Stinking! Don’t forget stinking!”

“Stinking... frog. I should learn my place.”

“Your place is in the kitchen, Frogston, tossing me up a plate of pancakes. Squirt a little fresh cream on top of these and we’ll call it quits.”

“Of course, Your Gorgeousness, Your Cleverness, Your Radiance.”

“Less talk, more toss.”

Jaben moved the tiny frog into the palace kitchen. “I might need a little help with the... pans, Your Highness.” He picked up a pan with the frog that was twice as large as the poor thing.

“No one else had help. No special treatment for you, Frogston.”

“No. Of course not, Your Majesty.” Jaben heaved and grunted as he pretended to light the stove, mix the batter, pour it into the pan.

“You’re getting it everywhere!” The princess was *not* amused.

“Sorry, Your Highness. The flavor will be worth the mess.”

“It smells incredible! The combination of strawberry and peanut is sublime!”

“Yes! Nearly there. I just need to... toss.” A moment’s pause. “Your Majesty, a slight problem.”

“Problem?”

“The pancake. It’s stuck to the ceiling.”

“Well, scamper up the walls and scrape it off!”

The frog obliged. Soon, it was time for the big moment. Jaben was so lost in it all, so happy to see Zoe truly let go and be herself around him, he didn’t want to spoil any of it by analyzing what was going on. He just wanted to share this with his Little.

With his love.

“Well?” Frogston asked, eagerly.

“It’s... it’s...”

“Yes?”

Then, for the millionth time that evening, Zoe pretended that she was vomiting. And somehow, it was the sweetest sound Jaben had ever heard.

\* \* \*

Later that night, for the first time, they shared a bed together. Just to sleep, of course. Jaben didn’t want to move things any

more quickly. That was what his head thought, anyway. His body though, was less convinced...

As she wriggled in the bed next to him, he felt a thrill of excitement he hadn't experienced since he was a teenager. Somehow, the intimacy was even more erotic than it had been to bind and spank her.

"You got enough room with me in here?" he asked.

"Of course I do. I'm not like that princess in the palace. Not in real life. I don't need a huge bed to sleep in. So long as my Daddy's here with me, I could sleep in a sardine tin for all I care."

"You know, you played the part of that princess perfectly."

"Did I?" Her voice was difficult to gauge.

"You did. You were spoiled, bratty, pretentious, and you acted like the whole world revolved around you."

"Mmmhm." A little sound, quiet, timid.

"Which is amazing. Because in real life, you're nothing like that. In fact, you're totally the opposite."

"I'm not."

"Sure you are. You're lying here in a tiny single bed with an ex-army guy who's about as well-educated as the damn frog from our game. Not spoiled. You've been working as a maid since you got here, putting the needs of other people before your own almost constantly. Not bratty. You're funny and charming, playing with the other Littles and putting on silly voices with me. Not pretentious. And as for acting like the whole world revolves around you—Maisie still attends the Ranch, and you suffered for that. You're nothing like a princess. You're the opposite."

In the dim light, he couldn't quite see Zoe's face. But he felt her grip. Her arms squeezed him so tight that he was shocked by her strength. He felt his Little girl push herself up against him, as she almost climbed up his body, and then her hot, small mouth found his. As he kissed her, quickly setting the pace and running his hands down her body, he felt that her face was wet, covered with tears.

“Darling?” he whispered.

“I'm fine. No, I'm better than fine.” She was half laughing, half crying. “Daddy, that's the nicest thing anyone's ever said to me.”

“Ain't nothing but the truth.”

This kiss was more, it was deep and long and physical. Her body squirmed against his as she struggled to find a way to push herself against him. He helped her, stretching out a thick thigh for her to wrap her legs around. She moaned as they kissed, and he felt his cock harden until it was so thick and huge that it threatened to burst from his pants. Zoe reached down, tentatively, touched its shape through his underwear, and gasped momentarily.

“Daddy,” she panted, “this feels so good. It feels so right.”

“It is good. It is right. I belong to you. You belong to me.”

Maybe it *was* the right time for this, after all. He was happy. She was happy.

She kissed his neck, kissed further down, finding his hard pectorals, then, as though fighting with all her might, she said, “Stop. We need to stop. There's something I need to tell you.”

Zara paused for a moment. She was committed now. She had to tell him. There was no way around it.

But...

She didn't want this to stop. The feeling of closeness, the arousal. It was heady, intoxicating.

Their faces were close. She could smell the minty freshness of his breath, feel the warmth of it.

She closed her eyes, trying to hide from the reality of what she was about to share.

“Daddy, I'm a virgin.”

The words hung heavy in the air. Zara kept her eyes closed, terrified of how Daddy might look. He might be furious. This was exactly the kind of thing that should be made explicitly clear before signing a BDSM contract.

It might even void the contract.

Her heart started to race, and then she felt Jaben's reassuring palm, pressed right over her heart. She felt the pressure of her blood as her heart pumped it around her body, throbbing under his heavy fingers.

“Is that it?” He didn’t sound furious. He didn’t *seem* furious.

“That’s it.”

“You can open your eyes, Zoe. It’s just me. Daddy.”

As her eyelids blinked open, she allowed herself a look at him. At the gentleness of his smile, the softness of his eyes.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I know I should have told you. I was just, just—”

“Scared?”

“Yeah.”

“Course you were. It’s a big thing, isn’t it?”

“Mmhmm. It probably seems dumb. To someone as experienced as you.”

“Not at all. Hell, I remember how nervous I was before my first time.”

“You? Nervous? I don’t believe it.”

“Of course I was. I was nervous as a rabbit waiting to cross a highway.”

“You still remember it?”

“How old do you think I am?” He chuckled.

“I didn’t mean it like that—I’m sorry.”

“No, babygirl, I was just teasing. I remember it like it was yesterday. Feels like a big part of your identity, doesn’t it?”

“I guess. The other girls in school used to tease me about it.”

“Sounds rough.”

*Virgin Princess*. That's what they used to call her.

"I was used to it. Didn't have the happiest time at school."

"I'm sorry. School can be tough."

"I loved primary school, though. Remember it fondly. All my little friends."

Back then, everyone was too young to really understand what it was to have a princess at the school. People were her friends just because they wanted to be friends with her, not for the freak factor.

"Makes sense that you're enjoying preschool. The innocence of it."

"It's wonderful."

"Hey, I'm so grateful you told me." He rubbed her hand.

"Of course."

"Makes me feel special. I feel so close to you, and every time you show me a little bit more of who you are, I feel even closer." He threaded his fingers through hers. Every time they touched, it was as though she'd been shocked by a small, pleasurable spike of static electricity.

"I feel *so* close to you. No one's ever made me feel like this." Zara had, of course had other boyfriends. But the key part of that word was *boy*. They had all been members of the British aristocracy, and she had always broken up with them before things went too far. It just never felt right. None of them had treated her the way Jaben did. Not even close. "There's something else I want to tell you."

"Anything."

She pushed her lips close to his ear. “I want you to take my virginity,” she whispered. “I’m sure of it.”

He kissed her forehead. “What did I do to deserve someone like you?”

“Ummmm, well, I guess you’re a super-sexy, stupidly-kind, stern-but-lovable lunk with a heart of gold. That seems like enough.”

“You’re being too generous. Hey, I can let you into a secret of mine, as a kind of trade, if you like?”

She nodded. “I’d really like that.”

He sighed. “I don’t think I’ve ever been in love.”

She let it sink in. “How come?”

“I dunno. Hard to answer. I always hold back.” Then he looked her in the eye. “Until you, that is.”

She bit her lip.

He continued, “With you, I can’t hold back. You might be feeling things for the first time with me, physical things. But for me”—he brushed a strand of hair off her cheek—“you’re opening my heart to things it’s never experienced before. Vulnerability. Passion. Tenderness. L... lots of things.”

She snuggled up to him, and for a moment, she felt as though they were one entity—two chambers of a single, beating heart.

“So tell me,” he said, “just how far *have* you gone?”

“How far?”

He raised an eyebrow. “Kissing?”

“You know I’ve kissed someone. *We* kiss all the time.”



“I can’t believe I’ve hog-tied and spanked you, but you haven’t had sex. I feel bad.”

“Don’t! It’s my fault. I didn’t tell you.”

“So, we know you’ve been kissed.” He paused and pushed his lips against hers. She felt a rush of blood to her pussy as he slipped his tongue into her mouth. With a burst of lust, he gently bit her lip, tugged it away just a little, then let go. “On the lips, at least. I wonder if you’ve ever been kissed anywhere else?”

It was her turn to bite her lip. “No, Daddy.”

“Interesting.” His eyes were burning with intensity now, and something else, too. “I’m going to show you what it feels like. If you’re ready?”

He didn’t need to ask twice. Just the thought of his hot mouth on her wet pussy was making her tingly all over. Zara nodded so quickly her head practically fell off.

“Good girl. Let Daddy show you just how good it can feel to be kissed.”

He kissed her again, but this time, he slipped his hands down onto her ass, pulled it in close to him. She felt his cock up against her pussy, rock hard, right there, dangerous and delicious all at the same time. This kiss was pure lust, and as he pushed his tongue in and out of her mouth, she imagined how it would feel to have that thick cock sliding in and out of her pussy. She moaned.

Jaben hooked his fingers under her panty’s waistband. He’d touched her ass countless times before, administering spanking after spanking, but this felt different.

“I’ve thought about this ever since the first time I saw you.” He was practically growling.

In turn, Zara practically moaned back. “Me too, Daddy. Me too.”

He pulled her panties down and then pushed his hand up, under her pajama top. He found her breasts, her nipples hard and aching for his touch. “You ever been touched here before?”

“N-no,” she whimpered as he gently drew agonizing circles around her nipples. She felt her skin pucker and her body start to buck. He was causing waves of desire to radiate around her body, a simmering bubble of lust, fast growing into a torrent of need.

Her top came off—she wasn’t even sure how it happened—one second it was there, the next it was not. Then, a moment later, after a final, long, lingering kiss, he was down below the covers, tracing tantalizing kisses across her stomach. He cupped her breasts, groaning as he softly pinched her nipples. Each pinch made her pussy throb, and then, he was there, head between her legs. She moved the blanket away so that she could see the top of his head—his thick, silver hair, and the muscular form of his shoulders. She watched as he moved, his body beautiful as he kissed her inner thighs.

Zara reached down and threaded her fingers through his hair, gently tugging, feeling the silky smoothness of it. Everything felt good, as though she was feeling things in high definition, as though her body was finally waking up.

“You’re beautiful,” Jaben said, looking up at her. “Just so damn beautiful.” Then, to her surprise, he touched the opening of her pussy. “And you’re so wet.”

“You did it to me,” she moaned. “You made me that wet.”

As he pushed the tip of his finger inside her, she shuddered with pleasure. Just that tiny motion was almost enough to push her over the edge. She knew she was close to a climax almost before he'd started.

With his finger still inside her, he slipped his thumb over her clit, rubbing her wetness over that nub of pleasure. He didn't push hard. He didn't overwhelm her. It was perfect, and she gasped. "This feels so good, Daddy."

"We haven't even started yet."

He kissed her— inches from her pussy—his beard scratching her soft skin, making her shudder at the closeness of him. "Please, Daddy, kiss me, please."

She didn't have to ask him again. His finger was replaced by the hot, soft, all-encompassing pleasure of his mouth. It was a true kiss—his lips on hers, almost like he was swallowing her up. As soon as he started pushing his tongue into her, it was like her body caught fire: intense, unstoppable, fierce. She gripped the bedsheets, screwed her eyes shut, but it didn't make a difference. There were colors dancing inside her eyelids. There was sensation all around her.

He kissed slow, then he scooped his hands under her butt, gently pushing her up to him. She was in his control, unable to do anything but give in to ecstasy. His tongue darted in, then up, licking her clit, eating her up, then plunging deep between her lips again, tasting her.

"Oh my god," she gasped, her voice strained, almost silent. How did this feel so good? What if it kept getting better? Was her brain going to melt?

The first orgasm, when it came, shook her out of her thoughts. It rocked and shook her body, making her muscles

tense and her face burn. She had to hold on because it felt as though she was going to take off. “Daddy!” she yelled, “I’m coming.”

Jaben didn’t stop—when she told him she was coming, he pushed two fingers into her dripping wet pussy, and started to devour her clit. He worked through it, and the more he touched, the more he fucked her with his fingers, the more he ate her, the higher and faster the pleasure pushed her, until she was so high that she could see the stars below her, looking up.

She breathed heavily, her chest flushed pink and her arms trembling.

“That was...” she trailed off, momentarily losing the ability to speak.

“Incredible.”

Jaben pushed himself up, and lay on her, his cock resting against her leg.

“It was incredible, Daddy.” She found the tip of his manhood through his underwear with a finger. “And I want to repay the favor.”

“Interesting. Come with me.”

CHAPTER 14

He wasn't taking her far. In fact, he carried her, naked, out of her room and into his.

"So, this is where you've been sleeping," she said. She felt so good against his body, so soft, so warm. He could scarcely believe that someone as gorgeous and young wanted to be with someone as battered and gnarled as him.

But it was happening.

"Kneel on the floor" he demanded.

"Yes, Sir," she replied, sensing the shift in their power dynamic.

He wasn't going to take things too far with Zoe—he wanted to ease her into this—but at the same time, he was a Dom, and she needed to be aware of that.

"I've been fantasizing about that pretty little mouth of yours," he said.

"It's hungry to taste you."

"Good. You're going to follow my instructions. To the letter."

"Yes, Sir."

He saw her face light up. There it was—the sub in her, coming out to play.

He walked over to the armoire in the corner of his bedroom. It was the same as all the others in the Ranch, and was kept well stocked with toys, lube, condoms, everything a Dom and a sub might want to spice up an encounter. Right now, he didn't need anything too complicated, just a little something to establish control.

“What are you getting, Daddy?” Zoe asked.

“You're about to find out.”

He chose a simple, black satin blindfold—something that would feel sensual and soft, at the same time completely obscuring what was going on.

Zoe looked up at him with those big, beautiful blue eyes. He thought he'd give her a little show—let her see exactly what was about to happen to her. So, before he put the blindfold on, he tugged his underwear down. They didn't leave much to the imagination as it was—the lump of his cock was clearly visible—but when he pulled them all the way down, his heavy cock sprung up just a touch, and Zoe's eyes widened.

“It's... you're... big, Daddy.”

“Remember, you're to follow my instructions.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Good girl. You're going to enjoy having Daddy's cock in your mouth, aren't you?”

“I can't wait, Daddy. Please.” She moistened her lips with her tongue. “I want to be a good girl for you.”

“I bet you do.”

Then, he carefully pulled the blindfold over her eyes, and tied it tight behind her head. He took a moment to look her over—her toned, slim body, generous breasts, and the bow-shaped lips he'd noticed the very first time they'd met.

“Pout for me, babygirl,” he said.

She obliged.

Jaben brushed the tip of his cock against those slightly moist lips. He was going to enjoy this—every damn second of it.

“Now open up for Daddy.”

He watched as she parted her lips, saw the dark pinkness inside her mouth. And then he pushed between those lips. It was heaven.

She moaned as she took him in.

“Let that jaw go slack. Don't fight it.”

Zoe did as she was told, and he pushed in farther. He was going to be gentle—it was her first time, and he wanted her to enjoy it.

“Now push those lips together, babygirl. Suck Daddy's cock. Harder.”

She formed a perfect seal around his dick and he started to fuck her face—slowly, painfully slowly for him—but it felt so damn good he didn't mind.

“I want to feel that dirty little tongue of yours,” he said. “Wrap it around me, move it in your mouth. That's it. You're doing a good job. I'm proud of you.”

Zoe was following his instructions just right. He loved it—the feeling of power he had over her, but also the respect and

trust she was giving him. He looked down at her perfect breasts, pink nipples puckered.

“I’m going to take my cock out now.”

She moaned, pushing against him.

“I want to fuck your tits, babygirl.”

He pulled out.

“Use me, Daddy,” she said.

“Good girl. You’re just for me, aren’t you?”

“I’m all yours to do whatever you want with.”

“Crawl to the bed. Hands and knees.”

As she crawled, he watched her ass, looked at the line of her soaking wet pussy, peeping out at him between her legs.

“Did I do a good job, Daddy? Did it feel good to use my mouth?”

“You’re doing the best job,” he said.

She lay on her back and Jaben crouched over her, sitting gently on her stomach, but keeping almost all his weight in his legs. He pushed her down just enough to let her know that he was in control of whether she could get up or not.

“I love having Daddy’s cock in my mouth,” she said.

“Push your breasts together.”

“Like this?” she asked, squeezing her breasts as he slipped his cock between them.

“Just like that, baby.”

His cock was still wet from her mouth, and it slid beautifully between her breasts. She looked so fucking sexy



like this, laid out before him to do whatever he wanted with. “Now open that pretty mouth.”

To fuck her mouth like this was incredible. He started slow, but it was so hot that he started to speed up. Zoe took him like a champion, opening wide for him, relishing the taste of him. Although this pleasure was for him, he couldn't help reaching an arm back, finding her pussy. As he touched her clit, she shivered beneath him. She was so fucking wet—feeling how turned on she was made his dick throb—he was so close he was practically aching.

“Fuck, baby, I'm gonna come. And you're going to swallow me up.”

She moaned—a deep, animalistic noise. Zoe was lost in the moment. He felt her pleasure peak—she quivered with ecstasy, the vibrations of her moaning feeling incredible against the tip of his cock.

Then, when he could take no more, he filled her mouth with his cum, his cock throbbing and pulsing between her perfect lips. When he'd finished, she gulped him down.

“Did I do it right?” Zoe asked, panting.

Jaben shifted his weight off her, slipping down next to her in the bed. He loosened the blindfold, took it away from her eyes. “Babygirl... you were perfect.”

The kiss was like magic.

“Daddy... that was... the single hottest thing that anyone's ever done to me.” Her cheeks were flushed pink.

“Oh, really?”

It was so wonderful to see her change. Now that the chains of the power dynamic had been relaxed by their release, Zoe

almost tripped over her tongue to get her words out, she was so excited. “I love being your dirty little subby, almost as much as I love being your sweet babygirl. When you put that blindfold on, it was like—instant subspace. You were in control, and I trusted you so much and everything was magnified, like I was on drugs or something, but obviously I *wasn't* on drugs, because I don't do—”

Another kiss, and his babygirl relaxed.

“Never heard you talk that fast before.”

“Well, nothing like that has ever happened to me before. I feel... well, I feel happy. Truly, truly happy.”

“I'm so glad.”

“Can we have sex now? Can you tie me up and have sex with me?”

She was grinning, clearly teasing. She stuck out her tongue.

“We can do whatever you like,” he said, squeezing her ass. “Although my advice would be for your first time to be more vanilla than that.”

“Interesting. How come?”

“So you can focus on the act—the sex, our connection, rather than all the swanky sub/Dom lacy dressing. Course, it's your body, and I'm not dictating the way you lose your virginity. But still, be worth thinking about.”

Zoe nodded. “I'll think about it.” She threw her arms around his chest. “You're the best, Daddy.”

“Hey—you excited about tomorrow?”

“Kinda. I'm nervous, too.”

Tomorrow was another big day for Zoe. She was due to spend a little time in the nursery with Nanny J. She'd never played as young as a baby before, and she had some trepidation about it. But the two of them had talked it over. They both thought it was worth her giving it a try, throwing herself into it.

“Remember, if you don't like it, it's not forever. You're doing great in Butterflies, and we don't want you feeling uncomfortable. It can help to get out of your comfort zone, though.”

“It's just... the diapers. Do I have to wear them?”

“It's up to you. I'd like you to try, but I won't be in any way upset if you don't. If you don't try, you'll never know.”

She nodded. The last thing he wanted was for her to feel uncomfortable. Thing is, he'd known plenty of Littles who weren't sure about wearing diapers who went on to totally love it. It didn't matter to him—he just wanted Zoe to be happy.

Just then, there was a heavy knock at the door.

“Ah, that'll be the diaper delivery,” he teased.

“You're joking, right?”

He smiled. “What do you think? I better go check out who it is.”

Zoe let out a little growl. “Don't want you to go.”

“*You* can go if you like?” Jaben replied with a smile.

“Daddy, nooooo! Please, I'm so cozy.”

“You know what, babygirl, I think you should go. Teach you a little respect for Daddy.”

“Ugh, fine. I’ll go, you monster.”

“Less lip,” Jaben said, as his babygirl wriggled into some of his sweatpants and a t-shirt. “Otherwise I *will* have to spank you after all.”

“I thought you liked my lip.”

She ducked out of the room before he could answer. He heard the door open, but there was no talking. A few moments later, Zoe returned. But she looked different. She was white as a sheet.

“Babygirl, what is it?”

“Nothing,” she said, trying to smile. “Just... someone got the wrong room.”

“You look like you saw a ghost.”

“Nope. No ghost. Nothing. Just... a funny tummy.”

“You sure?”

“Mmmhmm. Um. I think I should hit the sack. Big day tomorrow. Is it storytime yet?”

“It can be, babygirl, it can be. Wanna sleep in here tonight?”

She nodded and slipped between the sheets. As he held her, he could have sworn she was trembling.

Zara barely slept that night. How could she?

When she'd opened the front door, there was no one there. Instead, there was an envelope. She'd opened it up, and inside was a card with just one single sentence on it:

*I know who you are, Princess.*

Someone, here at the Ranch, knew who she was. As she lay there next to Jaben, she ran over the implications in her mind.

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad. Maybe they just wanted to... blackmail her?

No. That was terrible. Blackmail was awful.

Who would do something like this?

Of course, she thought instantly of Maisie. Maisie had been bullying her the whole time she'd been at the Ranch. She'd made fun of her accent. She'd gotten her into trouble with that prank. But why would she do something like this? For money? Could she just be trying to scare her, to make her life miserable?

Maybe she had even worse plans.

All of a sudden, a memory swirled up from her subconscious.

On the very first day she'd arrived at the Ranch, Moses had taken her bags. There had been a definite spark of recognition in his eyes. Jaben said that Moses was discreet, and she'd seen him around plenty since then. He'd always had a friendly smile for her. It just didn't seem right that he would be trying to blackmail her.

But he could have let slip to someone, who let slip to someone else.

Then of course, someone else could have just recognized her. She'd tried hard with a "disguise" to begin with. Changing makeup and changing her hair. But she'd grown a little lax with that stuff lately. Wearing a ton of make-up to preschool didn't feel right. And as for her hair... it always ended up doing its own thing, however she styled it.

Her thoughts went round and round and round in circles until finally, the sun came up and her Daddy woke.

"Morning, babygirl. Ready for a day of fun?"

"Of course."

It wasn't going to be a day of fun. Not even close.

\* \* \*

On top of the sickening anxiety she felt from the horrible note she'd received, there was the prospect of starting in the nursery that day. She didn't really know why this felt such a big step after preschool. Maybe it was because she felt like she had gotten the hang of preschool but was worried about

making a mistake. About acting too old, or just not being Little enough.

“I’m sorry you’re so nervous,” Jaben said. “If you really don’t want to do this, you know you don’t have to. If you want, I can talk to Nanny J and get you transferred to Butterflies for the day. Your friends there will be very happy see you.”

What he didn’t know, of course, was that the reason she seemed sick with nerves was also because of the note.

“No. I want to try. Whatever happens, I’m sure to learn something from all this.”

“I’m proud of you,” Jaben said, taking her hands in his.

“What are you going to do today, Daddy?”

Slowly his role had shifted away from that of a security guard, toward that of a Daddy. Zara had a strong feeling that Derek had known she wouldn’t need a bodyguard at the Ranch. He had probably wanted to match them up all along.

“You know, I think I’m going to check in on things in the dungeon and meet with Chief Lawson and have a look at the security cameras for the past couple days, see if I notice anything unusual. I’ve been a little distracted from my other duties lately. Better keep on top of things.” He leaned in close. “And while I do it, I’m going to be thinking about nothing but last night. And keeping on top of *you*.”

She smiled, for a moment lost in the beautiful memory of what had happened last night. Then, she remembered about the note, about the nursery, about everything.

“Right, let’s get in.”

He pushed the door open, and Zara's eyes widened in wonder.

\* \* \*

Everything was so... cute! The minute she walked into the nursery, she knew for a fact that she was going to have an amazing day. Screw the anxieties. Screw the hang-ups. It was time to relax deep into Little space.

Now, she'd seen Littles waddling the halls of the Ranch in diapers every now and then, but this was the very first time she'd seen so many of the puffy white crinkly things in one place.

The Littles who had already been dropped off seemed completely lost in their own worlds. Some of them sat and patiently stacked blocks. Some dragged huge, chunky crayons across massive pieces of paper. Others drank from teated bottles, cuddled by attentive staff members.

There were rocking chairs, stacks of thick, soft blankets, art stations laden with poster paint and chunky sticks of chalk. The walls were pastel colors, giving the space a reassuring, friendly feeling. There were also some oversized playpens, in which groups of Littles happily played with each other.

Zara got the appeal of the place instantly.

In here, there were no worries—none whatsoever. Your every need could be taken care of by someone else. No responsibilities, no expectations, no demands. All of the anxiety-provoking rubbish that came with adult life was left behind, replaced by tender, loving care.

Yep. She got it.



It was a powerful realization, and it brought up a swirl of emotions and memories in her. In a way, she knew that this was what she wanted: total acceptance. Unconditional love.

It made her think about her family and her own upbringing, about the demands that the station of her birth had asked of her. Zara didn't want to meet those demands. It felt like she had been born into the wrong family, and she was living the wrong life. She realized she was close to tears.

“Miss Franks.” That was Nanny J. She had something of a reputation for being a little stern. But her friend, Patti, had told her that once you got used to her demeanor, Nanny J was a total sweetheart. “So glad to have you in the nursery. We’ve been looking forward to getting to know you.” Nanny J was dressed in a similar manner to Miss Price—that same long black skirt, sensible shoes, and a starched white shirt. It felt as though she was a different species from the Littles who bumbled around in her care.

For some reason—maybe it was just because she felt so overwhelmed with emotion—Zara really couldn't bring herself to talk. She just nodded slowly, and then—in a moment that surprised even her—she raised her hand to her mouth and popped in a thumb.

“Seems my Little girl is feeling a bit shy. That’s not like you, Bandit.”

Zara buried her face into her Daddy’s chest.

“It’s all right, little one. You don’t have to talk.” Nanny J was giving her a soft smile.

“Hey, I got you something,” Daddy said, before reaching for his pocket. “You don’t have to use it, but I thought you might like it for comfort.”

It was a pacifier. Pink. Bright. The mouthguard studded with rhinestones.

Zara's mouth opened wide; her thumb fell out. How had he known? Still, she struggled for words, until, finally, she managed a small, "Thank you, Daddy."

"Why don't we get you changed into some comfy clothes and a diaper, and then you can go play with some of the others?"

"Oh... I'm not sure whether Zoe wanted to go *straight* into a diaper..."

Daddy was giving her the option, so she didn't have to have any kind of confrontation. But practically every other Little in the room was wearing a diaper. It might just be easier to fit in, then she wouldn't need to think about it.

Plus, it wasn't like she'd have to use it, anyway.

"It's okay," Zara said. "I'll try one."

"Good girl," Nanny J said, holding out a hand. "Come with me, little one."

Zara looked up at Daddy one more time, then took Nanny's hand.

\* \* \*

What surprised Zara the most about the diaper—or nappy, as she called it in British—was how comfortable and natural it felt. Sure, there was a slight waddle she had to affect with it on, but other than that, she barely thought about the crinkly pad that fit snugly round her bottom.

"Would you like a bottle?" Nanny J asked.

Zara nodded. Why not? Best to immerse herself in the experience.

Nanny J gave her a brightly decorated plastic bottle, full of milk. Zara instinctively lifted it to her mouth and experimentally chewed the teat.

“No teeth, baby,” Nanny said. “I know the plastic feels funny, but you’ll get used to it.”

“Sorry, Nanny.”

“No, no, don’t worry, you’ll learn soon enough. Come on, now. Let’s relax and have some fun. What would you like to do?”

Zara scanned the room, her eyes eventually landing on an adult-sized play kitchen over by a bright, light-filled window. “Make pancakes, please.”

“Perfect!”

Zara walked over to the kitchen and took hold of a plastic pan. She found some other chunky items—a bag of flour, a carton of milk—and set to mixing up some batter. She never felt much happier than when she was dreaming about pancakes. Connecting to those happy early memories was such a treat for her.

“Can I play?” That was another Little, with bright blue eyes and a tight unicorn top. She had dark, black, wavy hair in pigtails which reached down past her shoulders. “I’m Eloise, but you can call me Ellie.” She had a binkie in her hand and put it back into her mouth in between sentences.

“You can play, Ellie. I’m playing pancakes. I’m Zoe.”

“What toppings would you like?”

“Lemon and sugar?”

Ellie made a funny little face, her nose wrinkling up.  
“Sounds sour!”

“That what the sugar’s for.”

“I like your accent.”

Zara beamed. “Thank you. I like yours, too.”

“Mine’s just normal.”

“Not to me! Do you want to be in charge of the toppings?  
I’ll do the batter and the cooking?”

“Sounds great.”

It was a different way of playing. Today, in the nursery, Zara felt incredibly mindful and in the moment. It almost felt as though she was truly playing for the very first time. She’d never really thought about how plastic felt in her hands, never really stopped and thought about the smell of fresh, warm air coming through big windows. She’d never noticed as much as this. Noticing felt good. It made her feel alive.

Other Littles slowly joined in. They worked in shifts, coming up with new toppings and batter styles, but it was a slow, methodical process. Each time they came up with a new batch of pancakes, Zoe waddled over to Nanny J with a stack (the play kitchen came with some wooden pancakes and even a bright yellow knob of wooden butter) and presented them to her.

Obviously, Nanny J was quite busy, sorting through bottles and organizing diapers and binkies, but each time Zara approached, she made a big show of sampling the pancakes and pretending to be very impressed.

Occasionally, when she was deep at work, Zara used her pacifier. The soft plastic felt alien in her mouth at first, until,

after it had been in for a few minutes, it almost felt as though it was a part of her.

The more she sucked, the calmer she felt, the calmer she became, the less self-conscious she was about sucking.

How strange that if she'd been back in London, Zara would have been preparing for the Princess Pancake Party right now. Her old life seemed a world away.

It was only after a couple of hours, and a few bottles of milk, that Zara realized that she had, without realizing it, used her diaper. When a nursery aide whisked her away to a large changing table, at first, she felt a flush of shame. The feeling didn't last long, though. Within moments, she was changed and good to go. With a fresh nappy secured around her waist, she hurried back to her friends. Looking at all the other Littles, she realized—for the first time in years—that she really, truly, had nothing to feel ashamed of.

In that moment, all of the baggage she'd been carrying seemed to gently, softly, lift off of her, and she felt so light she could have floated up into the sky.

And then, something happened that shot her straight back down to earth.

“Zoe, sweetie, you need to come with me, please.”

Looking up, Zara saw Nanny J reaching her hand out for her to take.

“Why?” she asked, not failing to notice how the giggles and happy voices of her friends had gone silent.

“Just come along,” Nanny J said, closing her fingers around Zara's as she led her toward the door.

Zara gave a glance over her shoulder but instead of any clues as to whether this was normal behavior or not, all she saw were rounded eyes and looks of confusion. The moment she followed the nanny out the door and was handed over to a man she'd met only once, Zara knew something was horribly wrong.

“Don't be scared.”

The words might have been said in a familiar accent, but they did absolutely nothing to ease the worry that was already constricting her lungs.

“Is it my Daddy, Chief Lawson?” she managed to ask around the binkie in her mouth.

“No, little one, I promise your Daddy is just fine. Master Derek needs to see you in his office.”

Relief flooded through her until another voice rang out. A voice she instantly recognized. A voice regal, cold, and bitterly, bitterly disappointed.

“Zara Emmeline Cecelia Bunty Sussex, what the devil do you think you're doing?”

Zara looked up to see her mother, the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Head of the Commonwealth, and Defender of the Faith, standing in front of the door leading to the office of the Master of Rawhide Ranch.

It couldn't be real. She must have been taking a nap in the cozy corner. This was a dream. A nightmare.

There was no way on earth that she was standing in front of her mother, the Queen of England, in a diaper, sucking a pink rhinestone pacifier.

“Mum...” she murmured. “I mean, Ma’am...” Why was everything so deathly quiet? If she’d thought her friends had gone silent, this was far, far worse. Every person in the hallway stopped in their tracks, conversations and giggles halting mid-word. It was as if the very foundation of the building was holding its breath to see what was going to happen.

There was a look of pure thunder and disgust on the Queen’s face.

Then, from behind her mother, another familiar face appeared. Her best friend, Millie, stepped out and smiled sheepishly, before grimacing and shrugging.

CHAPTER 16

“There is no question. There is no room for negotiation. You are coming back to London with me on the royal jet, and we’re leaving”—her mother looked at her priceless Vacheron Constantin wristwatch—“in precisely ten minutes.”

Zara was in a state of shock. “M-mother, I don’t want to go back.”

“I’m afraid this isn’t a decision for you to make, Zara Emmeline.”

Zara hated the way her mother called her that. Every time she said it, it was like she was trying to twist her identity, make her into someone she wasn’t.

“How can it not be? What about Dr. Stanford? Being here is my prescription!”

“Thankfully, that quack is no longer a part of the royal medical team,” her mother said, not pausing for a moment. “Thank goodness for your friend Millie. If it hadn’t been for her, I wouldn’t have found you here.”

Millie. Her friend had told her mother about Rawhide Ranch because she’d thought that Zara was terribly sad. It was true that Zara had sent her an email when she’d been at a very



low place, and then—with everything that had been going on—she'd forgotten to send another one back.

Zara looked at Millie, and then she looked around at the faces of all her *new* friends. Her fellow Littles. Nanny J. They all looked in a state of shock. At least they all knew who she really was now. She didn't have to lie anymore. Only problem was... she wouldn't get to do anything here anymore. Her life was ruined.

She was about to say something, anything, to try to plead her case, but just then, Master Derek burst into the hallway, Erika on his heels.

“Ma'am,” he said to the queen, bowing his head slightly. “You were asked not to leave the lobby.” When the queen opened her mouth, Derek shook his head. “I must insist the three of you continue this in a private setting. Although I think the dungeon is free at the moment, I imagine the library might be more to your taste, Your Majesty.”

Millie's eyes had widened at the mention of a dungeon. She looked really guilty about giving the game away. Zara was upset about it, obviously, but it wasn't Millie's fault. Millie was just trying to protect her. If only she'd known that for the first time in her life, Zara *had* felt fully protected. This place, Rawhide Ranch, was her safe-haven.

The queen walked ahead of Zara with Derek. Obviously, she wasn't speaking to him, but she was clearly too angry to stand next to Zara. Millie, meanwhile, who'd realized what a terrible mistake she'd made, was desperately trying to apologize.

“I'm so, so, sorry,” Millie said, her normally pretty and carefree face twisted into a mask of anguish. “I didn't know you were happy here. I... I don't know what I thought. And

it's not like I sent a message to your mum saying, 'We need to liberate Zara from the perverts'. It was more like, 'I'm worried about Zara'. And then, your mum, being your mum, the questions started."

"It's okay," Zara said, trying her best not to sound too emotional. "I know you were trying to help. It's my fault. I should have sent you more emails. It's just, I got distracted." She lowered her voice, "Millie, I found a Daddy."

Millie's eyes widened. "You did? Seriously?"

"Seriously. He's... amazing."

"And not part of any of the Royal Families of Europe?"

"Um. No. Definitely not."

Millie grabbed her hand and squeezed it. When they had reached the library, her mother had stepped in first, not waiting to be invited in. That was unusual for her mother, who was normally polite to a fault.

Zara was about to follow her mother in when Derek stopped her. "Little one, I'm sorry. I had to let her in. She's... the queen."

"Don't worry, Master Derek," Zara said sadly. "I understand."

Who could say no to the queen?

\* \* \*

"You've caused me embarrassment before, Zara Emmeline. I'll never forget the night when you poured disgrace on our household."

Zara knew exactly the night her mother was talking about. During high school, Zara had a very bad time. After years of teasing, the other students picking on her for her obvious Littleness as well as her virginity, she hit rock bottom.

Zara decided that she was going to prove to everyone that she was a grown up. And in England, that meant one thing. Drinking.

The pictures of Princess Zara, drunk out of her mind, slumped against the railings of Buckingham Palace in a pool of her own vomit went viral. She'd been grounded for a full six months. No drinking. No socializing. Just working for charity and studying.

At the time, she'd felt so guilty she'd convinced herself she deserved it. After a month at the Ranch, she wasn't so sure.

Now, as she looked back at that night, she saw herself for what she'd been: a soul in conflict with itself.

"I'm proud of that night." Zara's voice was small, but it was resolute.

Millie had decided not to come into the library. Derek had offered her a tour of the Ranch while Zara spoke to her mother. It was just as well because this was a conversation for the two of them. Never mind that they were a princess and a queen. First and foremost, they were a girl and her mother.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You don't know what I went through in school, Mother."

"You went to one of the finest schools in the country."

"I went to one of the most *expensive* schools in the country."

“Waste of money. The way you squandered your opportunities was criminal. I’m not surprised that you’ve taken to wearing a nappy. You’re a big baby.”

Zara pursed her lips and put her hands on her hips. “Why are you here, Mother?”

“To take you home.”

“Why not send for me?”

“Because,” her mother said, gripping her Versace handbag in both hands, “I wanted to see it for myself. See the perverse, disgusting way you’ve chosen to live your life with my own eyes.”

Zara shook her head. “Please, just leave me. I’m happy here. For the first time in my life, I’m happy.”

“You’re happy because you’re not having to face up to reality.”

Zara raised her voice. “Exactly! Because my *reality* is being despised by the people I love most, just for being the person I am!”

For a moment, it looked as though her mother was trying to decide whether to shout at her or hug her. “The people you love most.”

“You. You’re my mother. I’ll always love you. If you trapped me in a cage for the rest of my life, I’d still love you. If you made me eat cabbage every day forever, I’d still love you. I can’t help it.” Zara was sobbing now, fat, ugly tears pouring from her eyes. “I just wish you loved me too.”

There was a pause. “Of course I love you.”

“You don’t. You love that you have a daughter. You just don’t love your actual daughter.”

“I... gave birth to you, Zara Emmeline.”

“You won’t even call me the name I like to be called.”

There was a momentary softening of her mother’s expression. “Zara. I gave birth to you. In our home. I remember your father passing you to me... God knows *how* I remember it. I was stoned off my nut.”

“Wait, what?”

“Oh yes. Laughing gas, an epidural, the full works.”

“Wait, does that mean you’ve actually laughed?”

A tiny slip of a smile lit up her mother’s face. “Very funny.”

“This isn’t even important, but... the nappies. I don’t normally do that. I just... the whole point of my being here—according to Dr. Stanford—was to find out about myself. Find out who I am and what I like.” She knew that she shouldn’t have to justify herself to her mother, and she didn’t want to seem like she *hadn’t* enjoyed wearing the diaper. She was just desperately searching for some way to get her mother to understand.

“Yes. Well. Clearly it was medical advice that I didn’t approve of.”

Zara breathed in deep. “But, Mummy, maybe it’s not your place to approve of my medical treatment. It’s meant to be confidential.”

“Zara, you’re fourth in line to the throne. If the papers got wind of this, it would be a bloodbath. Imagine it. Taxpayer’s money being used to send the princess to some kind of kink-ranch in America? It might undermine the whole institution.”

Zara clenched her teeth. She'd had an idea. It was make or break, and even as she said the words, she knew that she was saying something she could never, ever take back.

"I know. That's why I don't want to be a princess anymore."

Her mother's face stiffened. "It's your duty."

"I'm a liability. If I don't do something to bring disrepute on the family now, it'll just be a matter of time. I mean it, Mummy. I'm not cut out for life in the public eye."

"But... you're my little girl."

"I'll still be that. I'll always be your daughter. It just means that finally, I'll be able to be myself, too."

Her mother looked at her with soft, red-rimmed eyes. "This is why I came, Zara," she said. "Because I knew that if I sent someone else... they might bring you back."

Then, for the first time in years, Queen Charlotte reached out and hugged her daughter.

\* \* \*

Zara felt as though she was walking on air. Safe in the knowledge that her mother was waiting to be served a—no doubt delicious—dinner in the restaurant, she walked as fast as she could without breaking into an actual run, all the way back to her shared suite.

She opened the door and said, "Jaben? Daddy? I'm back, I'm back, and I've got wonderful news. M—"

There he was. But he didn't look happy. His face was grim. He had a bag packed and slung over his shoulder.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Zoe? Or Zara? My babygirl, or a goddamn... princess?”

“Daddy, I’m both. I’m sorry, I just—”

“You know, I never pushed it. Felt like I didn’t need to know who you were. But this is... it’s so big. You never felt like you could tell me?”

Zara felt panic rise up in her gut. This couldn’t be happening. She had to do something.

“It’s not like that. I wanted to tell you.”

“We played a princess game. You didn’t think that might be the time?”

“I really wanted to. Y-you don’t know what it’s like.”

He snorted. “That’s true. I don’t know what it’s like to live a life of luxury. To be waited on hand and foot.” He rubbed his temple. “Zoe—Zara—whatever your name is, I’ve had enough of people keeping things from me. I can’t do this. Not again. Not with someone I can’t trust.”

There was an impossibly pained expression on his face. And in that moment, Zara knew what she had to do.

“Okay,” she said, simply. “I understand. I’m through being a disappointment to people.” As she said it, fear coursed through her. Was this another moment like before? Had she said something that she’d never, ever be able to take back?

For a moment, Jaben paused, and it looked as though he was genuinely conflicted. Then, without saying another word, he walked past Zara, and out of her life.

## CHAPTER 17

It was the worst he'd ever felt. The sorrow was physical—like someone was dragging jagged rocks through his gut.

Jaben didn't have a plan. He didn't know where he was going to go or what he was going to do. He just knew, unequivocally, that he couldn't be at Rawhide Ranch anymore. He needed to get out and he needed to stay away. This place would always be the place he'd met, and lost, the love of his life.

As he staggered down the corridor away from Zara, trying to walk in a straight line, it felt as though he was in a bad dream. One of those dreams where you're walking through thick molasses, trying to escape danger in slow-motion.

Ahead of him, twilight. The world had no real color. His ears were ringing—he could hear his blood whooshing around his veins, and it made everything feel like it was buzzing with malevolence. And then, from behind...

“Jaben!” It was Master Derek's voice.

Jaben stopped in his tracks.

“Jaben, where are you going?”

He turned around. Master Derek stood in the lobby with his arms crossed.



“Away.”

Derek didn't look impressed. “As far as I remember, you're still on the clock.”

“Nope. I resign. As of right now. I'm through with this place. I'm through with matchmaking. I'm through with security. And I'm definitely through with princesses.”

Derek's eyes narrowed. “Talk to me, Jaben. Come to my office.”

“I mean it, Sir. I'm gone. Thanks for everything you've done for me. I appreciate the opportunity, I really do. But I can't be here anymore.”

He turned again and started to walk toward the exit. He had so many memories of this place, and they were all about to haunt him for the rest of his life.

“I hate to strong-arm you,” Derek said, a tone of steely resolution in his voice, “but if you leave now, you will be in breach of contract. Jared and I take issues like this extremely seriously. Walk through that door and the financial and legal repercussions will be severe.”

Jaben stopped again and let out an angry grunt. Then he turned. He didn't want to have to face legal proceedings, and he knew that Derek did *not* make idle threats. “Fine. I'll come with you,” he said moodily. “But don't expect me to talk.”

\* \* \*

Of all the times he'd been in Master Derek's office, this was the time that stuck out. The atmosphere was combative, and he really didn't want to be here.

As he sat across the desk from his boss, the truth slowly started to sink in. He'd lost her. His forever girl.

“What’s going on in your head, Jaben?”

“I told you. I’m not talking.”

“You’re acting like a child.”

It was annoying because it was so obviously true. Jaben took a deep breath. “Lots of people at the Ranch act like children.”

“You’re saying you want me to treat you like a Little?” Derek’s eyebrow arched.

“Fine. Fine. You want to know what’s going on in my head? I’m devastated. Fucking devastated.”

“I get that. I also understand how you might feel let down —”

“Let down? I’m not feeling *let down*, I’m furious!” Jaben cut in, his eyes blazing. “Can I go now?”

Derek paused for a moment. “Have you thought this through, Jaben? I mean really, truly through. You’re going to give all this away—your job, your lifestyle, your Little—because she didn’t feel as though she could tell you the whole truth about her identity?”

“It’s not like she lied about what college she went to, Derek. She’s a *princess*.”

“She didn’t lie. That’s my point. She didn’t tell you the truth, but she didn’t lie.”

Jaben scoffed. “Never heard of a lie of omission, Derek? Come on, you’re better than that.”

“Call it what you want.” He steepled his fingers. “You know, I remember when we first met. Your interview. You told me some interesting things about your past.”

“I was honest.”

“Sure. I knew I could trust you from the start. But what about your mother?”

Jaben felt like he’d been punched in his solar plexus. “What’s my mother got to do with any of this?”

“She lied to you. Didn’t she? Not even a lie of omission. A straight-up lie, wasn’t it?”

Jaben rubbed his temple. “That was different.”

“I don’t see how. You told me that for years, while you were a boy, your mother told you that your father was dead. Didn’t she?”

Jaben had a rough childhood. He’d been the product of a one-night stand between his mother—a waitress in a diner—and an alcoholic. As Derek had said, until he was thirteen, his mother told him that his dad was dead.

“He was a great man,” she’d said. “I loved him dearly and he loved you too.”

It was only on his thirteenth birthday, in a terrible, terrifying way, that he found out that his father still lived. As his mom was handing him his presents, there had been a rough, loud knock at the door. The man forced his way in, past his mother who looked like she was about to pass out from shock.

It was his dad. He’d escaped from prison. His crime? Murder.

A horrendous scene unfolded. Jaben's father, using him and his mother as human shields, in a hostage negotiation that ended in Jaben's father being shot and killed. It had taken Jaben a lot of time and counseling to put the trauma behind him.

"She was wrong to lie to me," Jaben said. "I could have dealt with it, with knowing."

"But... you understand *why* she lied to you, right? Because she was protecting you—her family. The person who mattered most in the world to her."

That's when it dawned on Jaben.

He'd been a moron.

Zara hadn't been lying to trick him. She hadn't been lying because she wanted to live out some kind of poverty-porn experiment. She'd been lying to protect her family.

Jaben's head pounded as the realization hit.

"I forgave my mom," Jaben said. "Didn't even fucking have to. It was obvious. She'd sacrificed everything for me. I knew that she loved me. I knew she had her reasons, even if I didn't agree with them."

Then it dawned on him. Zara had lied for Maisie, too. To protect someone who needed her help.

"Think how hard it must have been for Zara," Derek said. "She adores you. You can tell. She might have been lying about her past, but you can't fake the way she felt about you. I see the way she looks up to you. You've been the center of her life here at the Ranch from the moment you took her hand."

Jaben thought back to all the time they'd spent together.

Their play pancake party.

The hog-tie incident (holy shit, he'd hog-tied a princess).

Watching her blossom in preschool.

Being excited to see how she coped in the nursery.

It felt as though they had so much more to do. So much life to live together. Was he really going to give up on all of that? Was he really going to condemn himself to misery for the rest of his life?

Jaben shot up. "Fuck. I'm a fool."

Derek smiled. "We all make mistakes, Jaben."

"Derek, my job. I didn't mean that I—"

"I'm afraid you've tendered your resignation now, so—"

"But, boss, I—"

"I'm joking, Jaben. Sorry, I couldn't help myself. Of course you're welcome to keep working here, for as long as it serves you."

"Thank you. Now, excuse me, I've got to move."

And move he did. At a rate that drew suspicious glances from other residents and staff members, Jaben ran away from Derek's office, straight back to his suite. He unlocked the door and pushed it open.

"Zara, babygirl—" He stopped. She wasn't there. In her place, a note.

*Jaben,*

*I'm sorry I lied to you. You changed my life. I'll never forget you.*

*I love you,*

*Princess Zara Emmeline Cecelia Buntly Sussex*

Jaben looked left and right, harboring some mad hope that he might catch sight of her out of the corner of his eye.

But of course he didn't. She was gone.

She should have fought harder. She shouldn't have let him go. Everything was falling apart.

“Care for an aperitif, Your Highness?”

Zara sat in the back of her mother's favorite car—a fully armored, bulletproof Rolls Royce Cullinan. It wasn't quite the size of a limousine, but the layout allowed four passengers to sit facing each other.

It had been an easy decision to leave. Without Jaben, there was no way she could be happy at Rawhide Ranch. Every time she'd turn a corner, every time she'd open a door, every time she'd finish a day in the nursery, she'd see him, remember him, think of him. It would be torture, a raw wound that would never, ever heal.

Somehow, this had to be better, didn't it?

Going back to her old life—unfulfilled, but, at the worst, boring. Empty. But not agonized.

She sat facing her mother, who was looking a little sleepy. Next to her was Stephen Partridge, her mother's Private Secretary. He was responsible for making sure her mother's diary of public engagements and duties was followed to the

minute, and—of course—to make sure the queen always had access to little home comforts, no matter where she was.

Millie wasn't with them. She had decided to spend a little time in America. Much to Zara's jealousy, she'd be staying at Rawhide Ranch for a few nights, before deciding on some other places to explore. It was easy for Millie. She didn't have the kind of family pressures Zara did.

Zara imagined her friend, free and duty-less, carving a path of excitement and self-discovery across the most exciting country on the planet.

"No, thank you, Stephen," Zara managed, smiling tightly. "I'm not really in the mood."

"Of course, Your Highness." He turned to the queen. "Ma'am? A Negroni?"

"Very good, Stephen."

As Mr. Partridge poured her mother a drink, Zara was silently screaming. This wasn't right. This shouldn't be her life. She'd been so sure that she was staying. Her mother had even agreed that she could leave the royal household. A normal life had been within her grasp.

And then her Daddy, Jaben, had decided that the pain she'd caused him had been too much for him to bear. The moment she'd gone back to their room and found all his stuff gone, she'd run after her mother. She couldn't lose her Daddy and her mother all in one day.

"You make an absolutely wonderful Negroni, Stephen," her mother said, sipping the drink.

Zara looked at her mom, then looked past her, out of the window at the beautiful landscape of the state she'd been steadily falling in love with. She looked at Stephen Partridge,



a symbol of the repressed, emotionless, dishonest life she was going back to in England, and she couldn't help it.

The tears came, and they came quickly.

“Zara?” her mother asked, half-concerned, half-embarrassed. “What’s the matter? Have you forgotten something?”

“No. I just... miss it. I miss him.”

“Him?” Her mother raised an eyebrow. “You mean that Derek fellow?”

Zara laughed at the thought. “No. Not him. There was someone else. Someone special.”

“You... cared for him?”

“I love him, Mum. He was... everything to me. Like warmth when I was cold, water when I was thirsty, love when I was lost.”

The queen looked somber for a moment. “You know,” she said, “before I was coronated, when I was just a girl, before I met your father, I had someone else.”

Zara’s mouth opened wide. “Really? But I thought Father was your first.”

“Well,” her mother said, conspiratorially, “how about I keep your—ahem—*little* secret and you keep mine?”

“Of course.”

Stephen Partridge looked tactfully out of the window, pretending to be a million miles away.

The queen sighed deeply. “He was wonderful—a polo player, as it happens. Excellent... calves. And so handsome. Not just that, he was kind and witty.”

“What happened?”

“Well,” she said, a look of sadness washing over her face, “Edmund died.” Her brother’s death had been sudden and tragic and had changed the course of history. Overnight, Charlotte had become next in line to the throne. “I had to grow up,” she said simply. “And that meant the polo player was no longer an adequate match for me. In my father’s eyes, at least.”

“I’m sorry, Mummy.”

Her mother laughed, sipped her drink. “Don’t be sorry. You wouldn’t be sitting here if it hadn’t been for that particular twist of fate.”

Zara shook her head. “I’m sorry you had to suffer like that. It must have been... awful.”

It wasn’t often that Queen Charlotte looked vulnerable. “It broke my heart,” she said. “But it was for the best.”

“Was it?”

“I chose duty over happiness.”

“So you’re not happy?”

“I didn’t mean...” Her mother looked at her Negroni. “I’m very lucky. I know at the moment, this seems horrible. But in time the pain will fade, and then change. And one day, you’ll look back and laugh at the idea that you ever almost chose a different path.”

It was the least convincing her mother had ever sounded.

\* \* \*

Rain. For the first time since she'd arrived in Montana, the heavens opened. She'd been watching the clouds from the car window, watched them slowly expand and darken, until they were so huge and heavy it was a miracle they didn't fall from the sky.

Eventually of course, they did, in a trillion little pieces. Soon, they were a constant drumming on the roof of the car. Lightning arced across the sky, white and jagged, followed by a solid wall of noise that resonated deep in Zara's bones.

"Quick!" Stephen cried as they pulled up to the airport's VIP entrance. This particular model of Rolls Royce had an umbrella built into the passenger door, and Stephen expertly withdrew it before stepping out into the rain. "Your Majesty," he said, helping the queen out and under the umbrella.

Zara stepped out too, but there wasn't enough room under the umbrella. Of course, the monarch couldn't be seen to run anywhere, so the three of them started a stately walk to the entrance. By the time they'd finished the thirty or so meters, Zara was completely, utterly soaked.

"Oh dear," Queen Charlotte said. "We'll find you a towel somewhere."

The royal security detail were waiting for them at the terminal, and—sure enough—one of them did have a towel. Although they were flying by private jet, they would still have to wait for a while in the terminal. Most likely it wouldn't be too long.

Zara looked at the faceless security guards, all wearing black suits and white shirts. They had earpieces and dark glasses, in spite of the thunderous weather.

The terminal was a huge glass building, and the sound was outrageous. It was like listening to a thousand drummers all thrashing their drums at random as hard as they could.

She sat by herself, thinking through everything that had happened to her at the Ranch. It had been a rollercoaster of a trip. Shame it had come off the rails so badly at the end. Ah well. Back to a life of misery and duty.

For the first time in days, Zara took out her phone and checked the date. Huh. At least she'd be back home in time for Pancake Day. Not that there would be time to organize the competition. Not that she'd actually *want* to hold the competition.

Zara watched as her mother's private jet taxied across the tarmac and drew level to the walkway. This was it. The end.

\* \* \*

This couldn't be how it ended. Jaben pounded his fist on the horn. Ahead of him was a seemingly endless line of cars, a queue that stretched off in the distance toward the airport. Outside, a storm was raging.

He was so fucking close. Only a mile or so from the damn building. But the longer he stayed in this line, the less chance he had of ever seeing Zara again.

What could he do? He pounded the horn again.

*You're her damn Daddy, Jaben. A Daddy doesn't give up. A Daddy doesn't play by the rules. A Daddy doesn't roll over and take what he's given. Time to act.*

With a roar of anger, he yanked the steering wheel and pulled the car over to the side of the street. Then, he pushed

the door open, and started to run.

\* \* \*

“Ready for boarding, ma’am?” one of the faceless guards asked her.

“Sure,” Zara replied. She looked out of the huge windows again, watching the rain.

Goodbye, beautiful country.

And then, in the distance, something caught her eye.

The security guard followed her gaze, and then, when he saw what she’d spotted, he reached up and removed his sunglasses.

“What the...?”

A sodden figure streaked across the exterior of the airport. He was running at full pace, his body soaked to the bone by the rainstorm. It was Jaben. He was being chased by a full gang of what appeared to be airport administrative staff—clad in high-viz jackets and sensible shoes.

Instantly, Zara’s heart pounded.

He was here.

He was coming for her.

And then, when she saw the reaction of the security guards, she realized that he was in a hell of a lot of trouble.

“Who *is* that man?” her mother said.

Jaben drew closer. He must have seen the royal jet! The insignia of the Royal Family was painted clearly on the rudder at the back of the plane. He was going to find her!

“Don’t worry, ma’am. We’ll deal with the situation. He could be armed.”

“No!” Zara shouted, her voice shrill and terrified. “He’s not armed!”

“You know him?” her mother asked.

“That’s... my boyfriend.”

Her mother raised an eyebrow. “*That’s* your boyfriend. Looks even more athletic than a polo player.”

Zara ran forward, a wild smile across her cheeks. She dropped the towel and pushed herself up against the window, waving like a wind turbine.

Jaben’s eyes lit up, and he ran to the glass, dripping wet, still in the storm. He pressed himself up against it, separated from his Little girl by the thinnest of margins.

He mouthed something to her. She mouthed it back.

“I love you.”

Zara looked at her mother, with pleading eyes. “Mummy. Please.”

There was a moment, a split-second of softness and acceptance when Zara knew, she just *knew* that her mother got it. They weren’t that different after all.

“Open the door! Make sure he doesn’t get caught,” Queen Charlotte said. “Your Sovereign demands it.”

Moments later, the door was open. The soaking wet figure stepped through, then, before the pursuing staff could enter, the secret service members closed the door again.

“Babygirl,” Jaben said, emotion etched into his every feature.

She threw her arms around him. His wet body was solid as a rock, just like him, just like always.

“I’m sorry,” he said, holding her tight.

“I’m sorry,” she replied.

There was the polite sound of a very socially gifted woman clearing her throat.

“Damn.” Jaben sprang back, fixed his eyes on her mother. “Your Majesty,” he said, his voice quavering, “I’m... dang it, I had a whole speech prepped. Was running it over and over in the car. How did it s-start?”

“Pleased to meet you,” Queen Charlotte said. “I see you know my daughter.”

“For sure. Yep.”

The queen gave him a soft, tender smile. “Don’t worry about the speech. What was the gist of it?”

“The gist?”

“The main point.”

“Right.” Jaben drew himself up to his full height. “The main point.” He paused a moment. “I’m in love with your daughter.”

“I see. And how do you feel, Zara?”

“I love him, too.”

The smile that she saw on her mother’s face was the widest, most genuine she’d ever seen. “Well, then... who am I to stand in the way of love?”

To her surprise, Jaben scooped Zara up, high into his immensely strong arms. And as they kissed, they heard—together—the loving, accepting applause of the queen.

“What did you say his name was?” Queen Charlotte asked after they’d finished.

“I didn’t. But it’s Jaben,” Zara replied.

“Jaben?”

Jaben grinned. “Perfect pronunciation, Your Majesty.”

“I suppose that’s... a normal, American name?”

“If we have a baby,” Zara said, “we’re calling it Jaben Junior.”

“I’m so glad you inherited my sense of humor,” the queen said, sarcastically. Then, with a soft look: “Never lose your passion, Zara. And Jaben... welcome to the family.”



*Two weeks later*

Ahh, the smell of pancakes! The sweet, sugar-kissed doughy aroma! The warm, chocolatey, sprinkles-and-syrup perfection.

It hadn't taken much effort to convince Chef Connor to host the first annual Rawhide Ranch Pancake Day Party. The format wasn't quite the same as the parties that Zara was used to.

Together with Jaben, Chef, and Sadie, Zara had devised a competition that would let all the guests take part in the fun, without the danger of having a bunch of overexcited Littles rampaging through the kitchen.

"I think it *could* work," Sadie had said, slyly, when Chef had put his foot down about not letting everyone cook and toss their own pancake.

"Absolutely not." He crossed his strong arms.

"Seriously," Sadie said, mischievously, "what could go wrong?"

Zoe could just imagine the chef was seeing images of shrieking Littles covered in globs of batter, singeing

themselves on burners and tossing half-cooked pancakes at the walls, ceilings, and, inevitably, each other. She was proven correct when he shook his head as if to escape the very thought.

“Literally everything,” Chef replied.

So, it had been decided: Chef and his kitchen staff—as well as a couple of the Service Submissives who were on kitchen duty—would cook the pancakes. Littles could request changes to their batter recipe, but Chef could also refuse if the recipe sounded too outlandish.

“No gold leaf. No pearl dust. Nothing... unusual.”

Once the pancakes were all cooked, they’d be handed out to the Littles in the restaurant. Some of them—those who were serious about trying to win the competition—had requested specific toppings in advance. But the others who just wanted to have some messy fun, had been provided with a basic set of toppings to add to their pancake.

It wasn’t *just* the Littles who were competing, either. Zara had been on a recruitment drive with Luna and Mia, in between their duties. So far, she’d managed to convince Master Derek, Nanny J, Master Jared, and Angel, the chocolate-loving chef, to enter.

So far, the day was going well. Very well, in fact.

“I’m so glad you decided to help with the pancakes,” Zara said, beaming at Jaben.

“You kidding? Chef needs all the help he can get.” Jaben gestured at the monumental pile of ingredients. “We’ve got hundreds of eggs to whisk. Pounds and pounds of flour and sugar to sift. Dozens of pancakes to cook and toss.”

Chef threw an apron to Jaben. “Better get to work. You too, your highness.”

The kitchen transformed into a hive of feverish activity.

Eggs were cracked into huge metal bowls, and the clickety-clack of hand-whisks fired up. Zara was in charge of the sifting. A thin layer of flour slowly built up on her hands as Jaben tipped more and more of the powder into the sieve.

“Faster, Daddy!” she said, grinning.

“Watch your place, young lady,” Jaben said, giving her a knowing look.

“Yes, Sir!”

“But you’re right!” he said, before dumping a bunch of flour into the sieve and helping her sift it.

Over the past two weeks, through many discussions, Zara had come to suspect that her Little age was more fluid than she could have expected. There were days when she felt as though she was too old to spend time in preschool, and that she was more in a Middle mood.

Then, there were other days when she craved a little paci and diaper time. When she’d spoken to Jaben about it, she’d been worried that he might say that she just hadn’t found herself yet. But that wasn’t his opinion.

“Far as I see it,” he’d explained, “it’s not that you haven’t found yourself, it’s that yourself, your essence, is changeable.”

That felt true to her, and she felt lucky to have such an understanding Daddy, and the opportunity to further explore herself at the Ranch.

She began to sieve the flour again. As she did, she glanced around the rest of the kitchen. It was a hive of activity.

Chocolate was being melted with butter, sugar was being heated with bicarb to make cinder toffee, honey was being decanted into bottles. The smell was incredible. Ginger, vanilla, nutmeg, and lots and lots of butter.

It felt so good to be doing this with Jaben. To think that two weeks ago, she'd nearly lost her Daddy forever. She shot him a glance as he poured about thirty lemons-worth of juice into individual droppers. Why was it that every single thing he did was sexy? He couldn't even pour lemon juice without giving Zara palpitations. That man was pure, unadulterated sex.

Speaking of which, today was going to be a very big day—and not just because of the pancake party. As Zara moved around the kitchen, she felt it: her and Daddy's little secret.

Earlier that morning, as the two of them had talked about the day, Jaben had produced a little something.

“What's that Daddy?”

“Before I answer that, I want to ask you something.”

“Anything.”

“Are you ready for me to claim you?”

Her heart had raced. “Right now? We don't have much t  
—”

“I mean this evening, babygirl. After the competition. When we have all the time in the world.”

“I'm ready. So, so, so ready.”

“Good. Then today, I'd like you to wear this.”

He held out the object. It was a small piece of pink plastic, shaped like a 'C'.

“It’s an... earring?”

Jaben smiled. “Baby, this is a wearable vibrator.”

“Oh.”

“Sit up here for Daddy,” he instructed, carefully pulling her panties down.

She did as he asked, sitting up on a chair.

“I’m going to push this part in, okay?”

“Mmmhmm.”

He slipped the thicker of the two ends between her lips, and she gasped quietly as he adjusted it so that the other end was resting snugly over her clit.

“Now, this is all about trust. And stimulation.”

“What will it feel like when you turn it on?”

“Let me show you.” Jaben put his hand into his pocket, and a moment later, there was a pleasant tingle. Both tips of the vibrator buzzed inaudibly. It was whisper-quiet, but the effect was astonishing. Even though he only activated the vibrator for a moment, she felt her pussy start to bloom.

“Are you sure this is a good idea, Daddy? It’s going to be hard to judge the pancake competition if this is going off all the time.”

“That’s where the trust comes in,” Jaben said. “I promise you that I’ll only turn the vibrator on at appropriate times. I won’t embarrass you.”

They’d been playing trust games like this ever since their reconciliation. It was so wonderful to demonstrate how unconditional their trust in each other was, and to show that there were no secrets between the two of them anymore.

“Okay, Daddy. I trust you.”

“Good. And I promise you that by this evening, when you’re ready to give yourself to me, you’re going to be so wet and ready for me that you’ll beg me to fuck you.”

Zara gulped.

True to his word, Jaben had been selective about moments to activate the vibrator. He’d never activated it while Zara was talking to anyone, and he chose his moments carefully.

He’d only zapped her a couple of times—once as she’d gone to the bathroom, and once as she’d been opening huge sacks of flour. Both times, she’d managed to keep her squirming under control. Admittedly, in the bathroom she’d touched herself as the buzzer buzzed, but that had stopped the moment she got a message on her phone from Daddy saying: *I hope you’re keeping your hands to yourself in there.*

The knowledge that Jaben could flick it on at any moment was more powerful than the times he’d actually done it. It was as though she was walking around in a permanent state of semi-arousal.

All this, and pancakes too.

After the team had been working for about an hour, Master Derek and Sadie entered the kitchen.

“Is everything progressing on schedule?” Derek asked, giving each station in the kitchen a quick looking over.

“Of course it is, this is my kitchen, after all,” Chef Connor said.

“I can’t wait!” Sadie said, clasping her hands together in excited delight. “So many pancakes!”

“What topping are you doing, Sadie?” Chef Connor asked.

“No spoilers, please!” Zara said. “I want to be surprised and delighted by each entry as it arrives.”

“You can tell she’s done this before,” Connor said, grinning.

Derek took a moment to talk to Zara and Jaben. “Good to see you both here. I have some news. Your application for accommodation up at Rawhide Ridge has been successful. We have a range of properties available to you, or, if you’d prefer, we can discuss a bespoke construction program. The choice is yours.”

Zara’s heart raced with excitement. This was it—she finally had a home. A real home, the kind of place she knew, instinctively, she’d never, ever want to leave.

“We’ll have a talk, huh, Bandit?” Jaben asked.

“Pancake house,” Zara said, folding her arms. “I want a pancake house.”

Just then, Nanny J poked her head around the doorframe. “The Littles are waiting patiently in the corridor outside the cafeteria. Shall I instruct them to enter?”

Chef Connor looked to Zara.

She checked the pancakes—the first batch were in the pans, almost ready to toss. “I think we’re good to go.”

\* \* \*

It was chaos. The kind of chaos that Rawhide Ranch does really well. Structured, managed, dangerously-close-to-spilling-out-of-control, chaos.

Zara sat at a table on one end of the cafeteria and surveyed the scene that was unfolding. Littles were clustered around tables with trays of toppings and pancakes to decorate. There was molten chocolate and spice in the air, and lots of sloppy, sticky toppings were sloshed around the place.

“Why did I agree to this?” Chef Connor—who was sitting next to Zara—asked.

“Because you get to taste the pancakes, too?”

Connor eyed a nearby Little who was stuffing a pancake with cheese, tomato puree, bacon, and maple syrup. “Can’t wait,” he said, sarcastically.

Lucky for him, he didn’t have long to wait.

The Littles started to line up in the order they’d finished decorating their pancakes.

First up was Daisy Grace. Her blue eyes twinkled as she pushed the pancake in front of Zara and Chef.

“I call this one... The No Onions.”

The pancake was, as far as Zara could tell, completely devoid of toppings, except for a couple of edible flowers and a drizzle of sugar syrup. It was surprisingly pretty.

“The theme is... no onions.” She laughed.

Zara took a tiny bite, making sure to include the blooms as well as the syrup. She had a sudden thought—what if her Daddy were to press the buzzer right now, while she was in front of everyone?

He wouldn’t, she was sure, but there was always a chance, no matter how tiny.

“I like it,” Zara said.



“I can’t believe a princess is trying my recipe!” Daisy said.

“Not really technically a princess anymore,” Zara said.

“You’ll always be a princess to us here, Zara.”

It hadn’t taken long for her to be officially written out of the inheritance for the throne. Her mother still insisted that she’d inherit a portion of her estate when she passed on, but there was no chance now that Zara would ever be queen. It also meant that the press suddenly lost interest in her. The official story was that she’d gone to live in America to pursue personal interests. There was always a chance that one day a nosy reporter might show up at the Ranch to ask questions, but Master Derek had promised her that he’d do what he could to keep her life private and keep her safe.

“Thank you, Daisy,” Chef Connor said, “for this elegant, refined pancake.”

Next up was a tall, curvy Little called Hayleigh who Zara didn’t know so well. She happened to be Chef Connor’s wife and Little.

“I’m going to sit out the judging on this one, jellybean,” Chef Connor told Hayleigh. “But I’ll taste it, of course.”

“Oh good. I was worried you might not taste it, Daddy.”

“This looks... interesting,” Zara said, trying to work out what she was being presented with.

“Um, it’s meant to be a kitty. See, the orange marmalade? Meant to be cheeks. And those chocolate streaks are kinda the whiskers?”

“I *thought* it was a cat,” Chef Connor offered.

“I see it now!” Zara exclaimed. It was kind of cute, other than the strange, jelly-like mounds of marmalade on the

pancake's "cheeks".

"Taste it!" Hayleigh urged.

They did. This one was good—it reminded Zara of a favorite Christmas treat back in Britain—a Terry's Chocolate Orange. It was a ball of chocolate, cut into segments like an orange. Delicious.

"I really like it!" Zara said.

"Daddy," Hayleigh said, "I've been so good. Maybe I *should* win this—"

"I hope you're not asking me to cheat for you, jellybean?"

"Of course not." Hayleigh laughed nervously. "I was just teasing, Daddy."

The judging process was long, involved, and very, very filling. Even with taking the smallest possible bites, by the time the line of Littles had diminished, Zara was starting to feel full.

They saw some wonderful creations, and some... not so wonderful ones.

There was the "Little bit of Everything," from Nat, which was literally a pinch of every single topping she could get her hands on. Then there was the "Red Raspberry Revelation" from Amy, which was absolutely delicious.

Eventually, though, Zara started to develop taste blindness, which is when she knew things were getting tough. She even started to feel sleepy. Until a familiar face appeared in the line.

It was Maisie.

Zara's heart skipped a beat. She hadn't seen Maisie for the past couple weeks, and she was shocked that she'd entered the

competition. Maisie gave her a sheepish look, then pushed her pancake forward.

It was plain, except for a single word, written in chocolate across the middle.

*Sorry.*

“This one’s just for Zara. It’s an apology pancake.”

“It’s okay, Maisie. I’ve forgiven you already.”

“I sent you a note. Did you get it?”

Zara had almost forgotten about the note. As soon as her mother had shown up and blown her cover, it almost didn’t seem to matter anymore. So it *had* been Maisie.

“I got it.”

“I knew who you were from the start,” Maisie admitted. “Got me kind of angry. It’s why I was mean. Because you were lying to us.”

“I understand.”

“You don’t know what I’ve been through.” Maisie looked so sad, so distant. “I don’t want to go into it now. It’s not your fault, and I don’t want to spoil the party. Just... believe me when I say that a lot of the girls and boys here didn’t find their way to Rawhide because they have a lot of money. Quite the opposite.”

“I’m sorry, Maisie.”

“Anyway. Who you are isn’t your fault. And I get why you lied now. You had no choice.”

“I would have been angry in your place, too. I’d have wondered why a princess would need to spend time at a place like Rawhide Ranch.”

“Everyone has problems. I see that now.” Maisie sighed. “Maybe we can be friends?”

“Of course.” Zara took a bite of the pancake. “This could be the most satisfying pancake yet.”

The entries kept coming. There was the perfect picture of a whip, rendered in icing and chocolate, from Master Derek. There was Angel’s dangerously decadent quadruple chocolate creation. Then there was Sadie’s “Prankcake” which had salt as the main ingredient.

Her best friend, Millie, who’d extended her stay at the Ranch, and who had been making full use of a number of the facilities offered, had produced a delicious pancake that was covered in crystallized ginger and honey.

“This one’s very good,” Zara said, “but you can’t win! You’re my best friend.”

“I know, don’t worry. Hey—I forgot to tell you. I’m going to be leaving soon.”

“You are?”

“Uh-huh. I got a job.”

“You did?” The idea of Millie taking work when she was so wealthy seemed faintly ridiculous.

“Yeah. I’m feeling pretty bummed about leaving. I was just starting to feel at home here.” She swallowed, looking around nervously to make sure that nobody was listening. “Zara, I think that I might... that I might be a...”

Zara knew what Millie was trying to say. She didn’t need to feel awkward about it. Millie was *obviously* a secret Little. That’s one of the reasons that the two of them were best friends. They were like two peas in a pod.

“Anyway,” Millie said, chickening out and changing the subject. “I’ll be working at a different ranch. Like, a *ranch* ranch. Working with horses.” She screwed up her mouth. “My dad’s kind of making me do it. We had a bit of a falling out. It’s the other reason I’m here. Anyway, look, we’ll talk about it later, okay?”

Millie sighed. There was clearly a lot more to the story. Zara hoped that she had a chance to find out about it before her friend left Rawhide.

By the time the final entrant was standing in front of her, Zara had been taken to heaven and back by some of the entries, and her jaw was aching from all the laughter.

The last pancake, though, belonged to her Daddy, Jaben.

As soon as he put it down on the table, she knew exactly what was going to be inside.

“Lemon and sugar?” she asked.

“You got it, babygirl.”

“I’ve tried this before,” Chef Connor said. “Zara made one for me.” Chef Connor—who’d been taking conspicuously bigger bites than Zara, took a moment to loosen his belt buckle a couple notches. “But I like that it’s light.”

Then, he took a bite. “Well... this is... delicious. It’s so delicate.”

“It’s the Amalfi lemons,” Jaben said.

“Of course! So you’re the one who put in that order!”

“Babygirl,” Jaben said, “why don’t you try?”

She rolled the pancake up and cut a section before slipping it into her mouth. The taste was wonderful—exactly as she

remembered the very best pancakes from her childhood. She closed her eyes in pleasure and then, just as the taste was intensifying, she felt it—a small, insistent buzzing between her legs.

She took in a quick gasp of air, trying to seem like everything was normal, but the buzz kept going, making her insides do somersaults as she finished her mouthful. The combination of the flavor and the sensation was so absurdly intense that she had to clamp her legs together to stop herself from coming right there and then.

“You like it?” Jaben said, removing his hand from his pocket.

“It was... perfect.”

Then, even though Jaben’s hand was out of his pocket, the buzzing started again.

The spring sun was setting as they walked together back to their shared suite. The chatter of happy Littles was all around. After Zara had declared the winner—Amy’s Red Raspberry Revelation had prevailed in the end—the leftover pancakes were shared around among the competition entrants.

Most of the Littles were now in a kind of sugar coma, staggering the hallways of Rawhide Ranch on their way back to their various rooms and play spaces.

Some of the responsible Bigs were doing their best to keep the stampede under control.

Zara though, with her little hand in Jaben’s big one, barely took in her surroundings. In fact, the only thing she could concentrate on was the vibrator going berserk in her pussy.

“Daddy, it feels very... powerful.”

“I think it’s stuck,” he hissed back.

As he said the words, the intensity seemed to increase a notch or two, forcing Zara to moan softly. Then, as she took another step, her legs buckled from the pleasure. Luckily, Jaben was there to keep her from falling.

“We’ll take it out just as soon as we’re back,” he said.

Thing is, there was a part—a big part—of Zara’s brain that was screaming: LEAVE IT IN!

The waves of pleasure she was experiencing abated for a moment.

“I don’t know how I managed to hand out the prize,” she said. “It was like...” The buzzing started again and she had no choice but to surrender. “Nnggg nothing else.”

“Not long now,” Jaben said, seeming genuinely concerned about his Little’s plight.

He guarded her as they approached their room, then gently pushed the door open. “Now come on,” he said, “lie on the bed and I’ll get that thing out of you.”

Zara crawled onto the bed, sticking her ass up in the air like a cat in heat. Jaben pulled her skirt up and quickly tugged down her panties.

Now that they were away from prying eyes, Zara had a moment to actually appreciate the sensation of the vibrator. She lay down on the bed and just *felt* the buzz against her clit, against her super-sensitive, super-wet pussy. She let out a low, soft moan that carried on, and on, *and* on.

“I think my babygirl might quite like it,” Jaben said, his voice full of sudden, dripping arousal.

“I *do* like it, Daddy,” she said.

“Want me to take it out?”

She felt his warm hands on her thighs, gently pushing her legs apart.

“Daddy, I’m so wet.”

“You’re ready for me, aren’t you?”



“Please,” she moaned, gripping the bedsheets as another wave of pleasure washed over her. “I want you so bad. I need you to show me how it feels. Teach me, Daddy.”

There was the briefest pause as Jaben grabbed a condom from the armoire and returned to her. A moment later, his pants were down, his t-shirt off over his head.

“Put this on me,” he grunted.

“Yes, Sir,” Zara said.

“Take your wetness,” he said, his voice deep, resonant, irresistible, “and rub it on my cock.”

She shuddered as she touched her soaking wet pussy, collecting her wetness, then she rubbed it on Jaben’s fast-thickening cock, marveling as it grew in her hand. She took a moment to marvel at how her slickness looked on the soft skin of his hard cock, then, at his command, she slipped the condom onto his tip.

It was so erotic, to push the condom over him, to feel his size beneath her hands.

“Over on your back,” he said, firmly. “I want to be able to look you in those beautiful eyes.”

Zara flipped over, staring at him. He was just the way she remembered him the first time she ever set eyes on him—imposing, stern, but so, so handsome. She reached up and touched his cheek.

“I’ll never forget this moment, this day, this time with you.”

“I’m your Daddy, I’m your Dom, but this is your first time—I want you to tell me if you need me to stop, okay?”

“Okay, Daddy.”

She felt so safe with him, so happy. She knew that no matter what, Jaben would always put her needs before his own. A moment later, he reached down and gently, slowly, softly pulled the vibrator out of her. She missed the sensation instantly, but she didn't have long to wait before she felt the hard tip of his cock, resting gently against her entrance.

“Ever since the first time I met you,” he said, brushing a strand of her messy hair out of her eyes, “I knew you were special. But the more I got to know you, Zara Sussex, the more special you became.”

It felt so good to hear him use her real name. She had grown used to being Zoe, but there was nothing quite as powerful as the truth.

As he pushed into her, stretching her wide open, she gasped. She felt her arousal peak—and her pussy immediately wanted more.

“I was scared of you,” she panted. “I never knew, I never dreamed that you—that anyone—could make me feel like this.”

The sensation was familiar, but wholly new, too.

As he pushed into her, she felt a moment of crazy, unbound, delirious happiness.

For so long, she'd wondered what it would feel like. She'd worried about how it would happen, about who it would be with.

And somehow, against all the odds, this was the most perfect way that this could have ever happened.

“Your cock feels so, so good, Daddy,” she purred. “I love it.”

“My cock loves you right back,” he growled.

He pushed in deeper, slowly showing her what it meant to be with him—to be with a real man. There was a moment of discomfort, but only a moment, and even that wasn't unpleasant, exactly, just a tension that had to be released. She wanted more of him, needed more of him inside her, and she'd do anything to make that happen.

“This is perfect,” she sighed, her pleasure starting to build. Then, in a moment that she didn't fully understand, she said, “Daddy, I'm sorry I'm not a princess anymore.”

“What do you mean?”

“I guess... I used to be special. My title was about the only thing that was special about me. Now... I'm just me.”

“What you are is *perfect*. You're a kind-hearted, creative, hard-working, sensitive young woman who'll do anything to stick up for her enemies, let alone your friends.” He gently placed a hand on her heart, his cock still deep in her, his body and hers joined as one. “Your heart is all that matters, babygirl. You'll always be my princess. No matter what.”

And then, he pushed in even farther. Her eyes widened as she took the full length of him into her.

“Oh my goodness,” she gasped.

“You feel incredible,” he said, leaning in, letting his lips brush her neck. “The very best, babygirl.”

She wriggled a little, tightened her pussy around his cock, starting to feel warm waves travel around her body as she began to hum harder than the vibrator had done.

“You're mine,” Jaben said, kissing her lips, gently biting, slipping his tongue into her as his cock pulled gently out,

nearly all the way, teasing her before he pushed it right back in.

She was so sensitive, she virtually gasped every time he parted her lips again, gasped as he kissed her, gasped as he swallowed up her nipple in his warm mouth, gasped as he bit down, made her body shake with anticipation, with desire, with need.

“There’s no one else,” she whispered. “You know me like no one else.” She found his hand and took it in hers. “Daddy, am I doing it right? Am I being a good girl for you? Is my pussy making you feel good, Daddy?”

He growled with desire, starting to move more quickly in and out of her. “You’re doing it just right, baby. You’re moving perfectly, just perfectly.” She slid her butt on the sheet in time with his movements, intensifying the feeling. It was like they’d been built for each other—his cock, her pussy; his hand, her breast; his mouth, her mouth.

The moment stretched out as he started to move more quickly. With fingers entwined, he kissed her neck and then, with a smooth movement, he scooped her up, holding her body in the air. His cock was still in her. His thick arms bulged as he lifted her up and down, using her for his own pleasure as her pussy ate him up.

“Daddy, fuck!” she cried, and an instant later, she felt the slap of his hand against her butt, then the perfect agony of his fingers squeezing, pinching her soft flesh.

“No cussing,” he growled.

“Fuck me, Daddy,” she yelled.

Another slap, across the center of her cheeks, his cock moving in and out like a piston. How was he holding her up

like this and spanking her at the same time? His strength was immense. If he wanted to, he could hold her so tight she would never, ever escape.

“You fuck so good, Daddy,” she moaned, kissing his powerful chest, “you fuck me so good I forget myself.”

With a bestial roar, he pushed Zara up against the wall. She felt the cold of the surface against her ass as he made her his, the cadence of his thrusts increasing. “I said no cussing.” Jaben took hold of a nipple and started to pinch. The moment he did, Zara felt an explosion go off in her pussy—it was like he’d tied a thread of pleasure to it, and every time he pinched and squeezed, she was launched higher and higher up into ecstasy.

“Daddy, I’m gonna... I’m gonna...”

“You wait,” he said. “Daddy says when you can come.”

“Please,” she moaned, “I can’t take it, when you’re fucking me this good I just—”

She gasped as he squeezed even harder, taking the sensation to a new level. Then, he pushed his cock all the way in, so far that her mouth opened wide and her eyes practically popped out, then he said, as he quickly let go of her nipple, “Now, come for Daddy.”

And as she did, as her body succumbed to the endless waves of tension and release, she felt his cock throb within her. His lips found hers, and as the princess and the pauper came together, the world stood still, just for a moment.

\* \* \*

It was later, when they lay happily dazed in their shared single bed, that Jaben sheepishly grinned at her.

“With all the excitement,” he said, “I forgot your present.”

“A present? For me, Daddy?”

“Mmhmm,” he grinned. Then he reached down, under the bed. “Been hiding him down here for days, waiting for the right moment. I got you this guy because he reminded me so much of you.”

“What have you got me, Daddy?”

He showed her. It was a stuffie, but not just any stuffie. He’d got her a sunshine stuffie. It was the sun, wearing shades. In that moment, she thought back to the stuffie she’d had when she was a kid—the little frog she’d called Mister Sunshine. Memories came flooding back—that unconditional love that had been missing from her life for so many years.

As she sniffled, Jaben said, “You okay? You like him?”

“I love him.”

“What you gonna call him, Bandit?”

She smiled. “Froggy.”

Jaben raised an eyebrow, confused and amused in equal measure.

“It’s a long story,” Zara said.

Luckily, she had all the time in the world to tell it. She looked down at her unchewed, brightly painted fingernails, then she opened her mouth and began to talk, more herself than she’d ever been.

THE END

\* \* \*

*Thanks so much for reading! Want to find out how Millie's new job as a stablehand at Littlecreek Ranch goes? Everything is going great for her until she meets her new boss: total Daddy-Dom material. Shame he's off limits because he's her father's best friend... [Read her story here!](#)*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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I write cute, HOT age play romances. My books are full of heat, heart, and VERY satisfying happy ever afters. Oh, and I like cats, chocolate, forest walks. And a little kink on the side, obviously! OK, a LOT of kink...