

BAYLEIGH RAE



LAS VEGAS LITTLES BOOK TWO

MARIAH

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CONTENTS

[A Note From The Author:](#)

[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](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[About Bayleigh Rae](#)

[Also By Bayleigh Rae](#)

[Red Hot Romance](#)

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, places, locales, and events are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, places, and events are purely coincidental.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:

While in my books I often write about and believe in spanking, discipline and age regression as having therapeutic healing benefits, the truth is, it isn't always the case, and while there is scientific proof of the benefits, it is not a fix-all.

In this story, my hero deals with and heals from a failed past relationship in which his efforts, his love, and the benefits of the lifestyle weren't enough and he had to walk away for his own mental health.

To be clear, this story does not deal with topics such as suicide or self-harm, but it does talk about self-loathing and deals with the reality of toxic relationships even between a Daddy and a Little. Because the reality is, toxic relationships are a thing, and the Daddy/Little dynamic is not exempt from that reality.

In the end, this is a love story and a story of healing and finding the right person. And everyone gets their happy ending.

CHAPTER 1

Mariah

“And this is my new crib, and my changing table, and my dresser and my toy shelf.” Margo led her around the room, giving her a tour of Margo’s Daddy Knox’s new suite.

“It’s beautiful,” Mariah breathed, only slightly jealous. She had a beautiful room upstairs in the penthouse with her friend and roommate Jade and it was perfect for her. What she didn’t have that Margo did was a Daddy of her very own.

“Does this mean you are gonna stop living in the penthouse with us and start living down here with Knox?” Mariah asked. She was happy for Margo, and she knew Little girls should live with their Daddies but Margo and Knox had been taking it slow while Knox worked on renovating this suite for the two of them. They’d been Daddy and Little girl for two months now, and during those two months, Margo had continued to live in the penthouse with their House Daddy, Baze, his Little and wife, Luna, who was also their best friend, and her and five other Littles. The idea that this could be the end of Margo living with them churned her stomach and made her feel like crying.

Margo shook her head. “We talked about it, but I’m still not ready and Knox is working long hours. I’m gonna do about half my time in the penthouse and half down here. It will be a lot easier now that I have my own space and my own things, and I won’t have to pack a suitcase just to stay overnight.” She giggled. “And Daddy won’t have to lay a towel on the floor just to change my diapers, so that will be nice.”

“Very much an upgrade,” Mariah agreed, spontaneously launching herself at Margo as she threw her arms around her friend’s waist in a tackle hug. Margo stumbled from the force and they fell onto the bed with Mariah’s arms still wrapped around Margo’s waist.

“Hey, what the heck!” Margo exclaimed as she disentangled herself. “I mean, thank you for the hug, but what was that for?”

“I’m just... really happy for you,” Mariah told her, “but I’m also really glad you’re not leaving us just yet.”

“Even when I do, I’ll only be going down one floor,” Margo reminded her.

“Yeah...” Mariah traced a circle on the bedspread with her finger. “It’s just... it’s dumb. Like we all want Daddies of our own right? That’s the dream? But when we get it... then everything and our family gets smaller.”

“No. That’s not true.” Margo shook her head emphatically. “The family we live with might get smaller, but our family gets bigger. It’s like... before Baze, it was just the seven of us. Then he found us and we added him to our family. And now Knox is our family too. And when you and Tessa and Ellie and Jade and Jilly get Daddies, our family will get even huger!”

“I guess that’s true.” Mariah sighed. “Ignore me. I’m just in a mood.”

“What’s this now? What’s huge and why are you in a mood?” Knox came in from the living area, and sat down on the bed next to Margo, pulling her into his lap and planting a kiss on the top of her head. “Were you showing Mariah all your new things?”

“Yes, Daddy, and we were just talking.”

“I think I caught the tail end of it. Just enough to be thoroughly confused.”

Mariah felt bad for confusing him even though she knew she shouldn’t. It wasn’t her fault he’d been in the other room. Margo filled him in before she could.

“Daddy, Mariah and I were just talking about how when all of us find Daddies, we won’t all live together anymore. Mariah was saying our family was gonna get smaller and I was telling her it’s just gonna get bigger and bigger. Even if we don’t all live together, we’re still family.”

“I hope that’s true,” Knox agreed. “I certainly think of you, Baze, Luna and all the others as my family.” He smiled at Mariah. “And I hope you know you’ll always be welcome here. Maybe we’ll have to plan a sleepover soon.”

Mariah smiled. She liked Knox a lot. He was warm and kind, and always gave her good advice. “Thanks,” she answered genuinely. “I told Margo to just ignore me. I’m in a mood apparently.”

“Anything you want to talk about?” Knox asked.

“I think Margo just about covered it. I think I always go a little stir crazy when the weather starts to warm up again. And... I miss working. I get why Baze doesn’t want us to do

what we were doing before—walking the strip in skimpy costumes and posing for pictures with tourists—but I need more in my day than puzzles and coloring and naps and chores.”

“Have you told Baze that?” Knox asked her.

Mariah bugged out her eyes and shook her head, gnawing on her bottom lip. “I can’t! I don’t want him to think I’m ungrateful or don’t appreciate all he does for us. I’m just... used to having lots of work to do. I grew up on a farm. But then I came to Vegas. So it’s my fault anyway and I just need to get over myself. Maybe I need a hobby or something.”

“A hobby might help,” Margo’s Daddy agreed. “But you shouldn’t settle for a hobby if it’s a job that you want. Baze will understand, and he won’t think you are ungrateful. Trust me. And trust him. Just make sure you are honest and respectful when you talk to him.” Knox smiled. “You know, I think I finally talked him into hiring a cook so we didn’t have to stop what we were doing three times a day and spend an hour cooking and serving. You said you liked working in the kitchen, so maybe start there. See if the new chef will need any help.”

“But it’s rude to ask Baze to give me a job and pay me when he already does so much for me,” Mariah countered, worrying her lip. Everything Knox was saying made sense, and she wanted him to be right, but she was also concerned about hurting Baze’s feelings.

“Mariah... I hear what you are saying, but the truth is that Baze is gonna have to hire and pay someone. It might as well be someone he knows he can trust. It might as well be you.”

This time her smile was genuine and she felt a thousand times lighter. “I guess that’s true. Thanks, Knox.” She stood

up. “I’ll get going so you guys can have some alone time.”

“Don’t rush out on my account. You’re welcome to stay and hang out as long as you like. I think we were just gonna turn on a movie and have some popcorn. You’re more than welcome to join us.”

“Thanks, but”—Mariah grinned—“I’m gonna go talk to Baze. I want to get it done before I lose my nerve.” She waved her fingers as she walked to the door. “Wish me luck!”

“Good luck,” they called out as the door closed behind her.



Mariah

Squaring her shoulders, Mariah burst into Baze’s office and walked right up to his desk, waiting for him to notice her.

He glanced up but kept working. “What can I do for you, Mariah?”

She started to lose her nerve immediately. “I... um... I want a job, Sir.”

Baze immediately stopped typing and folded his hands on the desk in front of him. “First of all, Mariah, it’s Mister Daddy to you,” he said, reminding her of his preferred title.

Baze was Baze Patrick, a billionaire hotel mogul who had found Mariah and her friends squatting in an abandoned Las Vegas hotel and casino, and promptly purchased it, vowing to turn it into a paradise for Littles. He’d fallen immediately for Mariah’s friend Luna, and became her Daddy-Dom, taking on a caretaker/pseudo Daddy-Dom role to the rest of them.

Mariah cleared her throat and started her pitch. “Mister Daddy... I’d like a job... please.”

Baze looked across the desk at her and frowned. “Mariah, we’ve been over this. There’s no need for you to go out and get a job. I can easily provide for all of you. If you need anything, all you have to do is ask.”

Mariah sat down in the chair in front of his desk. “I appreciate your generosity, Mister Daddy, but I’d still like a job. And I’m not asking permission to go out and get one. I’m asking you to give me one here.”

Baze frowned again, his eyebrows furrowing in confusion. “Utopia isn’t open and won’t be for months. I mean I suppose when it is, you could maybe work part time in one of the shops or something, but that’s a ways away.”

Mariah shook her head, plowing forward. She didn’t want to wait months, and she would be bored out of her mind working in one of the shops.. She was nervous, but Margo’s Daddy, Knox, had encouraged her to stand up for herself and ask for what she wanted. “I don’t... I don’t want to work in one of the shops, Mister Daddy. Knox said... Knox said you were hiring a cook for us and the crew. I was hoping... I was hoping I could get a job working in the kitchen. Like chopping vegetables, doing prep... I’d even wash the dishes.” She tried to keep the distaste out of her voice. Mariah really hated washing dishes, but if it was the only job she could get she’d take it.

Baze was leaning back in his office chair, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. “I did hire a cook, but I’m not sure Chef Graham wants me to hire help for him. Most chefs like to hire their own sous chefs.”

“Knox said he was coming here from California. Is he bringing a sous chef with him?”

“I guess not. If he is, he hasn’t mentioned it.” Baze nodded. “I’ll tell you what. I’ll talk to him and if he agrees, you can interview for the position. But part time only, okay, Mariah? Little girls don’t need to work all the time. They need free time and naps and a good night’s sleep. If you can work without it interfering with those things, then I’ll let you, but if I see you breaking rules because you’re working too hard, or getting too stressed out, that will be the end of that. Do you understand me, little girl?”

“Yes, Mister Daddy!” Mariah cried, jumping up and bouncing on her toes. “Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

“Don’t thank me yet,” Baze told her, turning his attention back to his work. “It’s not a done deal.”

It may not be, Mariah thought as she left, closing the door behind her, but the hard part was done. Asking Baze for a job was something she’d agonized over. Compared to that, having to interview for a job with some random chef she didn’t know would be a piece of cake.

CHAPTER 2

Graham

“Are you sure about this, bro?” Graham’s brother cocked his head and furrowed his brow. “I get that it’s a good opportunity, but, at a Littles resort? I thought you swore off all that after Kaylie.”

Graham’s eyes narrowed at the mention of her name. Someday just hearing it or thinking of her wouldn’t make his gut hurt and his heart rate accelerate, but he wasn’t there yet.

Not that it mattered though. Just because he’d sworn off Littles after his last experience, didn’t mean he couldn’t take a good job when it was offered. “Taking a Little isn’t a job requirement.”

“No, but being around them is. And I know you. You won’t be able to resist. There’s something about them that gets you every time.”

“There used to be, but I’ve changed,” he countered, trying to put a lid on his annoyance. He knew his brother just had his best interests at heart. And Pierce wasn’t wrong. Kaylie had done a number on him. But that was exactly why he knew he

could take this job and still stick to his plan. He had no desire to be a Daddy anymore.

“If you’re sure, bro. I just don’t want to see you get hurt again.”

“I won’t be. I’m one-hundred percent focused on work.”

“You could be one-hundred percent focused on work in a job that didn’t have you surrounded by the exact thing you are trying to avoid,” Pierce argued gruffly. “It’s like an alcoholic taking a job in a bar. It makes no damn sense.”

Graham rolled his eyes. “It’s not the same thing at all, and I love you, but you’ve said your piece. I’ve heard your concerns. Now butt out and be happy for me.” He checked his watch and slung his bag over his shoulder, grabbing his suitcase from the trunk. “Thanks for the ride. Now, scram before you make me miss my flight.”

“That might not be such a bad thing,” Pierce grumbled even as he pulled him in for a hug. “Have a good trip. Text me when you land.”

Pierce got in his car and pulled away, and Graham stepped through the airport doors, now questioning whether his brother was right. Was he making a huge mistake?

It was a good job, with generous pay and incredible benefits and an opportunity to see a city he’d never seen before. That should be reason enough to go, but had he been fooling himself? Was he ready to be around so many Littles? And would he really be able to resist their cuteness and their charms and wiles? Or would he end up in the exact same place he’d ended up with Kaylie? Hurt, confused and taken advantage of on a constant basis until he no longer knew which way was up.

He shook his head as he checked in at the self-check kiosk, dropped off his bag at bag drop, and headed toward the security checkpoint. Just because he didn't want a Little of his own, didn't mean he couldn't be around them every day or take a job working with them. He may not consider himself a Daddy anymore, but he still believed in the lifestyle. Daddies and Littles were still taboo and mostly misunderstood, even in BDSM circles. They needed a safe place to be themselves, like the Utopia that Baze Patrick was building, and that was why he'd taken the job. He just hoped he hadn't made a mistake.



Graham

“This is the kitchen. We just finished renovating and upgrading it last week. If we've forgotten anything or there's any equipment you'd like to have, just make a list and I'll see to it.”

Billionaire hotel mogul and his new boss, Baze Patrick himself, had met him at the airport, chauffeured there in a limo of course, had helped him move his things into a newly-renovated hotel room and was now giving him the grand tour. Baze had offered to let him settle in and give him the tour tomorrow, but Graham was full of anxious energy and eager to acquaint himself with his new surroundings.

He watched as Baze pointed out the state-of-the-art newly renovated kitchen with all its top-of-the-line, drool-worthy equipment, and nodded, impressed. “So, on the phone you said I'd be starting out cooking for a small group of people and to

just offer one or two menu options with large portions prepared ahead of time?”

“That’s correct. We are just doing minor upgrades and remodels right now, but our crew should be arriving in the next month. For now, it’s myself, my seven Littles, my foreman, and our five-person decorating team.”

“I’m sorry, did you say you had seven Littles?” Graham hadn’t heard anything after that. His brain had gone into shut-down mode. He hadn’t even been able to handle one, and this man had seven on top of running a multi-billion-dollar hotel empire? It was the money that did it. It had to be. He could afford to hire nannies to take care of them and cooks to feed them, obviously.

“How in the world did you end up with seven Littles? And how on earth do you manage to care for them all on top of”—he gestured widely with his hands—“all this?” Graham voiced his thoughts out loud before he could stop himself. He was bad at that. He didn’t really have a filter and it had a tendency to get him in trouble.

“It’s a long story,” his new boss answered with a chuckle. “Only one, my wife Luna, is truly mine. The others... I’m more of a House Daddy for them. I care for them and discipline them when needed, but they are only mine until they go off and find Daddies of their own. One of them recently got together with my foreman, Knox. You’ll meet him tomorrow if not before.”

Graham was stunned into silence as he processed it all. He couldn’t come up with a damn thing to say in response to Baze’s reply and such a reaction was unusual for him.

Luckily, Baze didn’t seem to require a response, and kept right on talking.

“Aside from that, they were all very independent and self-sufficient before they met me and have, for the most part, continued on that way. Only now they have security and rules and consequences. But they are very good Little girls.”

“Uh-huh.” He was starting to second guess his choice, and the reality of it was setting in. Maybe his brother had been right.

“Actually, that was going to be one of the things I was planning to ask you about.” Baze led him out to the cafeteria-style dining room and sat down at a four-top table, gesturing for Graham to sit across from him. He did and Baze continued, “I wanted to ask you about your staffing needs. I don’t figure you’ll need a full staff this early on, with less than twenty people to cook for, but I figured you’d need a sous chef and a general kitchen assistant at the very least. Maybe two of them.”

“That sounds good,” Graham agreed, too shell-shocked to do anything else. “I don’t know anyone in the area. How do you generally do your hiring?”

Baze shrugged. “The standard way I suppose, but it’s a bit different with this project. I want to make sure the people I hire are tolerant and knowledgeable of the DDLG, age-play and ABDL lifestyle, so I can’t go through the regular hiring channels and it does take a bit longer.”

“So it could be a while before I have any staff at all?” Graham questioned.

“Well, technically yes. That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. One of my Littles loves to cook, often handles kitchen duty and meal prep for us, and really wants a job. I promised her I’d talk to you.”

“One of your Littles?” Graham repeated dumbly. His gut felt like it filled with lead and his throat went dry. He didn’t want to start off their boss and employee relationship this way, but working with a Little, even one who was a proclaimed “good girl” and “self-sufficient and independent,” sounded like the worst kind of hell. How did he say that without putting his new job in jeopardy?

“I... uh... sure, I guess,” he stammered. Where was his no filter setting when he needed it?

“Great!” Baze slammed his hand palm down onto the table, wearing a wide grin. “Mariah will be thrilled. When can she start? Do you need to interview her first?”

“Uh... Monday I guess? No interview needed, but she’ll have to prove she can hack it. I’ll take her on a probationary period of sorts, if that’s okay with you.” He started on Monday and he’d be a fool not to accept help when it was offered. But that didn’t mean he had to keep her on. It just gave him time to look for someone else.

“Wonderful. I’ll let her know.” Baze’s pocket beeped and he pulled out his phone and peered at it. “Well, looks like I’m needed upstairs. I think we are done here for now. If you have any questions, feel free to give me a call. And”—Baze extended his hand and Graham shook it—“welcome to Utopia.”

As he walked away, Graham couldn’t help but wonder what he’d gotten himself into.

CHAPTER 3

Graham

Monday morning, bright and early at seven a.m. sharp, Graham was in the kitchen waiting for his new assistant to arrive. He'd had the weekend to himself, with ample time to acquaint himself with his surroundings. He'd spent some time playing tourist, and walking the strip, but he'd also spent a lot of time wandering around the resort. Most things were closed up and had been for years, but he still enjoyed checking out the casino and the brand-new chapel. He'd checked out the mural scribbled on the chapel walls and the details had made him laugh. There was even a little plaque explaining that it was Baze's wife who'd drawn the mural while squatting at the hotel with her friends and that it was how Baze and his wife Luna had met. The plaque detailed how Baze bought the building that same night and vowed to make Luna's dream Utopia a reality. The story made him smile. He couldn't help it. He was a sucker for a happy ending and had a soft side. He'd always been told that was what made him a good Daddy. Unfortunately, it was also what made him fair game for predatory Littles like Kaylie.

Baze knew some of his history and had assured him that the Littles he'd take care of now were good and sweet and wouldn't get in his way or cause him any trouble. He'd doubted it at the time, but since he hadn't seen hide nor hair of anyone remotely Little since he set foot in the place three days ago, he was being lulled into a false sense of security.

He'd see one today, he reminded himself. Any moment now the one called Mariah would show up and probably run through the door yelling and giggling with no regard for anyone but herself and not a care in the world despite the fact that this would be a real job he could only assume she'd be paid for.

Shaking his head to try to clear himself of the negative thoughts encroaching, he turned his attention to the menu. The one they'd been following when cooking for themselves was pretty simple, Little-friendly foods like pancakes and waffles. He'd work off it until he had time to create his own menu with his own spin on the favorites and order the supplies he'd need. Pulling a notepad and pen from his apron pocket, he wrote down meal ideas and started a shopping list. He was so engrossed that he never heard her approach and her timid greeting startled him.

“Hello. Are you Chef Graham?”

Startled, he spun on his heel to find her standing at the entrance of the industrial gourmet kitchen. She was already wearing an apron and looked ready to work. Her apron was orange with purple cats, and looking at her, it was the only outward sign of her Littleness.

Her bright red curls had been pulled back into a ponytail tied at the base of her neck and covered with a hairnet. She wore black jeans and a white button-down shirt with no

jewelry or other accessories. Her pale skin was smattered with light freckles the color of sand, and he was immediately drawn to her.

Stop it. She's just here to earn money and assist you in the kitchen, he reminded himself, shifting from one foot to the other uncomfortably to accommodate his growing erection.

“Chef Graham?” she asked again, pulling him from his stupor.

“I... yes... that's me,” he stuttered. A split second later he remembered his manners and stepped toward her with his hand extended. “I'm Chef Graham. And you must be Mariah.”

“Yep. That's me.” An awkward blush rose up her cheeks. He knew she was taken aback by his looks. He'd been told how handsome he was far too many times to not believe it at this point. His heritage was Greek and he had all the best features attributed to them in movies and books. Olive skin, dark chocolate eyes, a chiseled jaw and great hair. He kept it as short as he could, being that he worked in a kitchen all day, but his dark silky locks with their natural curl were his one vanity. He'd wear a hairnet all day long before he'd ever cut them really short.

Mariah gulped as she stared at him, and he quickly looked away. He didn't want to be attracted to a Little or have her be attracted to him. He was here to cook and she was here to help. Nothing more. Nothing less. Keeping that in mind, he moved the introduction along.

“Well, now that we've properly met, let's get started, shall we?”

“Yes, Da—Chef Graham.”

It didn't escape his attention that she'd almost called him Daddy and caught herself. He told himself it was instinctual for her at this point, but he had no idea if that was true. He had no idea what she called Baze or if she'd ever had a Daddy of her own. Ignoring it, he walked over to the fridge and motioned for her to follow. "This is the menu that was made before I got here. I figured we'd follow it today and order more groceries later. I appreciate the opportunity for carb loading, but I'd like to work in a few healthier options and put my own twist on the classics."

He expected her to groan and moan here, maybe even stomp her feet and tell him to stop being so fancy. That there was nothing wrong with pancakes and waffles and he needed to stop being so damn judgy. It was what Kaylie would have said. He recognized the toxicity now, but at the time, he'd taken everything she said and did to heart.

Mariah didn't moan or whine or call him pretentious or judgy. Instead, she looked thrilled, clapping her hands together and bouncing on her heels. "Oh yum. I can't wait. Do you make a good eggs benedict? Ooh, can you do home fries?" She paused and wrinkled her nose, casting her gaze to the floor.

He saw it then. She was lacking a security that only came with age and experience.

"Sorry. I know I shouldn't make requests. You're a big important chef and have your own way of doing things. And what works for us might not work for you. I'll zip it now." She drew her fingers across her lips and pantomimed throwing away the key.

Her own hesitation and where it must have come from tugged on the strings of his heart. He immediately felt a

kinship with her, having a hunch they'd both experienced similar toxic relationships that had left them scarred and feeling broken. But she was still a Little. And her compliance and empathy could be nothing more than an act—a desperate plea for attention.

He still couldn't help but reassure. "That's nonsense," he pshawed. "I want you and your friends to enjoy the food I cook for you. I'd love a second set of eyes on my list and menu and welcome any feedback you might have. And yes, I can and will make both of those things. How does this weekend sound?"

"Dangerous," she answered with a grin. "I'm not sure how my friends will feel about grown-up food, but eggs Benedict is my favorite and I haven't had it in so long." She looked down at the floor and quickly looked back up. "Would it mess up the menu too much if you did it next Monday instead? That's my birthday. It's okay if you can't. The weekend will be fine. I shouldn't have asked."

She asked for the favor and took it back in the same breath, and he had to admit his heart squeezed a bit. "Monday is fine," he answered because what else could he say? He'd be a jerk if he admitted he didn't want to make her special requests at all, much less for her birthday. It wasn't that he minded doing something nice, or that he didn't like the items she'd chosen, he just didn't want to lead anyone on or give them the wrong idea. He wasn't here to become anyone's Daddy, and he knew from experience, for a Little, especially a wounded one, a massive crush could be launched with a simple kind word. He'd done more than that. Not only had he rushed to reassure her, he'd offered to make her favorite foods, and on her birthday no less. He could already tell he'd have to be careful

around her. She was sweet and quiet and tugged at his heartstrings the way no Little had done since Kaylie.

Putting back on the gruff demeanor he'd planned to have, he grunted. "Anyway, we better get to work. People are probably getting hungry."

Mariah giggled. "Probably. Most of my friends would sleep in if Baze would let them, but he likes to keep us on a schedule."

Graham groaned. More details he hadn't wanted. He was going to have to try to keep the conversation centered around work. "Right." He clapped his hands together. "Well, let's get started. Today's menu is simple, just French toast and bacon. You go ahead and start cracking and whisking eggs."

"Okay, do you want me to like, add in the milk and the cinnamon and all that?"

"No!" he exclaimed more loudly than he'd meant to.

Mariah looked wounded. Great. He was trying to be cold, not cruel.

"I... uh... I like to use my own recipe for the batter."

Thankfully his explanation worked and she was back to smiling. "Cool. Maybe you could teach it to me sometime. Then I could help you more."

Over my dead body. That was what he wanted to say. He knew it wasn't reasonable. A sous chef should know the chef's recipes. It was part of their job. Normally he wouldn't think twice about sharing them. Then again, he'd never had a Little as a kitchen assistant before.

Gritting his teeth, he forced a smile. "Sure. Not today though, we're a little behind schedule."

He heated the griddle and began to fry the bacon, already second guessing his decision to take this job. The menu was mundane, like cafeteria food, and he was a five-star Michelin chef. This part of the job was only temporary; he knew that. Once Utopia opened, he'd been promised his own restaurant with a prime location and top billing. In the meantime he was going to miss creating. Food to him was an art form, and he was an artiste.

“I’m done with the eggs!” Mariah exclaimed behind him.

“Oh. Great. Just... uh... watch the bacon while I mix the rest of the batter and then you can dip the bread and cut berries.”

“I get to use a knife?” Mariah gasped, and he looked up in horror.

“Um... yes? I can’t have a kitchen assistant who isn’t able to do their job. If you can’t be trusted with a knife, then this isn’t the job for you.” His heart skipped a beat and he held his breath, suddenly hopeful. This might be his out.

And then she grinned. A big shit-eating Cheshire cat grin. “I’m just kidding. I can use a knife and a hot stove and do anything you can do and anything you need me to do. It’s just when Baze and Luna were on their honeymoon, Knox was in charge and whenever I had kitchen duty with him, he would be all ‘Little girls shouldn’t touch sharp objects. Don’t touch the stove, it’s hot, blah blah blah’.” Her voice rose an octave as she mocked him.

“Oh. I see. So it was a... joke?” He tried to hide his disappointment.

“Yep. I grew up on a farm. Everybody pitched in. Not only do I know how to do everything in the kitchen, I can kill and

pluck a chicken, gut a fish and shoot my own dinner. Funny how I couldn't wait to grow up and get away from all that stuff but now my upbringing makes me proud, and I kind of miss it. Some parts at least."

The hastily tacked on addendum was full of wistfulness and bitterness combined, and he instantly wished he knew where it was coming from. He could relate. A complicated relationship with one's childhood was not exclusive to Littles. His own complicated relationship with his upbringing was the reason he'd been drawn to the Daddy-Dom lifestyle. Hearing Mariah talk, he suspected their past lives had a lot of similarities and they would relate to each other's experiences.

While she talked, he added vanilla, cream, cinnamon, and kosher salt to the batter, saving his secret ingredient, orange zest, for last.

"Have you ever made your own whip cream?" he asked.

"Is there any other way to do it?" Mariah returned, her eyes lighting up.

Without being prompted, she grabbed a bowl, and poured whipping cream into it, then grabbed powdered sugar and vanilla extract from the pantry. "Anything else you want me to add?"

"That'll do. Let's keep it simple today. You got this?"

"Yep!"

She went to work and he finished the bacon before moving on to the French toast. Once she finished the whip cream, she started on the fresh berries, cleaning and cutting them.

"I used strawberries and blackberries, and I kept them separate because Margo is allergic to strawberries," she told him when she finished. "I hope that's okay. We had blueberries

too, but I thought if we saved them we could do blueberry pancakes one day this week.” Her eyes were full of hope, as she stood there blinking up at him, looking for validation.

“That’s a good call. I make a blueberry pancake with blueberry compote that’ll knock your socks off.”

She looked so happy at his simple response so he had to follow it up with something gruff. “Good job today. Eat your breakfast, and then clean up the kitchen and we’ll get started on lunch.”

He winced when he realized he’d started off with more praise. So much for gruff and cold. Good lord, he was in trouble.



Mariah

“So... how was work?” Luna asked as soon as Mariah walked through the door. She’d stayed late enough to do a lot of the dinner prep so Chef Graham would have less to manage in the evening when he was cooking by himself. “Chef Graham is hot. My Daddy sure knows how to pick ‘em.”

“Right, cause I’m sure Baze totally takes hotness into account when hiring staff,” Mariah scoffed.

“Oh yeah? Then why are they all so hot? Knox, Beau, Dax, and now Chef Graham.” Luna ticked each person off on her fingers as if to prove her point. “I haven’t seen the new pastor yet, but I’m guessing he’s a hottie too.”

Mariah was sure Baze wasn't taking looks into account, but Luna also wasn't wrong.

"I think that Beau and Dax might be gay," Ellie spoke up, softly.

"Well, first of all, gayness doesn't exclude hotness. And they aren't gay. They might be bi, I suppose, but they flirt with Jilly all the time!"

Six heads, including her own, swung around to gape at Jilly who was blushing. "They do not," she whispered. "And they aren't gay or bi, they are just best friends and business partners."

"See, she even knows their sexual orientation. They totally flirt with her!"

"They do not!" Jilly protested again, looking like she wanted to sink into the floor.

Before Mariah could come up with a way to swing the conversation back in her direction and take the heat off her friend, Margo stepped in to do exactly that.

"Okay, they're all hot. But Chef Graham is like... next-level hot. And Mariah gets to work with him every single day." She grinned. "We should start a pool to guess when he'll become her Daddy."

Her idea was met with excited squeals of agreement all around.

Mariah rolled her eyes. "I'm pretty sure that's gambling, and Baze wouldn't approve. So do what you want but it's your butts on the line not mine. And besides, you'll all lose. Chef Graham does not give off Daddy vibes."

“He doesn’t?” Margo looked genuinely shocked. “He screams Daddy all over to me. He looks like he’d make you scream Daddy pretty good too.”

Mariah shook her head. As a virgin who knew next to nothing about sex aside from the abstinence-only culture she’d been raised in, she hated that, ever since hooking up with Knox and making it official, Margo had sex on the brain and she’d gotten even more obnoxious. “Shush your mouth,” she told her friend. “Not everything is about sex. And besides, Chef Graham is... weird.”

“What do you mean?” Luna asked, narrowing her eyes.

“Well,” Mariah started, flouncing down on the couch between Jade and Tessa, “he’s hot, obviously, like melt your diaper, drop-dead gorgeous. Those eyes and that hair, and his jawline... on the outside he’s totally Daddy material. Like... you’re not wrong about that. But then... I don’t know. Something about him just seems off. He’ll be really nice and kind and affirming, but then his face will change and it will look like he’s mad about it and he’ll be really gruff and say, ‘get back to work’ and stuff like that.”

“Oh... well, is he mean about it?” Luna’s eyebrows furrowed in concern, and Mariah could tell if she didn’t answer carefully Luna would go back to Baze and say that the new chef had been mean to Mariah and Baze would go into his protective House Daddy mode and fire him or refuse to let Mariah work in the kitchen. Mariah didn’t want either of those things to happen.

“He’s not mean. He’s just... closed off. He can be really nice too. Like he’s gonna make a special breakfast for my birthday.”

“Oooh... Mariah and Graham sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-ng. First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Mariah in a baby carriage!” Her friends sang in unison, butchering the old childhood favorite.

“Stttooop,” she cried.

They did not stop. She was saved when an alarm went off, signaling that it was nap time.

“Ha. Now you have to stop.” She stuck out her tongue and flounced to her room, grateful for the reprieve. She hadn’t worked horribly hard or long, but it was more than she was used to doing in a day anymore and she was tired.

She changed her own Pull-up and took off the clothes she’d worked in, throwing on a t-shirt and short set that doubled as jammies, and climbed in bed, closing her eyes and pulling the covers over her head before Jade came in. She wanted it to be clear that she did not want to talk.

Jade entered a few minutes later, and Mariah heard her tiptoe around as she changed into sleeping clothes and then tiptoe to her bed. The bed creaked as she climbed in but no other sounds were made and she didn’t say a thing.

Mariah was grateful. Sometimes she thought it would be funner to have had a roommate like Margo or Ellie or even Jilly, because they were always down to shenanigate, but Jade was a good roommate too, because she minded her own business and knew when not to push. She also didn’t like to get in trouble just for the sake of it, something Mariah herself was known to do. Having Jade for a roommate balanced her out a bit.

And days like today, it allowed her peace and time to sit with her own thoughts. Right now, she had a lot of them.

She'd laughed off her friends teasing and discouraged their Chef Daddy dreams, but she couldn't deny that she herself had had the same thoughts. It wasn't why she'd taken the job. She had no expectations that working with a man would put her on the fast track to a Daddy of her own, but she'd be lying if she said the thought hadn't crossed her mind. There was something about his gruff demeanor and the confidence he showed in the kitchen, and even the way he'd be kind but immediately follow it with some grumpy command. It reminded her of a Daddy who dutifully doted, and soundly spanked.

She wondered what it would be like to be spanked by Chef Graham and her mind raced with the stories of naughty Littles being taken to task by Chef Connor in the kitchen at Rawhide Ranch. Would Chef Graham run his kitchen that way? If she was naughty, would he fire her or would he have other ways of dealing with it? Her pussy ached as she pictured herself thrown over his knee in the kitchen, being taken to task. She couldn't even imagine what one could possibly get into trouble for while working in the kitchen, but the Littles at Rawhide seemed to manage, so she knew it had to be possible. If she ever wanted to try, Luna and Margo would be able to give her ideas. Those two were practically professional shenanigans.

A shiver ran down her spine as she pictured Chef Graham, his jaw hard and his eyes darkening as he scolded her and called her a naughty girl.

She'd be instantly remorseful and full of regret as he beckoned her over to him with a crooked finger and pulled her facedown across his lap. He'd use a wooden spoon on her poor bottom because what else would a chef use? When it was done, and her bottom was sore and red and her eyes were leaking tears and promises to be good and pleas of sorrow fell

from her lips, he'd hand her the spoon with a wink and tell her it was hers now and to be good or he wouldn't hesitate to use it again. Then he'd pull her into his lap and wipe her tears. He'd kiss her gently at first, and then with passion, claiming her as his. She'd moan and whimper and press her body against his, writhing on his lap as she reached for his cock.

"Mariah?" Jade's voice broke through the silence. "Mariah, are you all right? Are you having a bad dream?" Her roommate shifted and stood, crossing the room to shake her shoulder. "Mariah, wake up. Are you okay? You're making funny noises."

Crap. She must have whimpered while she fantasized. And she only had a second to come up with a cover. The last thing she needed was for her friends to realize she was a lot more into Chef Graham than she was letting on.

She moaned, and stretched, sitting up in bed and opening her eyes, as she pretended to have just woken up.

"What? What's going on?"

"You were making funny noises in your sleep. I thought you might be having a bad dream or something," Jade explained.

"What? Oh... no." Mariah thought fast and reached down to massage her calf. "My leg hurts a little. I must have been getting a cramp. Guess I'm not used to being on my feet for so long."

Jade frowned and narrowed her eyes as if she couldn't quite believe Mariah's explanation, but she didn't argue. Instead, she walked into their shared bathroom and returned with a glass of water and a Tylenol.

“Here. Take this. And then go back to sleep. I’m sorry for waking you up.”

“Thank you,” Mariah answered meekly. She took the Tylenol she didn’t need and drank the water, setting the empty glass on her nightstand to deal with later.

Jade went back to her own bed, and Mariah burrowed even deeper under the covers, grateful for a place to hide so Jade wouldn’t see her burning cheeks.

She couldn’t believe that had just happened!

CHAPTER 4

Graham

When Mariah finished her shift and left for the day, Graham breathed a sigh of relief. She wasn't a bad worker—in fact, she seemed quite competent—but he'd caught himself having to work at keeping his guard up too many times.

That hadn't happened in ages, and he didn't like how easy and natural it had felt to adopt his Daddy-Dom persona after two years of not using it. Not only had he actually gotten to know things about her, he'd somehow let himself get roped into creating a special menu for her birthday. He had to find a way to get out of that, or he'd get stuck in a never-ending loop and have to do it for all of them. He'd met Baze's other Littles, Mariah's friends, at the breakfast service and while they had seemed nice enough and minded their manners, they were definitely Little and he was definitely not in Kansas anymore.

While he concentrated on dinner prep, his mind raced. Maybe he'd been fooling himself into thinking taking this job was a good idea. He'd pretty much thrown himself into the lion's den with no protection. If he wasn't careful, he'd get eaten alive.

I should just quit—get out now before I'm in over my head. The thought popped into his head unbidden and he rolled it around in his brain. There was nothing he hated more than being a quitter. That was how he'd ended up sticking it out with Kaylie as long as he had.

He shook his head. He hadn't uprooted his entire life and moved three states away for his dream job only to quit after the first day. That wasn't an option. He just needed to talk it out with someone. Preferably someone who wasn't his brother. Pierce would just throw him a big fat, I told you so and hop in his car to come get him before Graham could tell him not to.

No, he needed to talk to someone more level-headed, someone who knew what he'd been through with Kaylie but hadn't been there with him in the thick of it. He debated between his therapist, Carl, and his mentor, Trey.

Deciding Trey was the better option, he pulled his phone from his apron pocket, set it on the counter beside him, checked that his Bluetooth was connected and dialed.

It rang five times before Trey's voicemail picked up. Graham decided not to bother leaving a message. Trey was notoriously bad at bothering to actually check and listen to his messages. Picking his phone back up, he shot off a text, asking Trey to call him later and dialed Carl, knowing it was during office hours and he'd probably be in an appointment. As he'd anticipated, it went straight to voicemail and once again, he declined to leave a message.

He was debating calling Pierce once more when a quiet voice cut through his thoughts.

“Oh darn. Did I miss lunch?”

Graham jerked his head toward the voice and found a thin young man dressed in all black with a white collar standing in the doorway to the kitchen.

Graham instantly went on high alert as he'd met everyone working at Utopia over the weekend. And he definitely hadn't heard anything about Utopia employing a pastor, though he knew they did have a chapel. "Yeah sorry. Lunch ended about an hour ago."

The man frowned and shook his head. "Darn it. I'm not used to eating on a schedule. I got here last night and am still acclimating. I missed breakfast too." The man's stomach growled and he blushed, chagrined. "Guess I'll head into the strip and check out the city of sin. At least I know I won't have to travel too far to find food. Sorry to have bothered you."

Graham wanted to send him on his way and be left alone with his problems, but he was too superstitious to believe that a pastor showing up in his kitchen right when he needed to talk wasn't kismet. And he couldn't help but wonder what a pastor was doing living and working at a place like Utopia.

"No, it's fine," he said, gesturing to a stool in the corner of the kitchen. "Sit. Stay. The least I can do is whip you up a sandwich or something."

"Are you sure it's not too much trouble?" the man asked, even as he hurried to the stool to sit where Graham had pointed.

Graham's gut twisted. He had to be honest. "Well, truthfully, you showed up right when I was trying to work through a personal problem and was wishing for someone to talk to. I hate to take advantage, but..."

“But it seemed like divine intervention?” the man cut in with a wry grin.

“It kinda did, yeah. But don’t worry about it. We don’t have to talk. And I’ll still make you a sandwich,” Graham said, already opening the fridge to dig for ingredients.

“No, please. I love to talk. And I’m a naturally curious sort. Especially in a place like this. I can’t help but wonder about everyone and their stories. Just the little bits I already know are fascinating. I’d love to hear your story and hear your problem. But before I do that, let’s get on a first name basis.” The man stuck out his hand with a smile. “I’m Pastor Ryan.”

Graham, who was pulling bread from the pantry, took three steps and took his hand, admiring Pastor Ryan’s firm handshake. “Chef Graham. I’ve been here since Friday, but today is my first day on the job.”

“Ah. We’re both new then.” Pastor Ryan beamed. “All right, Chef Graham. Tell me your problems.”

The words tumbled out of him, faster than they ever had, even in therapy, and he knew Pastor Ryan had a gift for putting people at ease. He told him the whole story, everything that had gone wrong with Kaylie, how hard he’d tried to fix it, the emotional toll her antics had taken on his own mental health and the work he’d had to do to get over her once he realized he couldn’t fix it. He talked about how he’d started to dip his toe back into the lifestyle by simply checking out the website of the club he’d once frequented and finding a job listing for Utopia there.

“I’d just finished up an internship and graduated from culinary school; it seemed like it was meant to be,” he explained, topping off the sandwich and handing the plate to Pastor Ryan.

“But now that you’re here, you’re having second thoughts?”

“I thought I could keep my work separate. Like I could be around like-minded people while also not engaging. Taking a Little is not a job requirement.”

“It certainly isn’t,” Pastor Ryan agreed. “So why the second thoughts?”

“My kitchen assistant. I hadn’t even unpacked my bags before the boss asked me to give one of his Littles a job.”

Pastor Ryan sucked in a breath. “And you couldn’t say no, because you’d just gotten here.”

“Exactly.”

“Well, how’s that going?”

“It sucks.” He scowled, then softened. “The Little, Mariah, she’s competent enough, and professional enough, I suppose, but that’s almost making it harder.”

“Because if she’s not reminding you of how much you want to avoid Littles, then you’re being reminded you’re naturally inclined toward them and it’s harder to keep your guard up and remember why you’re really here,” Pastor Ryan surmised, taking a bite of his sandwich.

Graham frowned. The guy was good, and he already felt better just from talking with someone who seemed to understand exactly where he was coming from. “Yes, that’s it, exactly,” he agreed. “So what do I do? Should I quit?”

Pastor Ryan simply took another bite of his sandwich and chewed thoughtfully before answering. “Do you want to quit?”

Graham considered. “Not really, no. The job is too good and the opportunity is almost unheard of for someone with my

experience.”

“Well, then let me ask you this as you seem to have more experience than I do. Are all Littles like your ex? Is the toxicity and the pushing something universal to the lifestyle?”

Graham sighed. He’d answered this question many times over in therapy and he knew the reality in his core. Plus, Pastor Ryan was, by his own admission, inexperienced and Graham didn’t want to misrepresent the lifestyle and give him the wrong idea. He liked the guy, felt like he’d found an ally in him, and wanted him to stay. “Most Littles aren’t like Kaylie,” he admitted.

“Well, there you go. In life, I find we are given the biggest blessings when we are open to receiving them. When we can maintain the balance between cautious and not closed off. Take this conversation for instance. You could have just sent me away. I’d have had no trouble finding food outside this place. But you needed someone to talk to and I needed a sandwich and for whatever reason, you were open to the possibility that maybe, just maybe, we could help each other. And look what happened. My stomach is full and I think, if I’m not being too presumptuous, that we’ve both found a new friend.”

Graham grinned. “You’re not being too presumptuous.” He wasn’t a religious man, and he’d never pictured himself ending up friends with a man of the cloth, but he liked Pastor Ryan and he got the distinct feeling that the two of them could help each other. “So what you’re saying is I came here for a reason, and I need to stay open to whatever that reason may be, even if it’s not what I originally thought.”

“Precisely.” Pastor Ryan stood and carried his plate to the sink. “Thank you for the sandwich. It really hit the spot. Any

chance I could trouble you for a glass of milk?”

Graham smirked, finding that he wasn't ready for his new friend to leave. “I'll tell you what. I'll even throw in some cookies if you tell me how a non-kinky pastor ended up in a place like Utopia.”

“You've got yourself a deal.”

CHAPTER 5

Mariah

Baze had her scheduled for a day off, a day on, so it was almost forty-eight hours before she got to talk to Chef Graham again. She saw him several times, for meal service, but that was always hectic and there were too many people around. Plus, Chef Graham seemed even more closed off than usual when he was serving them. It had taken one dinner service for her friends to stop teasing her about him ending up as her Daddy. Well, most of them anyway. Margo and Luna had turned into hopeless romantics with too many stars in their eyes to see what was right in front of them. Just because Chef Graham looked like a Daddy and talked like a Daddy didn't mean he was one. And it certainly didn't mean he was interested in being hers.

Still, she couldn't help the butterflies she got in her stomach whenever she thought about seeing him. And now that she was about to work with him again, they seemed to have multiplied into a full butterfly garden.

She dressed carefully, making sure her uniform was neatly pressed, her Pull-up wasn't bunched under her clothes and not

a hair was out of place. She even ditched her cat apron in favor of a plain black one with Utopia's insignia on it.

When she got down to the kitchen before breakfast service on Wednesday, she heard voices coming from the kitchen before she entered. Frowning, she peeked her head in and saw a thin young man about her age with scraggly black hair wearing a chef's uniform, standing over the island with his knife poised above a pile of fruit that needed chopping.

Unable to stop herself, she rushed in, stopping short before she angrily demanded an explanation.

"Mariah!" Chef Graham exclaimed. "Oh good. You're here, and right on time. I want you to meet Earl. He'll be my other kitchen assistant, working when you can't."

"If he'll be working when I can't, then why is he here now?" Mariah asked sharply, barely keeping the scowl off her face, hating the way her voice sounded. It was perfectly reasonable for Graham to hire a second assistant, especially when she could only work part time. So why did it feel like rejection? Why did Earl's presence make her feel jealous as hell and physically ill?

If Chef Graham noticed her over-the-top reaction, he didn't let on. "A kitchen staff is a team. They need to be able to anticipate one another's needs and have each other's backs. It's about working together, even when they're not physically working together. We have a big event coming up at the end of next week, a special dinner for Baze and some local business people. I want us to be comfortable with each other before then and I figured this would do that, as well as getting a lot of prep work done for the week. Kill two birds with one stone and all that."

“Oh. That makes sense.” Fighting the disappointment she felt at not having Chef Graham all to herself, Mariah stepped up to the counter, grabbed a knife and started to chop.

Might as well make the best of the situation, she told herself, pasting on a smile. “So, Earl, I haven’t seen you around here before. Are you staying at Utopia?” So far all the staff Baze had hired had come from out of town and had been put up in the hotel.

Earl shook his head. “Nope. I’m a Las Vegas native. Born and bred. I’m excited about his place though, and look forward to spending lots of time here, outside the kitchen once the resort is up and running.”

The look he shot her was so darkly dominant and full of innuendo that Mariah instantly felt threatened. Her heart skipped a beat and her palms got sticky. She put the knife down and wiped them on her apron just in time to look up and see Earl give the same look to Chef Graham. What was that about? Was she imagining things? Did she just have Daddy on the brain? Had her friends gotten her so backwards with their teasing and innuendos that she was going to turn into them, seeing Daddies everywhere she looked?

Earl had definitely just given a Daddy vibe, and an interested one at that, but he was not her type. Of course, Chef Graham who was totally her type, didn’t give off Daddy vibes and seemed totally unavailable. She’d caught the bouquet at Luna and Baze’s wedding, a fact that her friends hadn’t let her forget, but it seemed just her luck to be interested in a Daddy who wasn’t interested in her or just wasn’t a Daddy at all, and to catch the interest of one who she was certainly not interested in.

At least, she consoled herself, according to Graham, she and Earl wouldn't be working together often, and she and Graham would. She just had to grit her teeth and make it through today.

Concentrating on a pineapple that needed to be cored and cut into chunks, Mariah ignored Earl's hungry look. "It will be really cool when Utopia is up and running," she said, to agree with him, while still effectively changing the subject. "But Baze said it's going to be a while. Everything they are doing now is fairly simple, but in a month or so, that's when the real construction will start."

"It's an ambitious project, that's for sure," Chef Graham agreed. "But I'm excited for when it's finally open to the public and I have my own restaurant."

"Consider this my pre-application for the sous chef position when the time comes. I'd love an opportunity to work in a fancy establishment with a classically trained chef such as yourself," Earl said, clearly kissing butt.

Mariah held back a scowl. She'd like that opportunity too. But Chef Graham would probably give it to Earl because Earl was an ass-kisser, a guy, and not a Little. She was still trying to decide whether to speak up and put her own hat in the ring when Chef Graham's voice cut through her thoughts.

"Understood. But let's not get too ahead of ourselves. As Mariah said, it's a long way off and we haven't even gotten through our first day working together yet."

His voice was light and his tone jovial enough, but when Mariah caught a glimpse of his face out of the corner of her eye, his expression was flat and closed off. She silently cheered. It was the same expression he often wore with her, and while that sucked, at least Earl wasn't earning any

preferential treatment or brownie points with all the butt kissing he was doing.

“Understood, Chef.” Earl gave a sharp nod, wiped his work station before moving onto the next fruit—strawberries—and turning his attention to her.

“So, Mariah. You live with the owner of the joint, right? Mr. Patrick? You’re one of his band of Littles?”

The question and the way it was phrased instantly put her hackles up, and she was about to respond in kind when she noticed that Chef Graham had stopped what he was doing and appeared to be listening with interest. Huh.

With Chef Graham in mind, she took a deep breath, evened her tone and chose her words carefully. “Baze took me and my friends in when he met and fell for my friend Luna,” she explained. “He provides for us and takes care of us, and we are in a way, his, but not in the way you were implying.”

Again, she cut a quick side eye at Graham and noticed his shoulders had relaxed and the tension around his eyes seemed to be gone. Very curious. Only for that reason—watching Chef’s reactions—did she hope that Earl would continue with his line of questioning.

To her amusement, he did, and his next question played right into her hand.

“So, that means the rest of you are free to find Daddies of your own?”

She sucked in her breath before answering and snuck another peek at Chef. His expression was odd. She couldn’t place it. There was interest, but there was also something else.

With her eye trained on him, she answered. “We are free to do that, yes, but so far only Margo has. And a lot of us aren’t

ready to look quite yet.”

Chef’s expression didn’t change, but he grabbed a pile of peppers and started to clean them.

Mariah chewed her bottom lip and waited for the next question.

Earl didn’t disappoint. The guy really had no sense of boundaries and apparently had no qualms about posing very personal questions to someone he’d just barely met.

“What about you? Are you looking?”

Mariah shifted her body slightly to grab for a new container of strawberries and froze while she answered, in the perfect position to see Chef Graham’s face up close. “I’m *not* looking,” she answered. “Ideally, that’s the dream. But I’m not going to parties or hunting on apps or anything like that. More like being open to the idea if the universe sees fit to put the perfect Daddy right in my path.”

Chef Graham’s flat expression changed instantly. His eyes darkened and the corners of his mouth turned into a frown. But it was more than that—Chef Graham looked like he wanted to throw up, and finally he spoke.

“That’s enough chit-chat,” he barked. “No more personal questions. We’ve got work to do. And we certainly aren’t here to hookup or play matchmaker.”

Earl furrowed his brows, jerked his head down, and got back to work. Her stomach knotted, Mariah did the same. At least she’d gotten what she needed. Confirmation that Chef Graham was definitely not interested in being her Daddy. It was time for her to get over the notion her friends kept trying to put back in her head and move on. She was just here to work.

CHAPTER 6

Mariah

“Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday to you, happy birthday, dear Mariah, happy birthday to you!”

Mariah sat up in bed and opened her eyes to find her friends and Baze gathered around her bed, serenading her. They were all holding brightly colored packages with fancy bows.

She was instantly wide awake as she smiled and clapped her hands in delight. “You guys!” she squealed. “Thank you! What a wonderful way to wake up!”

“Open mine first!” Margo nudged her way to the front of the group and flopped onto the bed, shoving a square box with orange paper into Mariah’s hands.

“You wrapped it in my favorite color!” Mariah exclaimed, trying to remember the last time she’d gotten a wrapped package on her birthday. When they’d been squatting in the penthouse, before Baze found them, the girls had always tried to make each other’s birthdays special, but wrapping paper was an unnecessary expense—if there were even gifts to unwrap.

“Open it! Open it!” Margo cried, having no patience for Mariah’s slow appreciation of the moment.

Mariah picked the edge of a piece of tape and undid it carefully before turning the box and starting to undo the other side.

“It’s a new apron! This one is cow print because of Mario!” Margo cried, naming Mariah’s favorite stuffed animal.

“Margo!” Jilly exclaimed. “You’re supposed to let her open it, not just tell her what’s inside. So she can take her time and savor the day.”

“Sooorrrryy,” Margo sang sheepishly.

Mariah giggled, finished unwrapping and pulled the apron out of the box. It was indeed cow print with her name embroidered on the front in bright orange lettering. “Thank you! It’s perfect! I love it!” she cried, throwing her arms around Margo and smashing her into a hug.

“Open mine next!” Jilly bounced up and down excitedly, holding out another brightly wrapped package with a shiny bow. “Open mine next!”

“What happened to slow down and let her savor the day?” Margo snarked in a teasing tone.

“She can savor the day and also unwrap a little more quickly,” Baze answered, stepping in before an argument could start. “After all, she has a lot of presents to open, and we have a fun and busy day planned. Plus, we all still need to get dressed and head down to breakfast.”

Breakfast! Mariah gasped as she remembered Chef Graham’s promise to make her favorite, eggs benedict and home fries for her birthday. Her stomach growled and she

ripped open Jilly's present, suddenly much more eager to get her day started.

After Jilly's gift, a beautiful 300-piece puzzle of a farm scene that reminded her of home, she opened an orange tutu and matching boa from Luna, a new sippy cup and blanky from Tessa and Ellie, and a collection of storybooks from Jade.

"Well, that's about it," Baze said, peeling back her covers and engulfing her in a warm hug. "It's time to get our day started."

"Daddy!" Luna cried, crossing her arms. "What about your presents?"

Baze sat on the edge of her bed and looked from Luna to Mariah with a smirk. "She can open those later. Spread the celebration over the course of the day," he explained with a wink.

More than happy with that plan, Mariah jumped out of bed. She could already almost taste salty home fries dripping with a mixture of lemony hollandaise and runny egg yolks. She was almost more excited about that than she was about whatever Baze had planned even though it was sure to be amazing.

"C'mon everybody! Let's move! It's my birthday!" she cried, running to her closet to grab her favorite fancy outfit. Even though she knew Chef Graham wasn't interested in her in that way, her heart skipped a beat wondering what he'd think when he saw her dressed in her orange sequin dress with the ruffled diaper cover and white shrug. She hoped he liked it.

When they got downstairs to the conference room outside the kitchen that they used as a cafeteria, Chef Graham wasn't

there. Nobody was. The kitchen was closed, and the buffet that usually held the day's offerings was lined with plastic dispensers full of an assortment of sugary cereals and a large carafe of milk.

“Ooh, cereal bar!” Margo cried, running ahead. “Best day ever! Y'all should have birthdays more often!”

The other girls cheered and ran to the buffet, grabbing bowls and loading them up with their favorite breakfast cereal. Mariah was crushed. Where was Chef Graham? Where were her eggs benedict and home fries? Things had been awkward the past few days and she'd come to terms with the fact that he wasn't Daddy material—or at least that he wasn't interested in being Daddy material—but she'd never expected him to go back on a promise. She'd thought better of him than that.

The thought twisted around in her brain until a new one emerged. What if something had happened to him? What if he was sick or had a family emergency, or what if he had an accident and was in the hospital? Did he even have a car here? She didn't think so, but she wasn't sure.

She sucked in a breath to hold back the tears that were threatening to fall when Baze came up beside her. “What's wrong, Miss Mariah? Don't you like your birthday surprise? You guys are always asking for sugary cereals and YOYO mornings, so when Chef Graham asked for the morning off, I figured this would be a nice treat.”

The information that Graham was indeed fine and had asked for the morning off hit her like a sucker punch to the gut. On one hand she was glad he was okay, and on the other, she was hurt and disappointed. She'd really thought of him as a stand-up guy, and she'd thought he'd at least liked her in a

work capacity. Tears pricked the corners of her eyelids and she blinked them away.

“Mariah,” Baze prodded beside her. “Aren’t you going to eat? It’s a special treat and I’ve got a really fun day planned.”

“Oh right. Sorry.” Her mind still racing, she looked up at Baze and forced a smile. “I was just thinking I can’t remember the last time I had a birthday this nice. Thank you, truly.” The words she spoke and the sentiment behind them were real but the smile was fake. Not only was she sad and mad about Chef Graham not making the special menu she’d been expecting, cereal days were meant to be enjoyed on the couch while watching cartoons, but she wasn’t about to tell Baze that. She walked to the buffet and poured herself a small bowl of the sugariest cereal that was offered and sat with her friends. They were all smiles and giggles and whispers about what Baze might have planned for the rest of the day. It was hard to look around the table and be anything but abundantly grateful so she pushed her sadness aside and joined in the guessing games.

“Mini golf!” Margo guessed excitedly.

“Shopping spree!” Luna cried.

“Movies and ice cream?” Tessa asked.

“We did that last week,” Jade pshawed. “It’s gonna be something different.”

“Ummm maybe an amusement park?” Ellie guessed with a frown.

“That’s too far away unless you count the one at Circus Circus. I don’t think Baze would take us there,” Jilly piped up. “What do you think it is, Mariah?”

Mariah shrugged. “I think... I’d rather be surprised.”

“Surprised by what?” Baze asked, coming up behind them holding his own bowl of sugary chocolatey cereal.

“Daddy,” Luna explained, “we were just trying to guess what you might have planned for Mariah’s birthday.”

“Ah, I see. Well, you could keep guessing, or I could just tell you,” Baze answered with a wink. “So what’s it gonna be, Mariah?”

She grinned. “Tell us please.”

“We are going to a petting farm! You’ll get to feed and cuddle baby cows and goats and chickens and bunnies and pigs and sheep and whatever else they have there!”

Mariah’s mouth dropped open and her eyes welled with tears. She missed her animals back home, and it had been years since she’d gotten to see any of those things. “Really?” she cried. “A petting farm? Really truly?” Jumping from her seat she ran up to Baze and tackled his waist with a tight hug before looking up at him with questions in her eyes.

“But how? We’re in Vegas!”

“It will be a couple hours’ drive,” he admitted. “But not too far, and we’ve got several hours. However we do need to be back here for dinner, so we better get going. Put your bowls in the dirty dish tray and let’s head out.”

Her friends raced to do what they were told—Margo even took Mariah’s bowl for her, but Mariah still had questions. As they lined up at the door, she looked down at her fancy dress and frowned. “Wait! Don’t we need to change?”

“I don’t think so,” Baze answered jovially. “You look beautiful. Maybe a bit overdressed but it will make for some very cute pictures.”

“But what about my shoes? They’ll get ruined!” Mariah extended one foot in the air in front of her to point at her white Mary Janes.

“I have muck boots in the car as well as jackets, diaper bags and extra snacks,” Baze informed her. “Don’t worry. I already thought of everything. Now can we please go?” He motioned for her to join her friends and she hustled into action, smiling up at him.

“Yes, Mister Daddy. We can go now. Thank you, thank you, thank you! I love my birthday surprise.” She was glad it wasn’t shopping, mini golf, a movie or any of the things her friends had mentioned. Baze had picked the perfect activity for her, and she was so excited she almost forgot to be mad at Chef Graham.

Almost.



Graham

Graham stuck his tongue between his teeth as he concentrated on crafting the perfect orange roses for the top of Mariah’s cake. He absolutely hated cake decorating and he could have—probably should have—just ordered one from any of the fancy bakeries up and down the strip, but he wanted to make it himself. For Mariah. Hopefully, the fact that he sucked at it and it was an all-day project for him would make up for the fact that it would probably look like a toddler had decorated it. He finished the last rose, wrote *Happy Birthday Mariah* across

the top in orange icing and glanced at the clock just as Knox poked his head in.

“Margo says they are about an hour out, so I’m gonna start decorating. Boss said you had the decorations?”

“They’re in the office.” He inclined his head toward the back of the kitchen where a small room near the walk-in boasted a built-in desk, a straight-backed chair and a rack for his coat.

Knox pushed past him as he entered, looking over his shoulder at the cake as he passed. “Dude. That looks like a five-year-old decorated it.”

“I’m a chef, not a baker,” Graham lamented. “And most especially, not a cake decorator, no matter how hard I try.”

Knox laughed. “Well, that’s the truth, but Mariah is gonna love it anyway.” He wiggled his fingers around the box he was holding as he left the kitchen.

Graham hoped she did love it. He’d done it for her. When Baze had mentioned throwing a birthday party, he’d jumped at the chance to make the cake, without thinking it through until it was too late.

He’d needed the whole day to work on it so he’d ended up breaking his promise to make her favorite breakfast—opting instead to fix breakfast for dinner, which he was starting now. He’d been here early this morning working with all the doors and the partitions sealed when Mariah and the rest of them came down for breakfast and though he couldn’t see her, he could almost feel her disappointment.

That was hard enough. Add in the fact that he had very mixed feelings about making Mariah a special menu in the first place, and even more so the cake he’d volunteered to

bake, and he'd been a wreck all day, with nothing to think about but Mariah and what she was doing to him.

She'd gotten under his skin on day one. And he'd been fighting to regain the upper hand ever since. And just when he thought he had it and he'd reminded himself how much trouble Littles were and how he wasn't ready to have another one, she'd do something adorable like randomly breaking into song while she cooked, or something where he'd go into auto Daddy mode like when she cut her finger on a broken dish. Or like today, when she went and had a birthday.

He sighed as he chopped potatoes, the conundrum of her presence a never-ending battle in his head.

He did this every time. He could think about how pretty she was, and how sweet, and how she was absolutely nothing like Kaylie, and he could know those things were true. He could tell himself he was a better Daddy now, that he'd know better than to allow himself to get in the same situation twice. And he could daydream endlessly about what it would be like to set aside his misgivings and become Mariah's Daddy.

In the end, common sense always won out. He came here for a job, not a Little. Deep down, he wasn't interested in having one, no matter how much a certain little redhead made him question that decision.

It was just a birthday dinner and a cake, he told himself. It didn't mean anything. He wouldn't let it.



Mariah

“That was the best birthday ever!” Mariah sighed sleepily as they pulled into the city and drove toward the strip.

She’d cuddled baby cows and fed sheep and goats and chickens. She’d held bunnies and watched them hop around the grassy pen. They’d chased chickens and been chased by geese and peacocks, and they’d run around all day in fields of flowers and fresh air—something they never got to do in the city. She hadn’t realized how much she’d missed it, but everything about the day had fed her soul and she’d loved spending every minute enjoying it all with the friends she’d turned into family.

Her whole body was weary with a happy sort of exhaustion, and she could have just fallen asleep right in the limo and gone to bed as soon as they were back at Utopia, but Baze kept poking her and telling her to stay awake. Apparently, he still had plans. She was thankful and excited for whatever it was, but she already had more than she could have ever imagined. Still, Baze had gone to a lot of trouble to make her day extra special, so she would enjoy and appreciate every minute even though she was dead on her feet.

They pulled up to the hotel and Baze clapped his hands to get their attention. “Okay upstairs for diaper changes, and then we need to head down to the cafeteria for dinner, dessert and a few more presents!”

At the mention of dessert, Mariah rallied. Sweets were her jam, and a birthday dessert was the best kind. When the limo stopped at the curb to unload them, she jumped out and raced inside, not waiting for her friends. They caught up to her at the elevators.

They rode up together and all hurried to get themselves changed, with Baze changing Luna.

“What’s for dinner?” Margo asked as they exited the elevator on the ground floor. “I’m starving.”

“You’re always starving,” Baze told her.

“Yup. So what’s for dinner?”

Mariah listened with interest. Would Chef Graham be working the dinner service? She hoped not. She was still mad at him and having to see him would put a dark cloud over what had been an almost perfect day.

Baze never answered Margo’s question. But he took Luna and Mariah’s hands and pulled them into the cafeteria with the rest of the girls right behind them.

Mariah stopped short when they entered. The cafeteria had been decorated while they were gone and it was covered in bright orange balloons and streamers everywhere she looked. A bouquet of orange daisies sat in a vase next to a pile of gifts. Brightly colored tablecloths adorned each table and there was a three-tier cake sitting on the buffet next to a row of silver chafing dishes.

“What the...” she whispered, looking up at Baze. “How?”

“Knox mostly,” he answered. “With a little help from Chef Graham.”

“Chef Graham?” There were those damn butterflies again. They took up residence in her belly while she searched the room. The divider between the buffet and the kitchen was open as it usually was during mealtimes, and Chef Graham was standing on the other side with a smile.

“Happy Birthday, Mariah,” he said, lifting the cover off one of the chafing dishes to reveal the most perfect looking eggs benedict she’d ever seen.

“You remembered!” she gasped. “I thought...”

“I know, and I’m sorry. I needed the morning and afternoon off to work on your cake.” He walked to the end of the buffet and she followed, getting a close-up look at the cake.

It was white, three-tiered with uneven decorative icing scrolled in orange around each tier. The top layer had messy orange flowers all around the border and Happy Birthday Mariah was written in rather sloppy handwriting in the center. It was a beautiful mess.

“You made that?” she gasped. “For me?”

“I shouldn’t have. It’s a mess. I should have just let Baze order one. I wanted to make it myself, but a baker and cake decorator I am not.”

“I love it,” she assured him. “It’s perfect... but... maybe don’t quit your day job.”

He laughed, and she thought it was the most beautiful sound she’d ever heard.

“Come on, little one, let’s get you dished up. Don’t want your eggs getting cold or your home fries getting soggy.” He made her a plate and she carried it to the table, sitting between Baze and Knox while Chef Graham dished up plates for her friends.

As she lifted the perfect bite to her lips, she knew one thing for sure. Graham Rossi was the perfect Daddy for her—even if he didn’t know it yet.

CHAPTER 7

Graham

“Okay, these salads are ready to go out now! Earl, Renee, Casey, Angelica, let’s go go go! Jade, you go out there with the water carafe and give everyone refills. Tessa, you follow behind and take their drink orders. Go over to the bar and have Andreas fill them just like you did before and then deliver them. Then come back here and I’ll give you another job to do.”

Graham was in his element, calling out orders without looking up. Baze was hosting a dinner for several local businessmen, press members and investors, and Graham was working with a full staff, creating culinary gourmet masterpieces to his heart’s content.

With the salads out, he moved his attention to the main course. Beef Wellington.

“Mariah, you start plating. A smear of the potato puree, a sprig of parsley and three glazed carrot slices on each plate.”

“Yes, Chef!” Mariah said as she went to work.

They'd been working together for a couple weeks now, and he enjoyed the rhythm they'd found together. Mariah wasn't the least bit demanding or pushy. She found pleasure in the simplest tasks, and if he sometimes caught her sighing at seeing a sink full of dishes to wash, she'd never once complained. Every so often, he'd see her smile and give a soft giggle when she'd plunge her hands into a pile of bubbles and squish a few between her fingers before getting down to the task of scrubbing the pots and pans. The Little had a calmness about her that made every encounter one without the stress of worrying about what might set her off.

Sometimes, especially when Earl was around, he found it hard to keep his emotions in check with her, but for the most part, they had nothing more than a comfortable working relationship, and he mostly managed to ignore the fact that he found himself wanting more.

He checked his Wellingtons and turned the ovens off, keeping them in the warmth for a few minutes. Soon he'd have Mariah plate them and let them rest before serving while he turned his attention to dessert.

Crash! He looked up, startled, to find Angelica, his main server, on the floor. She'd knocked a trash can over when she fell.

"Shit," he swore as he rushed over to her. "What happened? Are you in labor?" Angelica was obviously pregnant. He wasn't happy that the agency had sent over a pregnant woman but she'd proven to be a hard worker and quick on her feet. He looked at the size of her belly. It wasn't that big, but he knew all pregnant women grew differently and he hadn't wanted to ask how far along she was.

“No, I’m fine. I’m just a klutz and I tripped over the mat. I can’t see my feet.” She struggled to stand and he held out a hand, helping her to her feet.

“You should sit down.”

“I’m fine. I just need a minute and then I’m good to go.”

She looked fine, but he wasn’t taking any chances. “No. After a fall like that, you need to go get checked out.”

She opened her mouth like she was about to protest, but he pulled out his inner Daddy-Dom and cut her off. “No arguments. You’re done for the night. Casey, you’re done too. Take her to St. Mary’s to get checked out.”

The server balked, but he shut that down just as quickly. “Don’t worry, you’ll both be compensated for the full evening.”

Casey’s protest died on his lips and he nodded smartly. “Yes, Chef. Thank you.” He wrapped his arm around Angelica’s waist, helping her hobble as the two of them left to make their way out to Casey’s car.

Crap. Now he was down his two best servers and several minutes behind.

“Mariah. You’ll have to take over and help serve. Start pulling the Wellingtons. The one on the pan all by itself in the small oven is made with eggplant instead of mushrooms. When you plate it, add an extra sprig of parsley to the top and make sure it goes to Miss Lamont at table three.”

“Yes, Chef!” Mariah called out. She was already arranging the Wellingtons onto their individual plates.

“Don’t forget. Small oven. Eggplant. Miss Lamont. Table three.”

Miss Lamont was deathly allergic to mushrooms which he'd only just found out at the start of the evening. If he'd known ahead of time, he'd have fixed a different dish or made them all with a carrot and onion *duxelles* which he much preferred over the eggplant option. But the late notice had given him no choice but to work with what he had and that was a fuck ton of mushrooms and one lone eggplant.

“Got it, Chef!” Mariah answered. He breathed a sigh of relief. Despite his initial reservations, Mariah had proven herself to be more than competent in the kitchen, and he much preferred working with her over her counterpart Earl. If they made it through this evening, he planned to talk to Baze about officially promoting Mariah to sous chef.

Earl, he supposed, was equally competent, but he was a Switch who made no bones about failing to stay professional at work, no matter how many warnings he'd been given. He spent half the time looking at Graham like he wanted to devour him and the other half looking like a recalcitrant little boy who was just waiting for Daddy to bend him over, spank his naughty little ass and have his way with him. Neither of those things would ever happen. Graham had no interest in spanking anyone, he was not a Switch and he didn't swing that way. The only reason he kept Earl on was because he knew how busy Baze was and how difficult it would be for him to find a replacement.

Jade popped her head into the kitchen. “They've finished their salads, Chef, and Tessa is clearing their plates as we speak. Is Angelica okay?”

“Excellent. Mariah, let's start getting those Wellingtons out.” To Jade, he said, “I think Angelica is going to be okay, but I had Casey take her to St. Mary's just to be on the safe

side. That means we're down two servers so I need the rest of you to work extra hard. We want this dinner to go off without a hitch for Baze's sake. All right?"

"Yes, Chef!" Jade disappeared and he turned his attention to the individual creme brulees he'd had chilling in the walk-in cooler. He loved doing the pastry/dessert stuff but it didn't come as naturally to him as cooking did, so he had to focus twice as hard. He concentrated on drizzling his ganache perfectly onto each plate while Mariah whizzed out with a tray full of Wellingtons.

When they'd all been delivered, she slumped into the kitchen and collapsed on the stool that was kept in the back corner of the kitchen. "Whew," she huffed. "That was intense."

He looked up with a smile. Her fluffy curls were falling from her hairnet, her collar was askew, and there was flour dusted across her apron. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were droopy from exhaustion. She'd worked hard today.

"Why don't you just sit a minute? I think we can take a break now and give people time to eat. Hopefully, we can finish the night off without any more crises."

"Chef! Chefchefchef! Chef!" Luna barreled into the kitchen at warp speed, dressed to impress in a fancy but simple blue velvet frock. She was a guest tonight, not a worker, which made her presence even more unnerving. "Chef! Miss Lamont's face is swelling up! It's all puffy and she can barely breathe!"

The Wellington. Mushrooms. After all his careful preparation, she hadn't gotten the right dish. "Call 911," he said to Luna as the blood drained from his face.

He glanced at Mariah, not even bothering to hide his anger as she sat there on the stool with her eyes wide and her mouth open. She was already crying, but he didn't have time to worry about that. Rushing to the office, which was more a glorified coat closet with a desk in it, he rummaged through his drawer, found the first aid kit, and grabbed the EpiPen he kept for emergencies.

Rushing out to the dining room, he ran over to Miss Lamont, who indeed was looking very puffy and jabbed her with the EpiPen. "I take it she didn't get the one with the eggplant," he said to the room at large.

"I think I did." Baze spoke up from the next table, looking a little puffy and green around the gills himself.

"Don't tell me. You're allergic to eggplant."

"It's a mild allergy. I think I'll be okay. I just need some Benadryl."

Thankfully, he had some Benadryl tablets in his first aid kit as well. "I'll be right back," he told his boss.

As he stormed through the kitchen on the way to the office, Mariah was bent over his creme brulees, about to hit them with the butane torch. "Stop!" he commanded. "Sit down and don't touch anything."

He had more to say but no time to say it as he rushed the medicine out to Baze who accepted it with a grateful nod and swallowed two pills. "This should help," he said, assessing the gravity of the situation. His boss was practically sweating through his suit and his face and neck were covered in hives.

Graham bit back a groan. This whole night had been a disaster of epic proportions. Forget about promoting Mariah to sous chef, he'd be lucky if *he* even still had a job after this.

“The ambulance is here!” Jade called out, running toward them, followed by two uniformed paramedics carrying a stretcher. Yep, he was totally fired.

He walked them over to Miss Lamont and was glad to see she was already looking less swollen. “I used an EpiPen I keep in my office. She looks a little better than she did before,” he explained as they took her vitals.

“She got lucky,” the paramedic said. “We’ll take her in for observation and administer some more meds, but I think she’ll be okay, thanks to your quick thinking.”

He had not been expecting to be praised nor did he deserve it. With a slight nod of his head, he motioned at Baze. “He also had an allergic reaction but it was milder. I gave him some Benadryl to get rid of the hives.”

They were already starting to disappear. The second paramedic hurried over and began to check out Graham’s boss.

“He’s gonna be fine,” he said. “No need to visit a hospital. Good job, Chef. Allergic reactions are nothing to mess around with, but thanks to your preparedness, tonight will end without crisis.”

Around him, men in suits began to clap. He stepped backward, waving his hands in front of him. “No, no, no. No thanks. No applause. I did the very minimum that could be done, and it was my fault the dishes got switched in the first place.” It was actually Mariah’s fault, but a good chef took responsibility for everything that came out of his kitchen. In public anyway. When he got Mariah alone, that would be a very different story.

He turned back to head into the kitchen and get out of the way, but Baze stopped him. “Chef Graham?”

He halted in his tracks. This was it. He was getting fired. In front of a room full of people no less. He didn't blame Baze for that at all. Tonight had been very important and the man had to save face.

"Yes, sir?" He did an about face, turned toward Baze and kept his expression blank.

"I think in light of everything that's happened, we should call the night to a close, and skip dessert. Although, I'm sure everyone would much appreciate another shot of whiskey."

His announcement was met with a round of hearty agreement from his guests and unbridled shock from Graham, who stumbled over his words. He'd been prepared to endure a very public firing and have his ass handed to him and instead he was being asked to play bartender? It was a bit beneath him, but his granny had taught him to never look a gift horse in the mouth, so he got behind the bar with Andreas and helped pour and deliver a round of whiskey to everyone but Luna, who didn't drink, and Baze, who *couldn't* drink thanks to the Benadryl.

When he was done, he found himself standing in front of Baze once more. "Anything else, sir?"

Baze shook his head. "I think that will be everything, Chef. And good job tonight. The food was exquisite. I only wish I'd gotten to enjoy more of it."

"I... uh... I'll make it for you some other time, sir."

"I'll look forward to it."

Graham was almost too shocked to move, but he forced himself back to the kitchen.

When he got there, the room was full of staff, hiding out and staying out of the way. The temporary staff was huddled

together in one corner, Earl was loading plates into the industrial dishwasher, and Tessa and Jade were crowded around Mariah who was still sitting on her stool, crying her eyes out.

“Everyone out.” He cleared the room with a simple edict, and they all rushed to take off their aprons and gather their things, avoiding eye contact as they squeezed past him.

Soon, only Mariah was left, sniffing as she struggled with the tie on her apron.

“You stay. You’re not going anywhere until we have a little talk,” he said ominously. Even to his own ears, his voice sounded suspiciously like that of a Daddy about to scold a naughty Little.

It hadn’t been his intention, but it had the desired effect on Mariah who stopped in her tracks and then sank back onto her stool with her mouth open in a little “O” of surprise. “You don’t have to tell me,” she sniffled, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. “I know I messed up.”

He couldn’t scold her with both her nose and eyes dripping, so he dug into his pocket and withdrew a handkerchief, thrusting it at her.

“Blow your nose,” he commanded. “I can’t talk to you while there’s snot dripping down your face.”

“Yes, Sir. I’m sorry.” She pitifully did as she was told, wadding the scrap of fabric in her fist when she finished.

Now that her face was dry, and her sniffles weren’t as violent, he narrowed his eyes.

“What did I say, Mariah? When you were plating the entrees, what did I say?”

“To take the one that was by itself and put an extra sprig of parsley on top so I’d know it was for Miss Lamont at table three. I thought I’d done that, Sir, but there was so much going on I must have mixed up the plates. I put the parsley on the wrong dish and gave it to Miss Lamont at table three.”

The fact that she had been listening and apparently made a mistake took some of the wind out of his sails.

His jaw unclenched, and he frowned. “It was a very big mistake, Mariah.”

“I know,” she wailed, her voice going into a falsetto as she started to get worked up again. “Jade said I gave Miss Lamont’s dish to Baze and she said he is allergic to eggplant and he got a rash all over his face and looked all weird and sweaty. I almost killed Mister Daddy!”

“His reaction was milder so that’s a bit of a stretch,” he assured her, knowing how much Baze meant to her and the other Littles in his care. “But giving Miss Lamont the wrong dish could have been very serious. We were very lucky that I had an EpiPen in the first aid kit.”

“You’re so smart,” Mariah said, her voice full of grateful awe. “And I’m so stupid,” she wailed again a second later. “I should have been more careful.”

“You are not stupid. Yes, you should have been more careful. Hopefully, tonight is a lesson that you’ll remember for a long time.”

“Yes, Sir.”

She squirmed in her seat and he knew he’d used one of those phrases that got to Littles. He hadn’t meant for it to come out the way it had, but once it did, he couldn’t help being fascinated by her reaction. Her cheeks colored as her

gaze swept the floor, and she shifted in her seat, as if he'd just spanked her and her bottom was sore. Suddenly, he almost wanted to, but he knew that would just be rewarding bad behavior and encouraging more of it in the future. No matter how much he'd punished Kaylie or how hard he spanked, it had never been enough. The next time she would always push a little bit harder, just to see what would happen.

Pushing those memories from his mind, he turned his attention back to the Little at hand.

"I'm glad it was a mistake and not a case of you just not listening, but the repercussions could have been catastrophic and when things like this happen, there must be consequences."

"I know," Mariah sniffled again, this time shoving to her feet. "I gotta be fired. I really enjoyed working with you and I learned a lot, but I understand." She took off her hairnet and pulled her apron over her head without untying it. Thrusting it into his hands, she looked up at him. "I feel really guilty. And I know I hafta be fired. It's just... I kinda wish you were a Daddy so I could be punished too."

Dammit. Her earnest admission squeezed his heart. Did he really need to fire her? If she was anyone else, he wouldn't hesitate, but he honestly liked working with Mariah. She was nothing but professional and she was good at her job. If he fired her, he'd be left with only Earl.

Looking at her, he exhaled deeply and cursed himself for what he knew he was about to do.

"Mariah, you don't have to be fired."

"I don't?"

“You have a choice. As you said, I’m not really a Daddy anymore. And I don’t believe in punishments. I can’t punish you for what happened tonight, no matter how badly you might want me to. But I do believe in preventative correction. Or maintenance, if you will.”

“Maintenance?” Mariah wrinkled her nose in confusion. “Like... on a car?”

“No, silly, like on a naughty Little bottom.”

As she started to get the picture, her eyes bulged in their sockets. “So you won’t spank me for punishment... but you will for maintenance.”

Not quite believing what he was saying, he nodded. “If you’d like to keep your job, I’d like you to. However, in order to ensure that you are more mindful in the future, I would expect you to come in fifteen minutes early every day for a week and accept my preventative correction. If you can’t do that, then tonight will be your last night.”

“I can do that!” Mariah exclaimed, her expression hopeful. “I can! At least... I think I can. What does it mean?”

“Do you have a wooden hairbrush?”

Mariah nodded. “Baze gifted one to each of us. It’s engraved with my name. Some gift.”

“If you would like to keep working here, then every morning for a week, you would come in a quarter hour early and present your hairbrush. We’d go into my office and I’d pull down your pants and plug your bottom and then spank it hard so you’d have a reminder to be very careful and mindful of your actions and their consequences.”

“Oh.” Mariah looked at the floor. Her cheeks were tinged with shame. “Every day? All week? I don’t work every day.”

Graham nodded. Prior to this disaster of an evening, he'd intended to talk to Baze about promoting her and changing her schedule. He hadn't decided if that was still on the table, but this would be a good opportunity to see if she could hack the extra hours he wanted her to work. "If you agree to this, then you will. Every day. All week. Those are my terms. But you don't have to decide tonight. You can think about it. I'll be here early tomorrow morning. If you decide to accept my terms, you show up with your hairbrush."

"I don't have to think about it. I want to keep my job. I'd rather be punished than maintained, but I know you have your reasons. I'll accept your terms."

"Very well. Then I'll see you here tomorrow, bright and early."

"Bright and early. Thank you, Sir. May I hug you?"

Surprised by the request, he could only nod. Rushing toward him she wrapped her arms around his waist, resting her head on his chest. Her hair smelled like lemons.

Not knowing what to do, he awkwardly patted her back and waited for the hug to be over.

She released him, and skipped away, and he looked around at the remnants of a very chaotic evening. He put the food away and took out the garbage. Deciding to leave the dishes for the morning, he headed out of the casino and down the strip. He had a butt plug to shop for.

CHAPTER 8

Mariah

Fifteen minutes was not going to be long enough to get plugged and spanked and clean up the mess that had been undoubtedly left the night before, so Mariah set her alarm for extra early, woke up, and shuffled to the bathroom so as not to wake Jade. She changed from jammies to work clothes, and put on a fresh Pull-up diaper, pulled her hair into a neat braid and headed downstairs. Her plan was to get there before Chef Graham and start the clean up so he'd know she was serious about doing better and grateful to still have her job.

When she entered the kitchen, he was already there, standing at the sink with his back toward her, loading dishes into the dishwasher and cleaning his expensive pans by hand.

When he noticed her, he looked at her over his shoulder, and quirked an eyebrow.

“Anxious to have your bottom spanked?” he asked.

“Yes, Sir,” she answered automatically, and then caught herself. “I mean no! No, Sir! I just knew there'd be a big mess to clean up, and I wanted to get a head start on it so you'd know I was serious and grateful. So, so grateful.”

“Ah. Well, as you can see, I had the same idea about starting early and I couldn’t sleep well. So everything is done except for one thing.” He turned to face her. “Did you bring your hairbrush?”

Her cheeks flushed, she pulled it from her back pocket with a flourish. “Right here, Sir.”

She stepped forward to place it in his outstretched hand. He took it and lifted it, apparently testing the heft then smacked it hard against his thigh. He didn’t even wince, but he grinned. “That’ll do.”

Her gut suddenly filled with dread as she wondered exactly what she’d gotten herself into. She’d been spanked for punishment many times after a naughty deed, but never for maintenance. She’d heard the term, but never really thought much about it. It had crossed her mind this morning to google it before she went in, but she’d decided against doing her own research, not wanting to take a chance that she’d get scared and chicken out.

“Go into my office and wait for me,” he told her.

The office was a tiny area off the kitchen. It had a shelf desk built into the wall, a few shelves, some coat hooks and a straight-backed chair. There was barely room for one person in there, much less two. She could see it working if he put her over his knee, but that didn’t really seem to be his style.

When she entered the room, she took a seat on the chair and did as she was told, waiting for him. A package on the desk caught her attention. It was a brand-new butt plug still encased in the plastic packaging. There was a store bag and a receipt underneath it. Next to it was a small bottle of lube. He’d obviously bought both last night with her and this exact purpose in mind.

Curious, she picked it up and examined it, her bottom clenching as she did so. She had a plug in her room that Baze had purchased for her and used only once. It was smaller than this one, and metal with a giant jeweled base that stuck out between her cheeks and made it hard to sit.

This one was bright red, a more forgiving silicone with a plain undecorated base. It was wider and longer, and just looking at it made her nervous.

She was so caught up in her mental comparison, she hadn't noticed Graham until he was towering over her with a smirk on his face.

“Approve of my selection?” he asked.

Mariah blushed. “It's not my job to approve or disapprove, Sir. I was just... I'm not really a butt plug expert,” she admitted with a shrug.

Graham narrowed his eyes. “Have you ever had your bottom plugged? I should have asked you that before I went shopping. I've personally always found it to be a handy tool and a good reminder, but not everyone feels the same way.”

“I've been plugged once before, Sir.” Mariah hesitated before continuing. It felt strange to be having a frank discussion with her boss about butt plugs and her experience with them, but she supposed it was par for the course in a place like Utopia. “It was metal with a jewel.”

Chef Graham nodded. “Ah yes. I'm familiar. I'm more partial to silicone myself. A bit more give.” He paused and looked at her shrewdly, still holding the brush. “Have you changed your mind, Mariah?”

“No, Sir.”

“So you consent to accepting my correction, and keeping your job?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Very well. Stand up, turn around, and pull down your pants and panties.”

“Pull-up,” Mariah corrected without thinking, immediately regretting doing so. He would see what she had on. There was no point in announcing it. Idly she wondered if the fact that she was wearing a Pull-up diaper and not panties was a turn off for him and would make him think less of her. Then she remembered that it didn’t matter what he thought, or whether he was personally turned off. Chef Graham had made it very clear he had no interest in being a Daddy, even if Mariah thought he would make a good one.

“I beg your pardon?”

Her cheeks flamed with heat as she realized she’d have to repeat something she shouldn’t have said in the first place. “I wear a Pull-up diaper, sir. Not panties.”

“Ah. Well, no matter. My instructions remain the same. Please obey quickly.”

Jumping to her feet Mariah did exactly as she’d been told, baring her bottom to her sexy but aloof boss.

She was almost trembling with embarrassment but Graham remained steadfast. “Bend over and place your palms on the seat of the chair.”

Again, she quickly obeyed, finding it easier to focus on doing what she was told without thinking too much about it.

There was a pop behind her and Mariah recognized the sound as the cap on the bottle of lube. Next she heard scissors

and the ripping of plastic. Then silence, and she could only assume Chef Graham was preparing the plug for her bottom. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other and tried not to tear up. She wasn't scared, but anxious. Her heart was racing, and she just wanted to get this first day over with so she would know what to expect.

“Mariah, I'm going to spread your bottom cheeks now and insert the plug. Say 'yes, Sir' to let me know you understand and consent.”

“Yes, Sir.” Her voice was a barely audible squeak to her own ears but Chef Graham must have heard her because the next thing she knew, his hands were on her bottom, pulling her cheeks apart and the tip of the plug, cold from the lube, was pressing against her tight hole.

“Relax your bottom,” he instructed. “You're going to feel a little pressure. I'll go slow, but I'm going to keep pushing until it's all the way in.”

“Yes, Sir.” Mariah wished he would stop talking and just do. Somehow the step-by-step explanation made it just that much more mortifying.

He was finally quiet and the plug breached the barrier of her anus, filling her. He continued to push until it was all the way in, with the base of the plug nestled between her cheeks.

Her bottom twinged where it stretched her muscles and her pussy ached. What was wrong with her that being bent over a chair having her bottom plugged by her boss made her feel aroused and all mushy inside?

“Okay, Mariah. It's time for your spanking. Do you want to tell me why you are getting spanked today?”

Her eyes flared open. She hadn't been expecting that question and wasn't sure how to answer. She felt like she was being spanked because she'd made an awful mistake, but Chef Graham had been very clear that this wasn't a punishment. "I don't... I don't know what you want me to say, Sir."

Behind her, Chef grunted. "You are getting a spanking to remind you to do your best, stay focused and alert and to never be careless in the kitchen. Serving food is a responsibility as much as it is a reward because so many people have allergies and sensitivities. One careless move and you can make someone very, very sick. You're a good girl, Mariah, and I know you wouldn't want to do that again. The spanking you will get will help you remember."

Her tummy fluttered when he called her a good girl. "Yes, Sir."

"Okay. I'm going to begin now. Stay in position please, or I'll have to start over."

"Yes, Sir." Please just get started and get it over with, she thought. The longer she stayed there with her plugged bottom bared to him, waiting for the long, hard bare-bottom spanking he was sure to give, the harder it was to not think of him as a Daddy. He may not punish, but he sure acted and sounded like a Daddy. With every stern word, she felt like shrinking. Her bottom clenched, begging for his correction. Punishment or not, whatever she called it, she knew this spanking would help her feel absolved and relieve some of the lingering guilt she was feeling.

Crack! The hairbrush smacked her bottom with a loud cracking noise. Pain exploded, spreading through the tissue.

"Owie!" she cried, not moving from position.

“This will help you to be a better sous chef,” Chef Graham scolded as he brought the brush down again and again. “This spanking will help you remember to be alert and focused.”

“Yes, Sir,” she wailed as he continued to spank. It didn’t escape her notice that he referred to her as a sous chef and not a kitchen assistant as he usually called her, but now was not the time to question his word choices.

The brush came down again and again, the swats moving from the fullest, fleshiest part of her bottom to the crease between her butt and thighs. Tears pricked her eyelids and she breathed deeply, reminding herself that she needed this and that she was lucky to have been given the option to keep her job.

Chef Graham was a skilled spanker, leaving no part of her bottom untouched, hitting with just the right amount of force and lecturing just enough to make her feel all the feelings one should feel from a very thorough spanking. She was relieved, and thankful and felt very thoroughly chastised. She was determined in her resolve to do better, and she was sore and sorry. Very, very sorry. Just when she thought she couldn’t take any more, he stopped. The brush was placed on the desk, right in her line of vision, and his hands were on her, pulling her pants and diaper over her hot achy bottom. The diaper felt scratchy and uncomfortable against her skin, but she told herself that was extra penance.

Chef Graham gripped her shoulders and turned her to face him. This was normally the point where her tears would be wiped and she’d be pulled in for a hug, but Chef Graham kept her at arm’s length.

“How do you feel?” he questioned. “Would you be able to take the same again?”

“I’ll do whatever it takes to keep my job,” Mariah answered honestly. “I appreciate the chance. Thank you for correcting me.”

Even as she said the words, she weighed her conflicting emotions. If this had been a punishment, it would have likely been worse, but it would have been a one and done. She wouldn’t have to look forward to the same treatment day after day. Aside from that conundrum, she felt the same as she did after any punishment Baze gave her. Maybe a little different because Baze was off limits. Technically, so was Chef Graham but in a much different way. He wasn’t married to her bestie.

Chef Graham looked taken aback by her gratitude. He frowned and quickly recovered. “I’m glad you’re okay. Let’s get to work.”



Graham

Spanking Mariah had awakened all sorts of unexpected feelings in him, leaving him cranky and confused as he attempted to sort out everything he thought he knew.

He hadn’t been too surprised to find out she wore a diaper and identified as a very little Little; as best he could tell, all of Baze’s girls did. He supposed he’d known that deep down, but it was easy to forget with Mariah. For the most part he only saw the competent, professional side of her.

The biggest surprise had been when she’d looked up at him, her eyes shining with unshed tears, and thanked him for correcting her. He could tell she was genuine about it, and it

took him by surprise. When had Kaylie ever thanked him for spanking her? Never. He could spank her until she couldn't sit down and the first thing she would do was push him for more. To see what would happen next.

He could tell Mariah was genuinely upset about her mistake whereas it was the sort of thing Kaylie would have done just to see what he would do. Her appetite for punishment had been insatiable. Switching to maintenance hadn't helped at all. Even knowing she would be spanked every day, and receive the attention she so desperately craved, her behavior had continued to get worse. She'd continued to push the limits until she was hurting herself and others just to get what she wanted, just to see what would happen.

He'd loved her, loved being her Daddy, but at that point, he'd had to realize the relationship was toxic and that his boundaries weren't being respected. It had taken him a long time to recover. Some days, Graham honestly wasn't sure he really had. Breaking it off with his Little girl had been heart wrenching and painful. After years of toxic manipulation and trying everything he could think of to make her happy only for it to never be enough, he'd been left resentful and bitter, full of bias toward Littles, a group of people he'd once loved.

His mentor, Trey, said his feelings were normal and okay, walls he was putting up to protect himself and that he didn't need to feel guilty for his emotions: anger and suspicion and lack of compassion. He'd also promised that someday those feelings would fade, and Graham would be ready let someone in again and be able to look back on that relationship with clarity. Graham hadn't really believed him at the time, hadn't been able to envision a time where that would be true, but ever since he'd met Mariah, those promises had echoed in his mind

on a daily basis. Was that what was happening now? Was he ready to let someone in again?

He still felt himself being cold and aloof; he hadn't even hugged her after her spanking.

He'd just pulled up her pants and sent her to work. She was standing next to him now, with a pile of carrots and celery in front of her, chopping vegetables to prep for the next week. He had a pile of onions in front of him for the same reason but he hadn't even picked up the knife.

Doing so now, he chopped both ends off an onion and peeled the outer layers. As he chopped, he watched Mariah. She was hyper focused on her task, all business. If not for her red-rimmed eyes and the occasional snuffle and the way she shifted uncomfortably every couple of minutes, no one would know she'd just been taken to task in his office and was now sporting a butt plug and a very hot bottom. Kaylie would have already been poking and berating him by now. Mariah had barely looked at him. Somehow this made him feel sad and empty.

"Mariah, do you think we should make stew or chicken for tonight's dinner menu?" he asked. He wanted to start a real conversation with her, but it felt awkward to talk about anything other than work.

Mariah frowned as she considered her choices. "I know I should say stew, because we are chopping all these vegetables and we need to be sure to use them up..."

"But you'd rather have chicken?"

Mariah shook her head. "I'd rather have stew over chicken, but... my bottom hurts and I'm feeling weepy. It feels like a comfort food sort of day."

Her honest answer warmed his heart and gave him an opening for a conversation that wasn't solely centered around work, something he was surprised to find he actually wanted.

“What is your ultimate comfort food?” he asked, knowing that if he had all the ingredients, he'd change the menu immediately just to please her.

“Macaroni and cheese,” Mariah answered without hesitating. “The homemade stuff. Not the kind that comes in a box.”

Cheese. Cream. Elbow macaroni, dry mustard, bread crumb topping. Garlic. He had all the things he needed. It was a done deal.

But she'd given him an opening for a conversation not centered around food so he took it. “You're feeling weepy, huh? Is that normal for you after a punishment? To feel weepy and crave comfort food?”

Her head jerked up. “It wasn't a punishment. You said you don't do punishments.”

“You're right. I misspoke. Is that a normal thing for you to feel after a spanking?”

Mariah shrugged. “Maybe. Kinda. I think it's worse this time because it wasn't a punishment. My brain doesn't know how to process that.”

Before he could respond, she posed a question. “Can I ask... why you don't do punishments?”

Anxiety burned his chest as he contemplated how to respond. Being truthful felt like the right thing to do, but he also felt like if he did, there would be no going back. Opening his mouth, he chose his words carefully. “Remember how I told you I used to be a Daddy?”

Mariah bobbed her head up and down and waited for him to continue.

“I had a Little whom I loved very much. Her name was Kaylie.”

“What happened to her?” Mariah asked with a gasp. Her lower lip trembled, and he realized she was already thinking the worst.

“Nothing happened to her.” He rushed to correct her assumption. “We had to break up.”

“You left her? You were her Daddy and you left her?”

Mariah looked horrified and Graham felt like an idiot. He sighed and set the knife down on the counter. “This is why I don’t like talking about this.”

“I’m sorry,” Mariah said immediately. “I asked the question so I’ll stop interrupting and let you answer.”

“Thank you.” Graham exhaled a sigh of relief. It was hard enough to get his story out without the constant interruptions. “I know a Daddy isn’t supposed to leave his Little girl and it broke my heart to do so, but Kaylie... she needed help. And it ended up being the kind of help that I couldn’t give her, no matter how hard I tried.”

“Oooh. Was she sick?” Mariah asked, then clapped her hand over her mouth.

“In a way, yes, I suppose she was. Kaylie didn’t like herself very much, and no matter how much love and affection I showered on her, no matter how much I spoiled her, or what steps I took to assure her she was safe and she could count on me, that never really changed. Kaylie used punishments as a replacement for self-harm. She would do whatever it would take to get the worst punishment she could. And no matter

how much I followed it up with aftercare and affirmation and told her she was a good girl, she told herself the opposite.

“She liked the adrenaline and dopamine a spanking would give her, but she hated herself so much, it was never enough. She never wanted to obey my rules, but she also had no respect for my personal boundaries. She saw them as another way to get what she wanted and didn’t care that she was actually hurting me. I tried everything I could think of but nothing worked. And soon I realized I didn’t like the person I was becoming as a result of that relationship. I was an anxiety-ridden miserable mess.”

When he finally looked up at Mariah, he saw that she was staring at him with a devastated expression on her face.

Setting down her knife she covered his hand with hers. “I’m very sorry that happened,” she said. Then she frowned, knitting her eyebrows together. “Did you try maintenance with her?”

“I did. The result was the same.”

“Oh.”

That was all she said but he could see the unspoken question in her eyes. If both things had gotten the same result, why was he against punishment, but not maintenance?

He swallowed thickly. It was a good question. One he was currently asking himself. But he wasn’t ready to examine that too much at the moment. “If you’re still struggling with guilt, you should talk to Baze about it,” he offered. He was starting to reconsider some of his previous assumptions and bias, but he wasn’t about to flip a complete one-eighty overnight.

Mariah seemed to read his mind. “I’m not sure how I feel about maintenance yet. But you believe in it, so I can accept

that. Just...”

She trailed off and he could tell she really wanted to say something.

“Just what?” he asked, prompting her to continue.

“Just... do you think... next time... I could maybe get a hug after?”

Feeling like a jerk, he stepped back and held out his arms. He could see that the gesture was not what she expected, but after only a moment’s hesitation, she all but ran into his arms, and hugged him tightly around the waist. He wrapped his arms around her back and couldn’t help but inhale her sweet scent. He was surprised to find that he had missed the physical contact and that he honestly truly cared for Mariah. Maybe even in the way a Daddy cared for a little.

She broke the hug finally, and resumed her place at the counter, chopping vegetables.

“I’m sorry I didn’t think to do that earlier,” he said. “Do you feel better now?”

“Much.”

Graham smiled. He felt a lot better too.

CHAPTER 9

Mariah

“I don’t understand. Why isn’t dinner being delivered up here? It usually is on the weekends.” Margo spoke loudly, as if not having their dinner delivered to the penthouse was a source of major conspiracy.

“I don’t know.” Luna shrugged. “Baze just said we had to go downstairs to eat. It’s not that big of a deal, Margo. Don’t make a mountain out of a molehill.”

“What’s for dinner, anyway?” Jilly asked as she ran a brush through her hair to get presentable to go downstairs. “Mariah, you worked today. Do you know?”

Mariah blushed. She had indeed worked today and every minute of the day was permanently burned into her brain, from having her bottom plugged, to the humiliating spanking she’d been subjected to, to the conversation they’d had afterward and how amazing she’d felt when he’d hugged her, and the shame of having him remove the plug from her bottom at the end of her shift. But dinner? She knew they’d talked about it. “Ummm maybe like stew or chicken?” They’d talked about both but she couldn’t remember if they’d decided on either.

Margo wrinkled her nose, seemingly unimpressed. “I don’t see why we have to eat downstairs for chicken or stew.”

“Who knows.” Jade rolled her eyes. “It’s really not as big a deal as you’re making it though. Mister Daddy wants us to, so that’s what we are gonna do. Okay?”

“Okay. Jeez. Where is Mister Daddy anyway?”

“I think he’s downstairs waiting for us,” Luna answered, pulling on her shoes. “Are we all ready?”

“I am!” Mariah answered eagerly. She couldn’t help herself. She was excited at the prospect of seeing Chef Graham again even though she’d seen him only a few hours before and she’d see him again in the morning.

“I’m ready!” Ellie answered, lining up at the door and waiting for the others. Mariah joined her and Tessa and Jilly lined up behind them. Jade joined them a minute later, and finally Luna and Margo brought up the rear.

“Finally,” Mariah muttered under her breath.

They rode the elevator down to the casino floor and walked to the dining room where they’d had the near catastrophic event the night before. The tables had all been taken down except for two large ones that had been pushed together. They were covered with a fancy linen tablecloth. There was a large centerpiece of daisies and sunflowers, Mariah’s favorites, flanked by two elegant crystal candlesticks holding long tapered candles with flickering flames. Two uniformed servers stood nearby. She recognized them as Casey and Angelica from the night before.

Chef Graham stood at the head of the table, standing beside a rolling serving tray covered with domed dishes. When she reached him, he leaned forward and handed her a flower.

He didn't give anyone else a flower. Mariah gasped. "What... what is this?"

"It's a special dinner for you, Mariah, to celebrate your promotion to sous chef." Baze said, stepping out of the shadows.

"My... what?" Mariah cried, tears of joy prickling the corners of her eyes. She vaguely recalled Chef Graham referring to her as a sous chef instead of a kitchen assistant, but she'd figured he'd just misspoke.

"You are an exemplary employee. You're diligent and knowledgeable, hardworking, and you have good instincts. I'd be honored to have you as my sous chef."

Behind her, her friends all gasped in surprise. Given the events of the night before, they'd been honestly shocked she hadn't gotten fired.

"I... what... what about my... probation?" Mariah whispered.

Chef Graham winked at her. "We can talk about that later. In private. For now, let's eat, and celebrate."

"What did you end up making?" Mariah asked.

"A small house salad to start, honey-glazed carrots or corn casserole for sides, and for our main course...." Chef Graham lifted one of the domes with a flourish. "The ultimate comfort food. My homemade macaroni and cheese. With a five-cheese sauce and a breadcrumb topping."

Mariah suddenly had a hard time breathing. Her eyes filled with tears that flowed down her face before she could stop them. Baze did nice things for them all the time, but this was the first time in ages somebody had done something special

just for her, and it wasn't even for her birthday or anything. "You... you made my favorite?" she whispered.

Chef Graham winked. "It seemed like a good day for comfort food. And you deserved it."

"No, I really didn't," Mariah argued.

Chef Graham shook his head. "None of that now. The truth is, we both could have lost our jobs last night, but if I'm going to be here still, I want you by my side. So what do you say? Will you accept my offer? Will you be my sous chef?"

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" Mariah cried. Then she stopped short and looked at Baze. "I mean, that's if it's okay with you, Mister Daddy."

"I wouldn't have helped Chef Graham set this up if it wasn't," Baze said. "I'm very proud of you, Mariah."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" Mariah cried. She couldn't contain her enthusiasm any longer. Launching herself at them both at the same time she hugged them, with one arm around Baze and one around Chef Graham. "Thank you for letting me keep my job and promoting me and thank you for my special dinner."

"You're very welcome," Chef said, squeezing her extra tight. "And on that note, let's eat before it gets cold!"

"Can you eat with us?" Mariah asked shyly. "You can sit by me." She knew he still struggled with his feelings about Littles and she wasn't sure he would say yes. She tried to temper her hope and prepare herself to hear a no so she wouldn't be disappointed.

"Well, considering I already set a plate for myself at the table, I think I better," Chef answered.

Mariah's chest swelled with happiness. She rushed to the table and sat, pulling out the chair next to her.

Chef Graham sat with a chuckle and leaned to whisper in her ear. "Little girl, you're supposed to wait and let me pull out the chair for you."

"Oops. Sorry," Mariah sing-songed. "If there's a next time, I'll try to remember."

"I hope there will be a next time."

Mariah giggled. "Me too."

Baze and her friends joined them at the table and Casey and Angelica served them. Mariah did her best to eat her salad, because she knew Baze would expect her to, but she was excited for the macaroni and cheese, not just because it was her favorite, but also because Chef Graham had listened and done something special for her.

The macaroni was flawless. Creamy and rich, with just the right amount of seasoning and the crumb topping was absolute perfection. Mariah moaned out loud when she tasted the first bite.

"Does it hit the spot? Did you get the comfort you were craving?" Chef Graham questioned her the second she finished chewing, watching her intently.

Mariah couldn't stop herself from scooping a second bite before she answered. "Mmmm... yum... it's so good," she answered around a mouth full of noodles and cheese.

"Didn't anyone ever tell you it's impolite to talk with your mouth full?"

She swallowed. "Didn't anyone ever tell you it's impolite to question people while they are trying to enjoy their dinner?"

“Touché.” He smiled. “I’m glad you are enjoying it.”

“I’d have enjoyed the macaroni alone, just because you made it for me, and it is such a sweet gesture. But the fact that it came with a promotion that I didn’t even deserve, and”—she swept her hand, gesturing at the fancy table and all her friends—“all this, it makes it that much better. I can’t even remember the last time anyone made me feel so special.” Her voice cracked on the last words and her eyes welled up with tears.

“Well, you deserve to have nice things done for you. And you deserve the promotion. Mushroom incident aside, you are extremely competent and easy to work with.”

“Thank you. I just... I just feel weird about accepting the promotion with... things... still hanging between us.”

“Ah. The maintenance, you mean?”

Mariah nodded.

“You made me think a lot today. And honestly, I’m still thinking. Can we talk about it tomorrow?”

“Well, I’ll still be there fifteen minutes early,” Mariah pointed out.

“Make it thirty. Now, ignore me, and enjoy your dinner.” He nodded at her plate. “Eat up before it gets cold.”

She savored every bite.



Graham

His mind had been racing all day, from the moment he'd bent her over the chair in his office and paddled and plugged her bottom, during the heartfelt conversation they'd shared afterward, and while he'd cooked up her surprise promotion dinner. And while a lot of things were becoming clearer, he still had a lot of questions.

He needed to think things through out loud, with someone who knew exactly what he'd been through and where he was coming from, but also someone who wouldn't just tell him what they thought he wanted to hear. He needed to call his brother. He made the decision while he walked back to his room and dialed while he was still unlocking the door.

Pierce answered on the second ring. "Ready for me to come rescue you yet?"

"Hardly," Graham scoffed, closing the door behind him and sinking onto the couch. "What would you say if I told you I'd met a Little?"

"I sort of assumed you'd meet a lot of them in a place like that."

"Yes, I have but I mean... there's one in particular who seems to have caught my attention and made me start to think about things."

"Oh, it's like that, is it?"

"I mean... it might be."

"Well, I can't say I'm surprised. It was bound to happen."

"It was?" Graham was shocked at his brother's unbothered tone.

"Graham... you are a Daddy-Dom. It's who you are. And you're a good one. The kind any Little girl would be lucky to

have. You went through some shit and you got hurt and you needed time to heal. But you were always gonna be a Daddy-Dom again.”

“I was?” Graham wished he felt as sure as his brother sounded. In his heart, he knew Mariah was nothing like Kaylie, but in his head... all he knew was he never wanted to feel that hopeless again. “It just... it feels like it’s too soon.”

“It’s been a year. Actually, closer to two. And in that time, you’ve healed. You’ve grown. You’ve had the power of hindsight, which will give you better instincts and intuition moving forward. So tell me about this Little. What is she like, and what’s still holding you back?”

“Well, I truly had no intention of interacting with any Littles. I thought I’d be able to avoid close contact. But this one lives here. And my boss wanted me to give her a job.”

The story poured out of him. He told Pierce everything from his initial reluctant agreement, their first week working together, to fixing her favorite breakfast for dinner on her birthday and surprising her with a cake. He told him about the unfortunate mushroom incident and almost killing his boss, and their maintenance contract and putting her on probation. “I told myself that if I called it maintenance, I could keep it purely professional and it wouldn’t affect me.”

“Uh-huh. And how’s that working out for you?”

“It... it felt good to take care of someone in that way again. Even if it was somewhat of a business transaction.”

“And how did she feel about it?”

“I think... okay? She’d have definitely preferred to be punished, but she took it okay. We had a good conversation

afterward and I told her about Kaylie and about everything that happened.”

“Wait. Stop. Hold the presses. You told her about Kaylie?”

“Yeah... so?”

“So you said you hadn’t told anyone about Kaylie aside from me, your therapist, and Trey. If you told this girl... I don’t know, bro. That seems significant to me.”

“I guess.” Graham wasn’t so sure. He’d also told Pastor Ryan and Baze. “Mariah is sweet. And I think she’s had a rough go of things.” He didn’t feel the need to tell Pierce she’d been homeless or that she was currently in the care of his boss. “I don’t want to jump the gun and think I’m ready if I’m not gonna be. She doesn’t deserve that.”

“You’re right. But she also doesn’t deserve to be strung along, and you’re definitely starting to act like a Daddy.”

He groaned. He knew his brother was right, and he hadn’t even told him about the special dinner he’d made her or how many times he’d called her “little girl” over the course of dinner. Not to mention how many times he’d had to bite his tongue to keep from saying very Daddy-like things.

“Even if I wanted to be more... I’m her boss. How do I go from boss to Daddy? That seems like it would be hard to balance.”

“In the real world, it probably would be. In a place like Utopia... I’m sure it’s manageable. It seems like a place like that would allow for blurring of certain lines.”

“I guess you’re right. But am I ready to blur those lines? Is she?”

“I don’t know, bro. The only way to know that is to talk to her and to be honest with yourself.”

“Right.” He knew his brother was right. He also knew he was ready. The fact surprised him, but he was sure. “You’re right. And you honestly helped a lot. I’m glad I called. Thank you.”

“Just doing my job as your big brother,” Pierce said with a chuckle. “Speaking of which, I’ve got one last piece of brotherly advice for you.”

“What’s that?”

“When you talk to Mariah... start at the beginning. Don’t start at blurred lines and the conundrum of having a boss who’s also your Daddy. Slow down and start at the beginning. Find out if she even wants a Daddy and how she’d feel if that Daddy was you. It might be all clear in your mind now, but if she thought you were off limits... she’s probably not there yet.”

Graham sighed. “Stellar advice, big bro. As usual.”

“I do my best. Listen, Mikey is hosting a poker night at his place and I promised him I’d grab some extra beer on the way so I’ve gotta hop off. You good?”

“I am now. Thank you.”

“Good luck. When you talk to her, let me know how it goes.”

“Will do.” He hung up the phone and stripped, exhausted from the extra-long work day but already excited to get back to work in the morning and see Mariah again.

Throwing back the covers, he climbed in bed, and was out as soon as his head hit the pillow.

CHAPTER 10

Mariah

“I’m here,” Mariah announced as she stepped into the kitchen the next morning. She didn’t know what else to say because she wasn’t quite sure why she was here even earlier today. It felt like something had changed, but she wasn’t quite sure what it was.

“Good morning.” Chef Graham looked up from the menu and greeted her with a smile.

His dimples made her tummy drop. “I umm... should we...” She gulped. “Should we step into your office?”

“Let’s talk out here.”

Mariah frowned. Talk? She’d been expecting something else. Her bottom clenched as she anticipated being plugged and spanked again. “I guess,” she finally answered. “What do we need to talk about?”

“I just want to get to know you.”

This made no sense to Mariah. They often talked while they worked and she felt like Chef Graham knew her just as

well as Baze did, if not better. But she could tell that whatever he was about to say was important to him. “Okay.”

“Can we go into the dining room?” Without waiting for an answer, he took her hand and led her into the same room where the unfortunate mushroom incident had occurred and the same room where he’d surprised her with a promotion and her favorite dinner the night before.

The remnants of the dinner parties had been cleared away, the linens sent off to laundry, and the extra chairs and tables folded up and stored out of sight. Only one remained.

They walked over to it and this time Mariah waited for him to pull out her chair. He beamed as he did so, waiting for her to sit and scooting in her chair when she did, before taking the seat opposite her.

“I remembered to wait this time,” Mariah announced, even though it was obvious he’d noticed.

“You did. Such a good girl you are.”

When he praised her, her tummy did flips and her panties moistened with the juices of her arousal, making her uncomfortable. She was pretty sure she was not supposed to feel these things about her boss. She frowned.

He noticed her change in expression. “What’s up, little one? Why the long face?”

“It’s not sadness,” she was quick to reassure him. “Just a little... confusion. Lately, you keep saying these things that are very Daddy-like. And you’re supposed to be my boss. You made it very clear you had no interest in being a Daddy.”

“You’re right I did. And I’m sorry to confuse you, but that’s actually what I wanted to talk to you about.”

“It is?” Mariah gasped. She didn’t want to get her hopes up but it kind of felt like her dreams were about to come true.

“It is.” Graham took a deep breath. “When I first came here, I did it because it was a good offer, and I believed in the project of creating a safe and fun space for Littles and their caregivers. I also truly and firmly believed that I wanted to and would be able to avoid being around Littles at all costs.”

“You did?” Mariah gasped. “But... you gave me a job!”

“Baze asked me to, and I didn’t feel like I could say no. I didn’t want to work with you at first. The idea of being around a Little again brought back all sorts of awful feelings and fears. But then... I met you. And you were sweet and smart, kind and funny and more than competent. Besides that, I could tell we had things in common. I enjoyed working with you. And even though I tried to keep my walls up, I realize now, they were never meant to stay up. They were just waiting for the right Little to come along and make me feel safe enough to allow them to be knocked down. And you did that. You *do* do that.”

“I do?” Mariah was incredulous.

“You do. I’d gotten so used to feeling hopeless, and you made me feel hope. You made me realize that what I went through with Kaylie was because of Kaylie, not because of me or because Littles are all inherently bad and manipulative. It was just her. And her sickness. I always knew those things intellectually, I suppose but I wasn’t ready to believe them or let go of the guilt I felt.”

“But now you are?”

“Now I am.” He reached across the table and took her hand. “Because of you.”

“Oh wow. Um... thank you? I mean you’re welcome?” She wrinkled her nose. “I’m not sure what I’m supposed to say.”

“I’m not looking for either of those things. What I’m trying to say is... I think... I think when and if you would be willing... I think I’m ready to be a Daddy again. And I’d like to be your Daddy.”

“Oh! Oh my god! Oh my god!” Mariah jumped from her chair and dropped his hand, bouncing around the table. Suddenly she stopped, sank into her chair and put her head in her hands. “Okay. I’m okay. I just need a minute. It’s all so sweet and romantic and like... even better than the fantasies I’ve had in my head. And...” Her breathing quickened.

“You’ve had fantasies about me?” he interrupted with a smirk.

“Of course I have. Are you kidding me? Have you seen yourself?”

He blushed and chuckled. “I’ve definitely had fantasies about you too,” he admitted. “So what I’m asking you now is, if you’d consider, now or anytime in the future, making our fantasies reality and letting me be your Daddy for real?”

“Oh my gosh. Yes!” She jumped up again and leapt into his arms, clinging to his neck. He held her tightly and listened to the incoherent ramblings she was speaking into his neck.

Finally, she pulled away and took the seat opposite him once more. “I get to keep my job right?”

“Of course. I couldn’t work without my best sous chef.”

“Okay good.” She frowned again. “What about... our arrangement? The probation? And you know... the stuff that comes with it?”

“I think we can call that good.”

Mariah was surprised to find that his answer made her uneasy. “A good Daddy keeps his word,” she said. “If he makes a threat or hands down a sentence, he’s gotta stick to it so his Little knows he can be consistent.”

“A good Daddy is able to admit when he’s been wrong and handled something unfairly,” he countered. “It was a mistake. And I know it’s one you won’t make again. You’ve been punished enough.”

His answer made Mariah mad and confused. “I don’t feel punished. I still feel super guilty. And you said that it wasn’t punishment, it was maintenance so I’d remember to do better and so I’d be focused at work. You can’t... you can’t just change your mind now and say oops just kidding it was a punishment, so you’ve been punished so no need to feel guilty anymore. That doesn’t really work.”

He chuckled. “I love the way you challenge me. And you’re right. I can’t call it one thing and then call it the other. But the fact remains, I did make a mistake. It was too harsh and unnecessary for me to draw it out all week.”

“Okay, agree,” Mariah responded softly. “But the fact also remains that I feel guilty and awful and I haven’t been punished or spanked in a way that would help me work through that guilt and feel forgiven.”

The corners of his mouth turned up and his eyebrows shot to his hairline. “Are you arguing that you need to be punished?”

“I think I am.” She grimaced. “Is that... is that something Kaylie would do?”

“Oddly... it isn’t. It seems like it would be, doesn’t it? But nope. Kaylie would fight with me to get out of each and every punishment until we were spending hours arguing about it and then be pissed at me for days if I gave in and act even worse.” He shook his head, reliving the memory and marveling that it had taken him so long to see that she was in trouble. He’d forgiven himself for those mistakes already, and finally he was ready to move on.

“I’d be happy letting it go. But I can see why that would be hard for you. So if you feel like being punished for that incident is what you need to move forward with me as your Daddy, then you can come to my room tonight after dinner and we will deal with it then.”

Mariah balked. “You want me to wait until after dinner? You don’t want to deal with it now? In the office?”

He shook his head, his expression grave. “No, little one. The office was fine for maintenance, and it might be used on occasion for a quick reminder, but if I’m going to give you your first true punishment as my Little girl, I’m going to do it properly. I’ll pull you over my knee on the couch in my room, and pull down your pants and diaper, and give you a long, hard, bare-bottom spanking. I won’t stop until I’m sure that you feel thoroughly punished and will feel completely forgiven. It will not be easy and it will certainly not be quick, especially as we’ll need lots of time afterward so I can give you proper aftercare.”

“Oh.” Mariah shivered. Her bottom clenched and her pussy spasmed. What he was proposing sounded awful and delightful and well... perfect. “Okay,” she agreed. “After dinner, then.”

“After dinner.” He nodded, winked and stood. “And on that note, we’d better get to work.”

He led her back into the kitchen. Mariah stifled a groan. So much had happened in the span of just a few minutes. How was she supposed to work knowing she had such a big spanking coming and that she was well on her way to having a Daddy of her very own?

CHAPTER 11

Mariah

Standing outside the door to Chef Graham's, *no, her Daddy's* suite, Mariah hesitated before knocking. She'd changed into a fresh Pull-up and powdered herself before heading down, but she was a nervous wreck. She knew her face was already beet red, and her whole body felt like it was covered in sweat. Her anxiety was made worse by the fact that he hadn't given her any instructions to follow, like an implement to bring, or even a time to show up. He'd just said "after dinner".

What if she'd taken too long getting ready and he was mad because she was late? What if she had eaten too fast and he wasn't ready for her yet?

She was standing there with her fist poised to knock, her mind racing with what ifs, when the door jerked open, and there he stood. Gone was the chef's uniform she usually saw him in. The plain white uniform had been replaced by a pair of cream-colored corduroy slacks, and a soft blue v-neck sweater with a checkered dress shirt underneath. The shirt was open at the collar and the hem peeked out below his sweater. His sleeves were rolled up to just below his forearms, revealing

taut muscles. His dark curls, which she'd only seen in a hairnet before now, fell free, cascading in loose ringlet-like locks around his ears. She gulped looking at him. He was even hotter than she'd imagined.

“Hi!” she squeaked. “I... um... I just... I didn't know what time you wanted me? Am I late? Am I too early? I can come back—”

“You're just in time,” he replied with a warm grin, swinging the door open. “I just realized I'd forgotten something important downstairs. Why don't you go on in and wait for me? I'll be back in a jiffy.”

Before she could respond, he swept past her, pausing only to press a kiss to the top of her head. She watched puzzled as he hurried down the hall toward the elevator bank. When he was out of sight, she shrugged, and entered his room, shutting the door behind her.

It felt weird to be in his space without him. Oh, who was she kidding? It felt weird to be in his space, period.

She'd never been in a boy's room before, aside from her brothers', and now she was in a man's room. And she was no longer a girl, but a woman.

A woman in a man's room. And not just any man, but a man who was her Daddy. The thought sent shivers down her spine. She had a Daddy. Of her very own. One who said things like jiffy. How old was Chef Graham anyway? Her gut twisted as she realized she didn't know. Her heart sped up and she gripped her wrist, checking her own pulse.

She'd wanted a Daddy of her very own, of course, but she'd never pictured herself actually having one. And she'd

assumed though, that when she did have a Daddy of her very own, she'd know his age, at the very least.

Trying to hold the anxious tears at bay, she plopped down on the couch and looked around the room. While the modest suite was wildly different from the penthouse she shared with Mister Daddy and her friends, it wasn't that different from Knox's. The living area and kitchenette were the same aside from a few personal touches. The door to the bedroom was open which allowed her to easily see inside. Knox kept an extra Squishmallow on his bed for Margo, while Graham's bed was bare and neatly made with perfectly fluffed pillows and hospital corners. From what she could tell from her seat, the rest of his room was equally tidy—he showed the same scrupulousness in his bedroom that he did in his kitchen.

Her train of thought was interrupted when the suite's door swung open again and Graham stopped over the threshold.

Mariah jumped to her feet. “How old are you?” she asked, too loudly, before clapping a hand over her mouth.

“Sorry,” she squeaked around her fingers as he entered, closing the door behind him.

He smiled, and shook his head as he walked toward her, peeling her hand away from her mouth when he finally reached her and holding it in his. “No need to be sorry for asking a question, little one. I guess there is a lot we still don't know about each other. I'm thirty-two.”

“I'm twenty-two,” she offered, even though he hadn't asked.

The corners of his mouth turned up in a smirk. “I know. I made your birthday cake, remember?”

“Oh. Right.” Her face heated as she remembered the wish she’d made blowing out the candles. It had been a silly thing—a dare Luna had put her up to, but for the first time in her life, her birthday wish had actually come true.

Unable to believe she was actually here, with a Daddy of her own, about to be very thoroughly punished like the naughty girl she was, she cast her eyes down to the floor and gulped. “What did you forget downstairs?” she whispered. He’d had nothing in his hands when he entered the room.

“Don’t worry about that,” he answered with a wink. “Look at me, Mariah.” He hooked a finger underneath her chin, lifting her face, forcing her to meet his gaze. “Why are you here, little one?”

Oh god. This was the worst part. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other and forced herself to answer. “We’re here because I made a big mistake that almost killed Miss Lamont and Mister Daddy Baze, and um... uh... we decided I needed to be punished to help with all the guilty feelings I was having. And to help me remember why it’s so important to be extra careful in the kitchen.”

“That’s right. And how, Miss Mariah, did we decide you were going to be spanked?”

Mariah licked her lips and averted her eyes. “You... you’re... um... my Daddy... is gonna spank me.” It was hard to get the words out, even though it had been her idea, even though she needed this. Reminding herself that he was her Daddy and actually saying the words out loud helped.

“That’s right, little girl. Daddy is going to give you a long, hard, bare-bottom spanking until all the guilty feelings melt away.” He squeezed her hand, and she looked up at him, meeting his gaze again.

“Ask me for your spanking, little one,” he commanded.

Her stomach dropped to her toes. She'd thought they were through the worst part now, but she was so, so wrong. This was way worse. She'd never had to actually ask for a spanking before. She wasn't sure she even could, at first. But then she looked into her Daddy's warm eyes and saw his encouraging patience. As hard as asking may be for her, she knew that by taking a Little again, he was putting his trust in her, and also doing a hard thing. She wanted to return the favor.

Steeling her shoulders, she met his gaze head-on, and uttered the words he wanted to hear, even though they felt like sandpaper in her mouth. “Daddy,” she said with a gulp, “I'm very sorry for my mistake. Please spank me so I can feel better and remember to be more careful in the future.”

The warm pride that flooded Graham's face was worth the awkwardness and embarrassment she'd felt at having to ask for her spanking. He beamed at her. “Very good, little one. And very well, Daddy would be happy to do just that.”

With her hand still in his, he sat down on the sofa behind them, and guided her over his lap.

Margo's breath hitched in her throat as he folded his leg over hers and pinned her hands to the center of her back. She'd been in this position many times now, regularly over the past several months, usually with Baze, and a few times with Knox when Baze and Luna had gone away for their honeymoon, but this time, it just felt different.

“Before we begin,” Graham said, speaking in an even tone, “I need your consent. I won't always ask for it, particularly when you are being punished and especially once we've gotten to know each other better and become more comfortable in our

roles, but this time I'd like to hear you say it. Explicitly please."

"Yes... I consent."

"Thank you." Graham, her Daddy, cleared his throat. "I'm going to lower your pants now and take down your Pull-up."

This time there was no question in his voice, no hesitation, just a soft-spoken but firm explanation.

"Yes, Daddy," Mariah answered.

And then his hands were in the waistband of her leggings, pulling them swiftly down her buttocks and over her thighs, and finally down her calves and onto the floor. He did the same with her Pull-up, eliciting a squeak when he pulled it all the way off, something Baze, and even Knox had never done .

Her squeak seemed to give him pause and he rubbed a circle on her lower back with his free hand. "Everything okay, little one?"

"Yes, Daddy," she breathed, thankful for how tender and careful he was being with her.

"I'm going to begin now. I'll start with a warm-up, using only my hand."

"Yes, Daddy." She wondered what he planned to use after the warm-up, that wasn't his hand, but she didn't dare ask. Instead, she drew a deep and fortifying breath and waited.

She didn't have to wait long. His hand crashed against the fleshiest part of her left bottom cheek with a smack and did the same on the right before she even had a chance to react or draw another breath. His hand was flat, and hard like a paddle, but she could tell he wasn't using his full strength.

He continued to spank, with his hard flat hand alternating sides and creating a pattern of tenderness all across her bottom from just underneath her tailbone to the tops of her thighs. She could tell he was an experienced spanker. She could also tell he was holding back and building slowly up to a harder spanking. And just when it really started to hurt, he stopped.

“The warm-up is done,” he announced. “The real punishment will begin now.”

“Yes, Sir,” she whispered thickly, waiting for further instruction. She expected him to have her change positions or at least get up for a moment so he could retrieve an implement, but he only shifted slightly. She guessed he meant to continue with his hand. Maybe he didn’t have any implements, or at least, he hadn’t brought any to Utopia with him since he hadn’t expected to end up with a Little of his very own. She suspected he knew how to make his hand hurt though, and had no doubts that by the end of her punishment, she would be very sore and equally sorry, but free of the guilt that had been haunting her for days.

Bracing herself, she stiffened, and quickly realized she’d been very, very right and very, very wrong. She would surely be sore and sorry, but there was no way Chef Graham was using his hand. Shrieking at the sudden and fierce onset of pain, she twisted her body to peer over her shoulder. “What is that?” she squealed.

Graham waved the instrument in the air. Her eyes widened as she realized what she was seeing—his favorite wooden spoon—the one she’d seen him use in the kitchen countless times. She’d never imagined he’d end up using it on her! Well, okay, so she’d imagined it, but she’d never thought it would

actually happen. Her eyes met his and she gasped in shock. “A spoon?” she cried, aghast.

He winked. “What else would a chef use?”

CHAPTER 12

Graham

Okay, so, he'd have to get a brand-new spoon to use in the kitchen now, but his last-minute implement grab had truly been a stroke of genius. What else was a chef Daddy to use on his naughty Little sous chef? And besides, there'd always been something about a Little and a spoon, at least every Little he'd known anyway. Judging from her first reaction, Mariah was no different.

“Owie!” she cried, squirming beneath his grasp. “Why a spoon? Don't you need it to cook with?”

“I have others.”

“But that one's your favorite!”

“And I can order a new one. Besides, it's fitting, don't you think, sousie?”

“Susie!” Mariah shrieked. “Why are you calling me that?” Wrenching free of his grasp, she jumped off his lap and glared at him.

“Sousie, not Susie. Because you are my little sous chef,” he explained patiently, his eyebrows furrowing in concern. Her

reaction seemed disproportionate.

“Oh.” Mariah fell silent, her lips twisting into a thoughtful pout.

“Do you have a problem with the nickname, little one?”

“I guess not... but... Susan is my middle name. It’s on my paperwork. I thought that was why.”

“I see.” He chuckled, amused at the coincidence. “I think it’s the perfect nickname for you then. But do you have an objection to the name? Did it trigger you?”

“No, I guess not. It surprised me, is all. I’ve never had a nickname before.”

“So it’s not something your family called you?” he clarified, gauging her response.

“My family called me Mariah Sue,” she admitted with a heavy sigh.

“Ah. I will not call you that then. It shall be Mariah or sousie. Is that amenable to you?”

Relief flooded her face and he could tell that having a say was important to her, something he would need to always remember. “Yeah... I guess so. Yeah, I think it is.” The corners of her lips turned up in a smile and her eyes twinkled with delight.

“Good. Then get yourself back in position, please, before I have to add extras.”

Her eyes wide, she scrambled to get over his knee once more, and again he used his body to lock her in place.

“I just want to go on record as saying the spoon sucks,” Mariah grumbled as he pinned her hands behind her back,

holding them with one of his.

“I know, but it’s so perfectly fitting and effective.” He kept his voice light, but his aim was not light as he brought the spoon across the center of her reddened bottom, making her squeal.

“This is the first spanking I will give you as your Daddy, and it will probably be the worst, but it will not be the last,” he said as he spanked, starting in with his lecture. A good lecture was key to getting a Little to the right headspace.

“Yes, Daddy.”

“We will have all the usual rules that Littles and their Daddies have, and we will go over those soon, but we will also be working together and I will expect you to continue to be as professional as you have already been. And I expect you to be more careful.” The spoon flattened her bottom with each smack, leaving a round pink mark in its wake.

She was whimpering now, but they were just getting started. Moving his aim lower, he continued his lecture.

“What happened last week was a direct result of carelessness and a perfect example of how dangerous carelessness in the kitchen can be.”

Her shoulders started to shake and he knew his words, and the spoon, were getting to her.

“You are lucky I keep an EpiPen pen on hand for emergencies as well as a supply of Benadryl or we could be having a very different conversation,” he scolded. Even his stomach was twisting with the words he was speaking. But that was the reality. Carelessness in the kitchen could have catastrophic results.

“Yes, Daddy, I’m sorrrry,” Mariah wailed. “I’ll be so super careful from now on. I promise I will. It will never ever happen again.”

“I believe you, Mariah, but I need to make sure. I’m going to see to it that this lesson sticks for a long time.”

“Yes, Daddy,” she sniffled.

With no more warning, he moved his aim lower still, to her sit spots, the crease of tender skin between her bottom and thighs. He spanked quickly now, leaving her barely time to catch her breath between pops of the spoon, as ready for the punishment to be over with as she surely was.

He waited until she was sobbing out her release between hiccupped apologies and promises to do better and then he stopped, tossing the spoon onto the couch beside him.

Rubbing her shoulders and back, Graham took a moment to admire the results of his handiwork. Her bottom was a fiery red, marked in little half-moons from the spoon. He’d been thorough enough to make a mark, but he knew any redness would fade within the hour and she wouldn’t carry any lasting bruises, but she would feel this one for a while. Both in her bottom and in her heart.

And she was his. He’d taken a Little of his own. At the realization of his whirlwind decision, his heart sped up and his palms grew damp, but he looked at her and his qualms faded. It was a wonder that he’d come this far, and something to be thankful for.

She was his. Maybe she’d been his from the moment she’d walked into his kitchen with her orange and purple cat apron and he just hadn’t known it yet. But he knew it now.

Her sobs faded to soft cries as he rubbed her back, and her curls stuck to her neck, sticky with sweat. She was gorgeous and she was all his.

Freeing her hands, he rubbed in slow circles using both of his, and moving his ministrations from her lower back to her red-hot bottom. She trembled under his touch, and a glance downward told him that her pussy was slick with arousal.

Reaching the center of her bottom he pulled her cheeks apart and pressed his thumb against her back entrance.

“You’re mine.” He claimed her with his voice full of awe. “Mine to spoil and spank and love and lust for.”

“You... lust for me?”

Her voice sounded odd, far away, and slightly nervous.

“Of course I do, little one. You’re a very beautiful young woman.”

“You... want... me?”

Again her voice sounded off but he figured it was just hoarse from crying.

“I want you very much,” he affirmed. “Not tonight, but someday soon. I want to taste you and I want to bury my cock in your sweet little pussy and eventually in your tight little ass.” To drive home his point, he pressed his thumb harder against her hole.

“Have you ever had a Daddy’s cock here?” he asked, certain the answer would be no.

“I’ve never had anything anywhere!” Mariah cried. “Just a plug, I mean, but...”

His jaw dropped and he stopped immediately, pulling her into a sitting position on his lap. “You’re a... virgin?” he asked incredulously.

With big fat tears falling fresh down her cheeks, she nodded. “I’m sorry.”

“Oh, sweetheart!” Feeling like the biggest cad, he rushed to assure her, wiping her tears. “Don’t be sorry! Daddy is sorry. I should have asked that and not just assumed. Don’t worry, little one, I don’t need to hurry.”

“You don’t?” Her head jerked up and she stared directly into his eyes, her expression suspicious. “I thought boys only wanted one thing?”

Oh hell. He should have seen that coming. He knew enough about Mariah to know she’d been kicked out as a teen after a very strict and religious upbringing. Her parents had clearly done a number on her before she’d left. Shaking his head, he took her hand, pulled her close to him and hugged her tightly. “Boys may only want one thing, I won’t deny that. But, honey, I’m a *man*. And a man believes that good things are worth the wait.”

She pulled back from his embrace and stared at him in awe. “I’m not sure... I don’t think I’m ready, and I don’t know when I will be. You don’t mind?”

“I don’t mind at all. It sounds like you are drawing a boundary, and I always respect boundaries. In fact, I have a few of my own.”

Her eyes widened. “You do?” she whispered. “What are they?”

“Well, this isn’t really the time I’d planned on talking about that—”

“I want to know, and besides, there’s no time like the present,” Mariah quipped.

He hesitated. She had him there.

“What are your boundaries, Daddy?” she asked eagerly.

“I’ll tell you but let’s finish talking about yours. Sex is off the table. I’m fine with that. I want to ask you something though, and I expect you to answer me honestly, not just tell me what you think I want to hear.”

“Okay.”

“Were you planning to wait until marriage?”

“I don’t know... maybe? I mean... that’s what was expected of me and what I used to think I wanted. But I haven’t really thought about it in years. Haven’t needed to,” she rushed to defend her answer.

“I don’t mind, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“Okay. Maybe. I think so.”

She still seemed unsure in her answer, like she was afraid he wouldn’t want to be her Daddy if sex wasn’t on the table.

“It’s fine,” he reassured her again. “I can wait. I don’t mind waiting. In fact I like the idea very much.”

“You do?” She seemed like she couldn’t quite believe what he was saying.

“Very much,” he reiterated.

“What are your boundaries?” She changed the subject.

“No purposefully dangerous behavior for one, and well, I’m not sure the second thing is a boundary so much as something I just need you to understand.”

“Okay. What is it?”

“I will always punish for things exactly the same. There won’t be a sliding scale. It won’t get progressively worse depending on how many times you break it. It won’t change. And that’s for my own sanity.”

Mariah nodded. “I understand.” She leaned forward and rested her head on his chest. “Are we done talking now?”

CHAPTER 13

Graham

Mariah shifted in his arms, still naked from the waist down. He reached down and cupped her bottom. It was hot to the touch, and, he knew, still red.

She hissed when his fingers splayed across her skin. “Owwwie.”

“Owie indeed,” he said with a chuckle. “Aside from sore though, how do you feel? Finally punished and forgiven?”

“Ya,” she said with a nod, sounding Littler than he’d ever heard her. “And... amazing. Everything is even better with a Daddy of your very own.” She sighed. “It’s almost bedtime. But I wish I could stay here in your arms all night. Do you think... would it be okay if I had a sleepover? We don’t hafta do anything. Just sleep.”

He smiled at her hopeful addendum. They’d just made it very clear that sex was off the table. A sleepover sounded nice though. Truth be told, he wasn’t ready to let her out of his arms either.

“I think... it’s okay with me, little one, but I think it’s also not up to me. Have you even told Baze yet that I’m going to be your Daddy now? Or your friends?”

Mariah shook her head. “No. When I got off work, it was naptime and then after my nap, I had to do my chore since I didn’t do it this morning. And after that it was dinner. After dinner, I told Baze you wanted to talk to me. He looked at me funny but told me to be back in time to get ready for bed.”

“What time would that be?”

“Almost now,” Mariah admitted with a sigh. “Maybe I could call him?”

He reached behind him and grabbed her phone off the nightstand, handing it to her. “I have to use the restroom. You can have some privacy.”

She nodded and as he walked away, she was already dialing.

He took his time in the bathroom, washing his hands, combing his hair and brushing his teeth just so she could have a conversation without him hovering.

When he came out, he could tell from her expression and the fact that she was gathering her clothes that it hadn’t gone the way she wanted. He’d been hopeful but he wasn’t really surprised.

“Baze said no?” he asked, sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Yeah.” Mariah wiped a tear with the back of her hand. “He said it wasn’t enough notice and he’d just found out about us and he’d hafta talk to you first. Find out what your ‘tentions were.”

“My ‘tentions?” He frowned and rolled the Little speak around in his head for a moment before he realized what she meant. “Ah, my intentions. That’s smart. I know it’s not the answer you wanted, but Baze is a good man. He should find out my intentions before he just lets you stay over.”

“I know. He’s really good to me. And he cares about me and takes care of me. But he’s really Luna’s Daddy, not mine, and now I finally have my own, and I just want to spend time with you!” Her voice rose and she became more upset with each word she spoke until she was full-on sobbing.

“Oh, little one.” He gathered her into his arms and wiped her tears away with the pad of his thumb. “Don’t cry now. It’s not all that bad. What if we compromise?”

“How?” Mariah cried.

“What if you get ready for bed down here and then I take you home and tuck you in?”

Her lip trembled still, but she smiled. “That might be okay. Should I call Baze and ask?”

“I’ll text him.” He let go of her, long enough to cross the room and grab his own phone and shot off a text. The answer was almost immediate. He looked up at his despondent Little and smiled. “Baze said that would be fine.”

“Okay!” She wiped her face with a smile.

“So what do you need to do to get ready for bed?”

“I usually take a bath or sometimes a shower. And then I put on my jammies and brush my teeth and read a story and then it’s bedtime.”

He nodded. “Well, you don’t have a toothbrush here yet, but I could give you a bath and get you dressed in jammies and

then take you upstairs.”

“I don’t have jammies here either.” Her face fell. “Or a fresh diaper.”

“Well, you came up here wearing a fresh one, and took it right down for your spanking, so technically it’s still clean. You could use that one, couldn’t you?”

“Yeah. Prolly.” She shrugged. “But I still don’t have jammies anyway.”

“You could wear mine,” he offered. “They probably aren’t as cute as yours but they are clean and they are also really soft.”

She giggled and her eyes lit up. “You’d let me wear your jammies? All night long? What would you wear?”

“I have others. And I’d like knowing that even though we were apart you were wearing my jammies.”

“I think I’d like that too.”

“Okay, then. We have a plan. You know what that means don’t you?”

“What?”

“It’s bath time.” He started to walk toward the bathroom and Mariah stopped him.

“Wait!” she cried.

“What?” He turned to look at her, wondering why she wasn’t following him.

“I-it’s just... since Baze isn’t really my Daddy... I usually bathe myself. But now that you’re my Daddy... are you gonna wash me? The way Baze does for Luna?”

“I was planning on it. Is that going to be okay with you?”

“Yes! I think I would like that very much.” She skipped ahead of him into the bathroom and waited for him to catch up.

He started the water, and made sure the temperature was just right, and then focused his attention on helping her undress the rest of the way. “Arms up,” he instructed as he lifted her shirt over her head. He unhooked her bra and let her luscious breasts fall free. When she was standing in front of him, naked, he stopped and stared for a moment, taking it all in, thinking about their journey and just taking a second to be thankful that she was his.

Oblivious to his contemplative mood, Mariah skipped over to the tub and peered in. “Do you have any bubbles?” she asked hopefully.

“I don’t.”

“What about bath toys?”

He shook his head. “I don’t have those either. I didn’t know I was gonna end up with a Little girl so I don’t have any Little girl things. I’m going to need a lot of stuff. Maybe we could go shopping and pick out stuff together?”

“Okay!” Mariah accepted his answer easily. “It’s getting full, Daddy.”

“So it is.” He shut the water off and wrapped his arm around her waist.

Lifting her, he set her down in the tub, enjoying the squeal she gave when her well-spanked bottom hit the hard surface of the tub.

Mariah scowled. “Spankings and hard bottom tubs do not go well together, Daddy.”

“So I’ve heard. Guess you’ll just have to be a good girl.”

She sighed and then got serious. “I will be a good girl, Daddy, and I won’t push your boundaries. I won’t be dangerous, and I won’t fight punishments, but is it okay if I’m sometimes a little naughty? With my friends?”

Graham chuckled. Kaylie hadn’t had Little friends to get in trouble with and that should have been his first clue that something was wrong. Friendships were very important to Littles, and he’d enjoyed watching Mariah and her friends interact. “If that’s something you usually do, then I wouldn’t want it any other way, little one. I don’t want you to change yourself to please me, but I also want you to understand I won’t be changing myself either.”

Mariah nodded. “I wouldn’t want you to. You’re a really good Daddy. I could tell the first day I met you. I’m glad you’re mine.”

“I’m glad you’re mine too, little one. Now, let’s get you clean. I don’t want to make you late for bed and get you in trouble.”

He reached for a washcloth but Mariah was frowning. “What is it, little sousie?”

“Can I get in trouble with Baze?”

“Oh for sure. As long as you are still in his care, you can get in trouble with him. And, if you get in trouble with him, you’ll also be in trouble with me.”

Mariah made a shocked face. “Double trouble?” she whined. “How is that even fair?”

Graham soaped up the washcloth and slid it under the water. He began to wash her feet as he answered.

“Guess you’ll have to be extra good,” he teased, knowing that it was only temporary. If he had his way, she wouldn’t be under Baze’s care much longer. He wanted her all to himself.

Mariah puffed her lips into a pout and crossed her arms over her chest. “I’ll be good,” she agreed grudgingly.

“I knew you’d see it my way,” Graham teased as he continued washing her. He covered her legs, arms, stomach and chest, before taking careful care with her sweet pussy, making sure she was clean, without torturing either of them too much. When he touched her slit, she whimpered, arching her back.

“Daddy,” she whispered.

He could tell she had something on her mind.

“Yes, little sousie?”

“How Little was Kaylie? I mean... was she as Little as me?”

Ah. That’s where this was going. Finished with all but her hair, he leaned back on his heels regarding her seriously and answering honestly. “She was not. And while I found your Littleness intimidating at first, I’m looking forward to it. I love all of your sides. I like that we can work together as equals in the kitchen, but outside of the kitchen, I like that you are Littler than she was. I like that I know you’re going to let me take care of you in very special ways and rely on me in ways she never did. I think that you, my little sousie, are exactly what I never knew I always needed and wanted.”

His answer seemed to please her as she leaned against the back of the tub with a satisfied smile. “It’s time to wash my hair, Daddy. I’m a little girl, so I can’t do it myself.”

His chest swelled with pride, knowing exactly what she was doing. With Baze, he already knew that she took care of herself in a lot of ways including washing her own hair. But now, she was giving her independence over to him, and truly letting him be her Daddy.

“So you are, and so you can’t,” he agreed, reaching for the shampoo.



Mariah

As Graham’s fingers massaged her scalp, working the shampoo into a lather, Mariah relaxed and went over the day in her head. It had been a whirlwind of surprises and she couldn’t believe how the day was ending: with her having a Daddy of her very own.

Not just *a* daddy, but the perfect Daddy who valued all her sides, who was fair and direct and didn’t mind that she was a virgin, or that she wasn’t ready to change that.

Mariah wasn’t kidding herself though. Her pairing with Graham was different than Margo’s with Knox or Baze’s with Luna. She knew that if Baze would let her, she’d move in with Graham immediately. She’d miss her friends, but it felt right. And she knew that when and if Graham proposed, she’d say yes with no hesitation. He may have only been her Daddy for one day, but he’d been proving himself for weeks and she was head over heels in love with him.

“C’mon, little one,” Graham said gently, rubbing her shoulder. “It’s time to dry off and get jammies on.”

She hadn't even noticed that he'd finished washing her hair. "Okay, Daddy," she agreed sleepily as he took her hand and helped her out of the tub.

She stood tired and compliant as he dried her with a towel, and lifted her into his arms, carrying her to the bed.

"We have your Pull-up and it's still dry," he informed her after returning from the bathroom with her discarded clothing. "I've never done this before, so bear with me."

He helped her stand at the side of the bed, her hands on his shoulders as he knelt and worked her feet through the leg holes of her Pull-up diaper, pulling it up her legs and over her hips, until it settled around her waist. "This is fine for work, but you're going to need real diapers for bedtime. And I need wipes and baby powder and all sorts of Little girl things."

"We can go shopping," Mariah offered, repeating his statement from earlier.

"Indeed we can and will," he agreed. "How about after work tomorrow? I don't want to make my Little girl go any longer than she has to without having the things she needs."

Mariah didn't point out that she had all the things she needed upstairs in the penthouse. She wanted to have them here, and be here, with her Daddy, as soon as possible.

"One last thing," Graham said, pulling a drawer open and removing a burgundy-colored, two-piece pajama set. "Will this work?"

Mariah just smiled and nodded, letting him dress her. When she was fully covered with the soft fabric of her Daddy's jammies hugging her body, she lifted her arms around his neck and let herself be pulled into his strong embrace. He

carried her like a baby, through the room, down the hall, and into the elevator.

Her friends gasped and oohed and awed when he carried her down the hall to her bedroom, not putting her down until he lowered her onto her bed. Mariah buried her face in his neck and giggled at their surprise.

Jade was in bed already, reading a book, and she barely looked up when Mariah and Graham entered.

“Okay, little one. It’s time for bed. I wish you could sleep with me, but I’ll see you bright and early tomorrow morning.” He peeled back the covers and gently laid her underneath them, pulling the blankets tightly around her shoulders and handing her Mario, the stuffed cow Baze had given her the night they’d met.

“Okay, Daddy.” Her body felt floaty and her eyelids were heavy. As they fluttered shut, Graham leaned over and kissed her cheek.

“Goodnight, my sweet little Sousie.”

“G’night, Daddy,” she whispered back as he tiptoed to the door.

She was asleep before the door closed behind him.

CHAPTER 14

Graham

Mariah bounced in her chair, far too painlessly for someone who'd been thoroughly spanked the night before. "What does Baze want to talk to us about?" she asked.

Graham shook his head. He'd been equally dreading and looking forward to this meeting since Baze had all but cornered him coming out of Mariah's room the night before and asked to meet after breakfast. "I don't know, little one. Probably just wants to check in, make sure I'm being good to you, find out what my intentions are, that sort of thing."

Mariah, Littler this morning than he'd ever seen her, giggled. "What are your intentions, Daddy?"

Graham shook his head, amused at her antics. "Let's just wait for Baze so we only need to have this conversation once," he told her.

To an outside observer, it might seem like he was still standoffish, or that his heart wasn't fully in it, but the reality was precisely the opposite. He knew exactly what his intentions were and he wanted Mariah so fiercely it scared him. He couldn't remember ever feeling like this, and he knew

he'd certainly never met a Little like her. His intentions were that he wanted it all, and sooner rather than later.

He just had to convince both her and Baze that he was what was best for Mariah. Tapping the table, he scanned the room for Baze even though he knew he wasn't there yet. After breakfast, his boss had taken the rest of the Littles back up to the penthouse, giving him and Mariah time to clean up.

They'd rushed through dishes and even managed some lunch prep and still they were waiting.

"Look, Daddy! Here he comes!" Mariah spotted Baze before he did.

Baze strode through the casino and into the abandoned restaurant. He took off his jacket as he joined them at the table. Why the man was wearing a three-piece suit on a Saturday, Graham didn't know, but Baze rarely wore anything else.

"So," Baze said as he sat down, jumping right into business. "What is... this?" He pointed between the two of them with two fingers and frowned. "It seems kind of sudden."

Graham inwardly groaned. He could see his boss didn't plan on making this easy for them. It was okay, though. Graham loved a challenge and he had love on his side. Honesty was the best policy.

"Well, Sir... when I first came to Utopia, I came for the job. Having been hurt pretty badly in a prior relationship with a Little who had some very toxic behaviors I had no interest in fraternizing. But when we first met, right out of the gate, you asked me to hire one of your girls. I couldn't say no. I wanted the job too much."

His boss frowned, his brows furrowing together. "I see. Go on."

“I was determined to hold her at arm’s length, to keep it professional and polite, but I quickly realized we had a lot in common and that she was nothing like my ex.”

Beside him, Mariah was beaming, still bouncing.

Baze just nodded and motioned for him to keep going.

Clearing his throat, Graham continued. “Well, I still tried to hold off. I kept my walls up. Or at least I thought I was. In reality, I was already a goner; making birthday cakes and special menus. I’m a chef. I show my feelings through food, even, apparently, when I can’t recognize them myself.”

Mariah was giggling, and Baze was still just nodding, but now there was a hint of a smile on his lips and his eyes were bright with understanding. He waited for Graham to finish talking about getting to know Mariah through work and food, and then he spoke.

“I understand pain, and walls, and being too stubborn to see what is right in front of you. I made some of those same mistakes when I met Luna. You might be smarter than me. I jumped in and then waited for my brain to catch up.” He grinned. “We got there though. So, what’s next?”

“Well, as of yesterday, Mariah and I are official. She is my Little girl and I am her Daddy. And I’ll be as patient as you both need me to be, but if it was up to me, sir”—Graham smiled—“I’d go all in.”

“All in, huh?”

“Well, this is Vegas, sir. Seems like the perfect place to do it.”

“Indeed,” Baze agreed. “I’m a gambling man myself and a gamble on love is a sure thing in my book. So I’ll leave you to it, with my blessing.” With that, he stood, shook Graham’s

hand, kissed a very confused looking Mariah on the cheek and rushed from the room, leaving them alone.

Mariah was sitting at the table looking befuddled. The gambling talk had gone over her head, but no surprise there. Mariah was a good girl.

“What’s happening?” she asked. “Is he happy? He looked happy. Does this mean I can stay with you tonight?”

Graham stood from his chair and knelt in front of Mariah. “It means, little one, that you can stay tonight and every night, for as long as you want. Personally, I’m hoping that will be forever.” Inhaling deeply, he took her hand. “Mariah, it’s only been a short time, but when I let myself, I fell hard and fast for you, my dear little sousie. And I know now that I don’t want to be without you any longer than I have to. I am your Daddy and you are my little girl. And I want to keep it that way forever. So, Mariah, I’m down on one knee, taking the ultimate gamble on love, and asking you to marry me.”

Mariah’s jaw dropped in shock, her eyes growing to the size of saucers. “You are?” she cried. “Oh my goodness!” She jumped to her feet.

Not sure what she was thinking, Graham cleared his throat. “It doesn’t have to be soon,” he clarified. “I’m not trying to rush you. I’m just... doing what feels right.”

Before he could finish, Mariah had jumped into his arms, wrapping herself around him. “Oh yes, yes yes! Yes, I’ll marry you. And I don’t want to wait. I want to marry you as soon as possible. Maybe even next week!”

“You will? You do?” Graham didn’t know what he had been expecting exactly, but it wasn’t that. His heart swelled with happiness as he looked into her eyes.

“Yes!” Mariah exclaimed. Then, with her voice lowered to a whisper, she leaned in, until their lips were almost touching. “Silly Daddy. This is Las Vegas. Haven’t you heard? The house always wins.”

Then she pressed her lips against his and they sealed it with a kiss.

EPILOGUE

THREE WEEKS later

Graham

“I now pronounce you man and wife.” Standing in front of them, Pastor Ryan chuckled before continuing, “In the eyes of the law and the state of Nevada,” he amended. “But since we are here at Utopia, I now pronounce you Little and Daddy. Legally, officially, and forever! You may now kiss your Little wife!”

Wasting no time, Graham took Mariah in his arms and dipped her low, kissing her deeply.

Cheers broke out from the first several rows of pews where Baze, Luna, and the rest of their friends were sitting with Graham’s brother, Pierce.

Their wedding was small and simple, no fuss or fanfare, and instead of a reception after the ceremony, they’d elected to have a catered dinner before they exchanged their vows. They hadn’t cut out all the frills though. Mariah wore a white lacy dress, he wore a three-piece suit, and together they’d baked a beautiful three-tier wedding cake for their friends to enjoy while they were off busy with other things. They’d had Earl do

the decorating. As it turned out, Earl was a very skilled pastry chef.

When Graham finally let Mariah up, she was breathless and panting, her eyes glazed with lust. He could tell she was thinking the same thing as him.

“Race you upstairs?” he whispered.

Her eyes glassy, Mariah licked her lips and shook her head. “Let’s go together!” she cried, grabbing his hand and taking off in a sprint.

To a cacophony of raucous cheers and suggestive whistles, they raced down the aisle, out the chapel doors, through the casino and to the elevators. As soon as the elevator doors opened on their floor, they raced again, not stopping until they were in front of the door to their suite and he was digging in his pocket for the key card. When he had it in hand, he unlocked the door, gave it a slight push, and before Mariah could argue, scooped her into his arms to carry her over the threshold.

He hadn’t taken two steps before her lips were on his, her fingers tugging at his tie. Grabbing her hand he stilled it. “Stop. I’ve waited long enough for this. We’re going to do it right.”

His low commanding tone begged obedience and Mariah stopped instantly. Her eyes unclouded and her gaze met his. “Yes, Daddy. But... how do we do it... right?”

“First, I’m going to set you down on the bed and take off your shoes and then your pantyhose.” As he spoke, he did exactly that, carrying her into the bedroom and savoring each step. He’d undressed her before, of course, but this time was

different. This time he wasn't focused on caretaking and avoiding arousal. This time, arousal was the whole point.

"Stand up," he told her, standing himself, and offering his hand. She did as she was told.

"Turn around," he directed. His voice was already strained with lust, and the slacks of his suit were tented with his erection as he slowly unzipped her strapless gown, letting it fall to a puddle at her feet, until she was standing in nothing but a strapless bra and a white satin bedazzled diaper cover.

He helped her step out of the dress, before unhooking her bra and skimming the diaper cover over her bottom and hips and down her legs, leaving him only one final barrier.

Pulling her close, he hooked a finger in the leg hole of her diaper and grazed her pussy lips with his finger. "This diaper needs to go. Are you wet?"

Shyly, Mariah shook her head. "No, Daddy."

That was all he needed to hear. Releasing the tabs, he flung the diaper aside and pushed her down on the bed, gently covering her body with his own. He wanted her so badly, but he knew he needed to be gentle, go slow and make her first time special.

She whimpered beneath him. "Daddy, I'm naked and you're fully clothed. It doesn't seem fair."

"You're right. Let's fix that." He quickly tossed his jacket and unbuttoned his dress shirt with her watching his every move, her eyes wide with excitement. When his shirt was off, he moved to his belt, swaying his hips with a wink while he worked the buckle with ease. He fell onto the bed beside her as he wiggled the fabric of his slacks over his hips until he wore nothing but his silky boxer briefs.

Mariah reached for him, cupping his erection through the thin fabric. Moaning, he batted her hand away. “What did I tell you about touching Daddy?” he growled.

Mariah wasn't deterred. “You said not until after the wedding. It's after the wedding.”

“I meant the day after the wedding.” Not giving her a chance to argue, he rolled his body until he was back on top of her, and grabbed her wrists, pinning them above her head. “Today, we do it my way, little one.”

“Yes, Daddy,” she panted.

The picture she made, all pinned and helpless and needy drove him wild and he claimed her lips in a deep kiss. She returned the kiss, arching her back, pressing her body against his, grinding her pelvis against his cock. He could feel her wetness through his briefs.

“Daddy,” she whimpered, her lips still pressed against his, “does doing it your way involve hurrying up at all? Because I'm wet and I want you. My pussy is aching and dripping and I've been waiting so, so long. I don't want to wait any more.”

Her wanton begging crumbled his resolve. “I wanted to make it special for you, little one.”

“It is special. It's special because it's with you, and because you waited for me. But if you make it any more specialer, Daddy, I might spontaneously combust.”

“Arrghhh,” he groaned, feeling her words at the very core of his being. The feeling was mutual. “Say no more,” he panted.

Without moving from on top of her, he hooked his fingers in the waistband of his boxers and pulled them off, freeing his cock.

Shifting until the tip was pressed against the sopping entrance of her pussy, he put them both out of their misery with one hard thrust.

“Oh!” Mariah gasped as her hymen broke. “Oh, Daddy!” Her eyes closed. “It hurts a little bit.”

“It will fade in a second,” he told her, having no idea if it was true or not. “This is what you wanted.”

“Kiss me,” she whispered as he thrust again.

“Hey,” he protested jokingly, “who says you get to make the commands around here?”

“Sorry!” she squeaked, even as he pressed his lips against hers.

“Just don’t get used to it. Daddy is the boss in the kitchen, and out of the kitchen. Here, there, and everywhere. Got it?”

“Yes, Daddy!” Mariah’s answer ended in a shriek as he plunged his cock inside of her and pinched her nipple between his fingers. “Yes, Daddy,” she said again when the surprise had passed. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

When she said the words, he knew they were true, and he felt the peace of having healed from the past. He was moving into the future with a new home, a new job, and a new wife, who just happened to be the perfect Little girl for him.

THE END

For more in the *Las Vegas Littles* series by Bayleigh Rae, click [here](#).

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ABOUT BAYLEIGH RAE

Bayleigh Rae is the sassy alter ego of a USA Today Bestselling Dirty Daddies Author.

She loves travelling, spoiling those she loves, and working hard to make her dreams come true.

Don't ask her who she is, because she won't tell you. Okay, she might... if you ask nicely. She's really bad at secrets.

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ALSO BY BAYLEIGH RAE

A Little Single's Day Saga (Rawhide Ranch)

Pampering Little Priscilla (Rawhide Ranch co-write with Allie Belle)

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