

Amy Cummings



A Lone Star Littles
Tale

Loving **LYNNLEIGH**

A FRIENDS TO LOVERS, DDLG ROMANCE

Loving Lynnleigh
A Friends To Lovers, DDLG Romance
Amy Cummings
Worthington Hall Press

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*For Jet.
Among the stars but always a part of Mountainville.*

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Chapter One

“You’re doing what?”

The irritation in Campbell’s voice was obvious, as was the irritation on his face. He was practically glowing red. Those dark eyes of his were as intense as ever, Lynnleigh noted.

She offered her best, most disarming smile, but it didn’t soften him much. It was hard to move the needle when Campbell got worked up.

And he was definitely worked up now.

“I’m driving to Texas,” she said casually, offering a little shrug.

“By yourself?”

“Uh-huh.”

“To find a Daddy?”

“Yep.”

He crossed his arms and leaned back, exhaling loudly as he continued to appraise her through a disapproving gaze.

“Do your parents know about this?” he finally asked.

“Not about the Daddy part.”

“I’m talking about you driving so far by yourself. Do they know about that?”

“Yeah.”

“And they’re letting you go through with it?”

She laughed. “I’m twenty-four years old. There’s not much they can do to stop me. Besides, they’re in Europe for the next month. You know they’ve always dreamed of renting a cottage in the Lake District.”

He shook his head, his eyes wide in bewilderment. “So you think it’s a good idea to drive halfway across the country? You’ve never driven out of New Hampshire by yourself!”

“That’s not true,” she said. “Last year I drove myself to the Pumpkin Chuckin’ Festival.”

He groaned. “That’s in Vermont.”

“It’s still out of New Hampshire.”

He appraised her for another moment before relenting with a slight smile. Lynnleigh wasn’t for certain, but it seemed as if her best friend—her lifelong best friend who was actually more of a brother to her than a mere pal—often found her cute. It was rarely enough to force him to loosen up, though. He was so protective. Sometimes he bordered on being *overprotective*. If “helicopter friends” were a thing, then Campbell Fields was one.

His arms were still crossed as he leaned against the counter in the small kitchen of her equally small apartment. His biceps bulged beneath the fabric of his black polo shirt. Even though they were strictly friends—nothing romantic here—Lynnleigh couldn’t help but notice how good he looked in that shirt. Or how well those jeans of his fit. She also noticed how handsome his chiseled face was. She loved his dimples and that random strand of black hair that hung over his forehead in a slight curl, making him resemble Superman.

“Driving across the border into Vermont is a lot different than driving to Texas, little girl,” he said.

She fought hard against blushing. She knew he didn’t mean it like *that*—like a Daddy would—but she loved it when he called her *little girl*. He’d done it as far back as she could remember. It was his playful way of rubbing in the fact that he was six years older. It was the same reason he sometimes called her kid or kiddo. He acted as if he was so much more mature.

“I can do it,” she said, crossing her arms, too.

“You’re too young,” he said with a shake of his head.

“I’m a grown woman!”

“Really?” He looked past her toward the plush bear and dog that rested on her couch in the attached living room.

“Hey! Grown women can have stuffies,” she said. “Besides, you know I’m a Little. But that doesn’t mean I’m incapable.”

“You’re right,” he said. “I think you can do anything you set your mind to. Except this. It’s too dangerous. You should fly. Besides, I’m not convinced this meeting a Daddy thing is such a good idea, anyway. That could be dangerous, too.”

“You think everything is dangerous,” she countered.

“Well, it’s my job to keep you safe. I made a promise.”

She laughed. “You promised back when we were kids! I was like seven years old and you were twelve. We lived next door and our parents were best friends.” She shrugged. “It’s the kind of thing kids do.”

He groaned and then rubbed the back of his neck, as if trying to relieve tension. Finally, he sighed again and shrugged. “I can’t stop you. I guess.” But the way he arched an eyebrow made Lynnleigh think maybe he was considering a way in which he could in fact prevent her from following through with this plan.

Would he take her over his knee? There were times she wondered if he’d considered such. It had happened before. But only once, and that had been so long ago.

Sparks of excitement and desire exploded in her core.

Stop thinking that way, Lynnleigh! He’s like a brother to you. It would never work out. Besides, he isn’t a Daddy. He’s just protective. And he’s got a girlfriend. She’s hot. You’re not. She’s skinny. You aren’t. We’ve been over this a million times.

“Why don’t you just fly?” he pressed.

“Because I’m going to stay there a while. I want my car.”

“So you’re moving there?”

“Maybe.”

“Are you keeping your apartment?”

She nodded. “For the time. My lease is up and I’m on a month-to-month contract. If I like it in Mountainville, I’ll come back here long enough to pack up my stuff.”

“And what about your job?”

“I’ve already given my notice. I’ve been saving for this. I can make it for a few months. But if I stay in Mountainville, there’s plenty of work there. I’ve already checked into it. That town is really growing. They’re always hiring people in the various businesses.”

“So you’re leaving me?” he said.

She giggled. “We can still be friends. We can talk just as much. Have you heard of cell phones? They’re so cool! You can call people and text. Even send pics. It’s awesome.” She stuck her tongue out playfully.

Despite not wanting to, he smiled at her. “You’re trouble. You know that?”

“Uh-huh.”

“And if you find a Daddy, he’s going to have his work cut out for him.”

She giggled. “You mean *when* I find a Daddy.”

“You know I have to meet him and approve, right?”

She rolled her eyes. “You won’t approve of anyone. You’ll say he’s not protective enough or he only wants one thing or ___”

“Some guys do only want one thing and they’re not taking it from you. That’s for damn sure,” Campbell said, his voice lined with steel.

“Do you seriously think I’m still a virgin? I’m twenty-four years old!”

He groaned. “I don’t want to know! In my mind you are. Let’s leave it at that.”

She giggled. She was a virgin, but she wasn’t about to tell him that. Maybe she wouldn’t be for long. Not when she found her Daddy in Mountainville.

“I’ve got to go,” he said, pushing off the counter. “I’m meeting Mallory for dinner.”

“Oh. Hope you two have fun,” Lynnleigh said, trying her hardest to sound genuine and not insanely jealous.

“Are you in for the night?” he asked.

“Oh my gosh! You interrogate me like a cop or something. I might go out and pick up Chinese. Is that okay?”

“Just lock your door when you get home. Deadbolt, too.”

“Of course,” she said.

Though she sounded exasperated, inside she felt that familiar warmth spread throughout her.

“Text me later and let me know you’re in safely, little girl.”

She nodded and watched him go. Once she was alone, she looked at her stuffies.

“I need to find a Daddy soon! Maybe then I’ll get over him.”

Chapter Two

Mountainville

Stella was ready for this discipline session to end.

How long had she been standing in that corner? Maybe ten minutes. Longer, even? Whatever the length of time, it felt like an eternity.

Corner time was so boring! There was nothing to do but keep her nose to the wall and stare ahead blankly. Of course, that was by design. It gave her time to think about her naughty actions. But still—it was downright awful.

She felt exposed, standing in her Daddy's office, wearing nothing but her diaper. As the marshal of Mountainville, her husband and Daddy, Dax, could control who came in and out of that adobe building. But what if he let in one of his deputies? It wouldn't be the first time they'd seen her in such a position. But it was still more than a tad humiliating. Sure, she'd seen the deputies' Littles in various states of punishment, as such was common in Mountainville. That didn't make it any easier, though.

"Come here, baby girl."

Stella gulped. As eager as she was to leave the corner, she knew what the beckoning meant.

It was time for her spanking.

She slowly trudged toward her husband. Even under the dire circumstances, Dax looked as sexy as ever. His taut muscles rippled beneath his black t-shirt. His Wranglers fit nicely, and the boots he wore completed the image of an Old West cowboy who was somehow transported into modern times. That shiny marshal's badge pinned to his chest helped in that regard, too.

Stella's diaper was thick, hampering her gait, causing her to waddle slightly. It crinkled loudly with each step she took. Dax was leaning against his desk, arms crossed, watching her

with a stern gaze. She stopped a foot away from him and hung her head in shame.

The lecture. Yuck.

This was not going to be fun. She wasn't sure if she hated this part more or the actual spanking. Of course, corner time was in the running for the worst aspect of discipline, too. At least she wasn't getting her mouth washed out with soap this time. That was a small victory.

"Did that little stint in the corner give you time to think about your actions?" Dax asked.

"Yes, Daddy," she said, still casting her eyes at the floor.

"And why are you getting this spanking?"

She swallowed the lump in her throat as she shuffled on her feet. "Because I was a naughty girl, Daddy."

"What did you do that was naughty?"

"I, uh, kinda, sorta, got into a glitter fight with Katie in the middle of Nancy's store."

"You *kinda, sorta* did or you just did?"

She groaned.

"Answer me, little girl."

"I did it, sir."

"Yep. You did the crime, alright. Now you'll take your punishment. You know the drill. Diaper down. Bend over my desk."

She hated hearing that sound—the sound of his belt swishing through the loops of his pants as he took it off—but she'd hate how it felt smacking her bottom even more.

With trembling hands, she slid her sodden diaper down and stepped out of it. A moment later, she was bent over Daddy's desk like she'd been instructed to do.

Her bottom's cheeks were clenched. She held her breath and awaited the first swat. Behind her and to the side, Dax folded his heavy, leather belt in half and got into position.

“Hold still, baby. This is going to sting. I want you to think about your actions and what led to this moment. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, sir,” she said with a whimper.

The leather slapped across her bare cheeks. She lurched forward but held her position. Her skin already burned just from that first lick. It burned even more as he quickly followed-up with more swats.

The spanking started slowly and evenly, with Dax alternating between cheeks. Soon, though, he increased the intensity. The spansks got louder and harder, and they fell faster.

And, of course, Daddy kept lecturing.

That was, in fact, the worst part of being a naughty Little, she decided. She hated having to listen to Daddy tell her what a bad girl she’d been and how disappointed he was in her actions.

Daddy was a firm believer that discipline should be carried out swiftly, but not rushed. So he kept it going for a good, long while.

“You know better than what you and Katie did,” he said, shaking his head before giving her another crisp lash. “That glitter fight was entirely uncalled for.”

“Y-yes, sir,” she said in between sniffles. Her eyes were wet. A moment later, tears streaked down her face and splashed onto the desk below.

“It seems as if you’ve been extra naughty recently,” he said. “Getting into a little bit more trouble than usual. Guess that calls for a longer spanking.”

She gritted her teeth and fought back against the pain that was threatening to overwhelm her.

“Maybe you’re in need of something more intense to curb this bad behavior,” he continued. “Something besides a simple spanking.”

The onslaught of swats continued. She danced from foot to foot. Oh gosh, it was nearly unbearable!

She gulped. “L-like what, Daddy?”

He swatted her a few more times, and then the spanking suddenly stopped. She breathed a sigh of relief. A moment later, he was gently massaging her heated flesh.

“Your behavior needs some serious correcting,” he said.

She whimpered, her skin hot. “Like what? Tell me, Daddy!” Her voice was pleading and cracking.

“Don’t worry. Daddy knows exactly what to do.”

“W-what is it, sir?”

“I think it’s time for a good enema.”

“But Daddy!” she cried.

“Don’t interrupt, little girl,” he said, swatting her rear.

She yelped.

“You need to be cleansed from the inside out. That will give you another chance to reflect on your naughtiness, too.”

“When?” she said, her voice desperate and full of dread.

“Tonight, honey. After dinner. Until then, no more playing with your friends this afternoon. You’re grounded. You’ll stay here at the office with me and then, on our way home, we’ll run by the store so you can apologize again to Nancy.”

“Yes, sir,” she said.

“For now, five more licks. Stick that bottom out. Prepare yourself, honey. These are going to be the worst yet.”

He wasn’t kidding. Her bottom was already so tender—and he delivered them with just a little bit more force—that the last swats had her howling loudly.

She was still crying when he took her into his arms and hugged her tightly.

“There, there, baby girl,” he said, gently swaying her and kissing the top of her head. “Daddy loves you more than

anything. Even when you're a bad girl. I'm not sure what's gotten into you lately, but it needs to stop. Am I clear?"

"Yes, sir," she said, hugging him back.

"Good girl," he said. His hand dipped down and rubbed her red, sore bottom. It did little to sooth her burning cheeks, though. She sobbed some more into his chest, staining his shirt with her tears.

The corner, lecture, and spanking had been bad enough! But now an enema? Gosh, the day just kept getting worse and worse. It's all worth it, she told herself. Just stick to the plan.

Even with her bottom on fire—and the knowledge that it would later be filled with yucky medicine—she couldn't help but smile slightly.

The plan was coming together nicely. And Daddy didn't suspect a thing.

Not a single thing.

The Littles of Mountainville would be victorious.

Chapter Three

Campbell felt guilty for being so distracted, but there wasn't a thing he could do about it.

He tried to shift his thoughts to Mallory. It shouldn't be hard. She was only his girlfriend, after all. She was also sitting directly across the table from him.

All around them, the quaint restaurant was busy with customers quietly chatting over drinks and food. It wasn't a fancy place, but it wasn't exactly casual dining, either. It occupied some space in between and Campbell didn't really like it there. He'd much rather be enjoying a steak, baked potato, and a nice, frosty beer. But that wasn't Mallory's style.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

She was gorgeous, with platinum blond hair that fell past her shoulders, big, beautiful, blue eyes, and full lips. She was a fitness instructor and had a body that matched her occupation. On a scale of one to ten, she was a fifteen. She constantly turned heads. To call her hot was a bit of an understatement.

"Lynnleigh is driving to Texas."

"What for?"

His mind raced. He couldn't divulge his best friend's secret. He'd stumbled upon it years ago, by accident, and had promised not to tell a single person that she was a Little. He'd never go back on his word, either.

It was for the best. Mallory wouldn't understand. She was a bit strait-laced. The notion of Littles and Bigs and any kind of kink was foreign to her. She was as vanilla as she was hot.

"There's a resort down there she wants to visit," he said.

That wasn't a lie. He just wasn't explaining what kind of resort Mountainville was.

"And let me guess," Mallory said. "You don't like the idea of her driving down there by herself."

"Of course not!"

She arched an eyebrow and smirked. “At some point you have to let her grow up. I know she’s like a kid sister to you, but you can’t look out for her forever.”

That’s where you’re wrong, he thought to himself.

I made a vow. She doesn’t have a big brother to keep her safe. So, it’s my job.

He studied Mallory’s eyes for a moment, trying to see if there was anything swirling about in there. “You sure you aren’t jealous of our relationship?” he asked.

She nearly spit out the sip of water she’d just put in her mouth. She put her glass down and used a cloth napkin to dab the corners of her lips. She stared at him a moment before saying, “Oh. You’re serious.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

Her mouth gaped, though she was still smirking. Again, she sized him up for a few silent seconds before saying, “Campbell, come on. Look, I’m not trying to be rude. I know she’s your friend and all. But do you really think I’d feel threatened by her?”

Campbell felt his temper starting to flare, so he took a moment to sip his own water. He held the icy liquid in his throat a few seconds before sending it down. “She’s beautiful.”

“Yeah. In that...plus-size...sort of way,” Mallory said. “Look, am I supposed to be jealous? Is there a reason to be? Are you trying to tell me something?”

“Of course not,” he said.

“Are you sure? Is this going to be a situation where I tell you to pick her or me?”

“We’re just friends. She’s like my sister. You know that.”

“Well, I thought I did. But now you’re making me wonder.”

“Let’s just drop it,” Campbell said. He suddenly really wanted that steak and beer. Heck, he’d settle for a hamburger from a drive-thru and a bottle of beer from his own fridge. He

just didn't want to be in this place sitting across from Mallory. He hoped his irritation didn't show, though.

"I know you worry about her, but she'll be fine," Mallory said. "Will she be in Texas long?"

"She might move there," he said.

He wasn't for certain, but it seemed as if there was a slight twinkle in his girlfriend's eyes upon hearing the news. Maybe she was jealous of Lynnleigh, after all.

She needn't be. He'd been telling the truth. Lynnleigh was a sister to him. She was family. He'd known her longer than anyone else in his life, save for his parents. Their history together ran deep.

"Would you be okay if she moved?"

"Of course," he said. "Like I said, she's family. We'd still see each other. Maybe she'd find a nice guy down there. I'd be happy for her."

Thankfully, the conversation shifted to other topics, but Campbell was still thinking about that long drive to the Lone Star State. It was just too far for his little sis to make by herself.

He was also thinking of the comments Mallory had made. His mind wouldn't stop spinning as he considered it all.

It was not a pleasant evening for the man.

Chapter Four

Lynnleigh awoke the following morning feeling more excited than she ever had.

Soon, she'd be in Mountainville! Freaking Mountainville! An oasis for Littles!

She hopped out of bed and pranced into the living room—which was actually the same room as the bedroom since her apartment was pretty small—and grabbed her laptop from atop the coffee table. It fired up in a matter of seconds, and she plopped onto the couch to check her email. She'd done this little ritual a dozen times before, but it brought her comfort to see *that* message.

She smiled as she opened it and re-read it.

Welcome to Mountainville. Your application has been approved and we look forward to seeing you in our special community. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dax Trevor, City Marshal.

She felt as if she already knew Marshal Dax. She hadn't actually talked to him. She'd barely knew what he looked like, even. But she'd seen his wife and Little, Stella, in some of Eli's videos.

Eli made the best comedy shorts. And his pranks were hilarious! Littles all over the world consumed his content as fast as he could get it out there. And thanks to those videos, she felt as if she'd been a part of the Mountainville community for years.

Now, though, she really would be. It was happening. She was living her dream.

Well, almost.

She still didn't have a Daddy. But perhaps that would come in time.

You'll find someone. Maybe. But it will never be him.

“Gross, Lynnleigh. Campbell is like your brother. Eww.”

She'd lost track of how many times she'd muttered those words aloud.

She got up and walked into the kitchen, still thinking about the future and all its possibilities. Campbell would always be her best friend. But she'd find a Daddy. And he'd be wonderful!

She was reaching for the bottle of orange juice inside the fridge when a knock at the door startled her. She hurried to it, wondering who would be dropping by that early. Her concern melted when she looked through the small hole and saw Campbell waiting on the other side.

She flipped the locks and threw it open. "What are you doing here, silly?"

"Just dropping by on my way to work. You got a minute?"

"I just got up."

Campbell stepped in, looking all handsome in his blue scrubs. He was a physical therapist and wore the exact same outfit to work every day. The thin fabric was a little tight with all his muscles, and sometimes she wondered if it was going to rip. It never seemed to, though.

While he looked professional in his work attire, Lynnleigh, however, was wearing something else. She gasped as she realized she had no pants on. What she did have on, though, was a big, thick, disposable diaper. She grabbed a throw pillow from the couch and held it at her waist. Campbell laughed.

"I've seen you in a diaper before," he reminded her.

That was true, she thought. Several times. On accident. It was still humiliating, though.

"Uh, maybe I should go put some shorts on."

"Or maybe you can just relax. It's no big deal."

She slowly removed the pillow but kept her head hung in shame. He closed the gap between them. He was standing so close now that she could feel the warmth of his body.

“You know it doesn’t bother me that you’re a Little,” he said, his voice affectionate and affirming. “You don’t have to be embarrassed.”

“I just don’t want you to think I’m some kind of weirdo,” she said, her voice barely more than a whisper.

“After all we’ve been through together you think something as small as a diaper could drive me away?”

Her worried frown slowly warmed into a smile. She finally managed to look him in the eyes. “You’re right.”

“I’m always right.”

“I wouldn’t go that far.”

He smirked. “Agree to disagree. But I’m right about what I came to say. Hear me out.”

“Oh boy. One of Campbell’s famous lectures incoming.”

“Not a lecture,” he said. “An idea. I found some good flights to get you down to Mountainville. I want to pay for it. My treat.”

She opened her mouth to speak but he put his hands on her shoulders.

Gosh, his touch feels so good.

“And before you mention the car situation, I did some research into that town. There’s not much online. I guess they’re pretty secretive.”

“There’s stuff, you just have to know where to look. Secret Littles forums,” she said proudly.

He chuckled. “Well, I managed to find out enough to know you won’t really need a car. That community has everything. A movie theater, restaurants, stores. Even a giant ball pit. Did you know about that?”

“Every Little knows about that,” she said. “It’s the size of an Olympic swimming pool.”

“Well, there you go,” he said proudly. “You can get all those places without a car and you’ll be safe because you won’t be

driving to Texas by yourself. Problem solved.”

“Campbell,” she said, a hint of exasperation in her voice. “I know you mean well, but I’m going to be fine. This is what I want.”

“But you can still have what you want. And you won’t be out the money for an airline ticket. It’s probably cheaper than driving, anyway. But it doesn’t matter because I’m paying for it.”

Her sigh was followed by a chuckle. “You don’t give up, do you?”

He shook his head.

“And you’re sweet,” she said, hugging him. “But I’m driving to Texas. I’m a big girl.”

His hand dipped lower. He didn’t touch her bottom, but he was close as he tugged on the waistband of her diaper. “You sure about that?”

“Hey!”

They both laughed.

Inside, she was losing it. The hug had felt nice. Him touching her diaper had felt even better.

“There’s nothing I can do to change your mind, is there?” he said.

“Not a thing.”

He hugged her for another moment before he withdrew, saying, “Too bad I’m not your Daddy. Then I’d just forbid this. Problem solved.”

Yeah. Too bad you aren’t my Daddy.

Lynnleigh kept that comment to herself, simply smiling and saying, “Everything will be okay. Just you wait and see.”

He nodded, but he sure didn’t look convinced.

And the whole time, Lynnleigh was still reeling, thinking that same thought.

Too bad you aren’t my Daddy.

Chapter Five

Mountainville

“Hear ye, hear ye. This meeting of the Mountainville Council of Littles is now in order. The honorable Eli is presiding.”

Stella stepped away and swept her hand toward the center spot where she'd just stood, against the railing high atop the tower that jutted out from the center of the ball pit.

Below, various Littles from around town were gathered for the meeting. Their chatter tapered off as their leader addressed them.

“Good morning, everyone.”

“Good morning, Eli,” the Littles said in unison.

“It's good to see you all here,” Eli said. “We have good news. But also bad news.”

Murmurs erupted through the crowd as the assembled throng wondered what bad news would be shared. They didn't have to wait long.

“We'll start with the negative. Unfortunately,” Eli said, “the Bigs are really clamping down. There's talk among them that our hijinks have gotten to be too much. I'm hearing reports of increased punishments. And even...dare I say it...school might be made mandatory!”

There were gasps and groans, along with shouts of displeasure.

In the ball pit, a beautiful woman with dark hair and a dark complexion, hinting at her Basque ancestors, said in a British accent, “Every day?”

“Good question, Leah,” Eli said. “The scuttlebutt I'm hearing is two to three days a week. Enough to, and I quote, keep us out of trouble.”

There were more groans.

“Is it for certain?” Leah said.

“Not yet. But they’re gearing up for it,” Eli said. “I suspect it’s just a matter of time. And beyond this school stuff, the Bigs are really clamping down. Stella, unfortunately, was the recipient of a rather, uh, embarrassing punishment last night.”

Stella nodded and then stepped forward. “My Daddy freaking gave me an enema!”

Everyone gasped once more.

“I asked if she wanted to share that and she chose to,” Eli said.

“Yep. I’m warning you all. Dr. Mannix is giving away kits that have the bags of medicine and everything your Big needs to clear you out,” Stella said. “My Daddy said since my actions have been so naughty, maybe I needed to be cleaned from the inside.” She shook her head and frowned. “Just a heads-up. I think the Bigs are really tired of all our shenanigans.”

“Which leads me to the good news,” Eli said after patting Stella’s shoulder comfortingly. “The diversion yesterday worked! When Katie and Stella got into that glitter fight in the store, some of us were able to sneak into the back room and look at the Christmas presents. Libby, you’ll be happy to know you’re getting a new bike! Colt, you have a whole crop of Batman action figures your Mommy ordered through my Mommy. Special editions, too. And Megan, so far, Bo has bought you a rocking horse for your nursery! It’s pretty, pink, and sized just for an adult.”

Everyone cheered at the news.

Once the applause died down, Eli continued, “But as you know, that victory came at a grave price. Katie, I assumed you were disciplined, too.”

“Not an enema, thankfully!” the beautiful, full-figured, brown-haired woman said. “But I got one heck of a spanking. Right there in the fire station. And then I had to sit in timeout for thirty minutes.”

Next to her, April draped her arm around her shoulders and gave her a friendly hug of support.

“It’s only October,” Eli reminded everyone, “so the Christmas presents are only starting to trickle into my Mommy’s store. She’s taken my keys away, so there’s no way to sneak in when its closed and snoop around. Which means we’re limited to the daylight hours. And, after yesterday’s little stunt, I say we wait a while before we try anything again. We have two months to discover our presents. Let’s let this lie for a bit. Anyone second the motion?”

In the ball pit, Penny raised her hand.

“Yes?” Eli said.

“We could always wait until Christmas and just unwrap our gifts without knowing what we were getting. Let it actually be a surprise.”

Stone cold silence fell over the room.

Finally, everyone, including Penny, burst into laughter.

“Good one, Penny!” Eli said.

“Thank you,” she said with a smile and nod. “I second your motion to snoop but wait a few days or weeks and let this discipline storm pass.”

“All in favor?” Eli asked.

Everyone raised their hands.

“Any opposed?”

No one moved.

“The motion passes with unanimous support.” Eli banged a blue, plastic hammer that had been taken from a playset upon the metal railing. “Now, next order of business. Trick-or-treat is coming!”

Everyone applauded.

“There’s nothing to really vote on here, just a reminder to visit the haunted house if you want. The spooky season is almost over. And on Halloween, anyone wanting to trick-or-treat as a group, we’ll meet out in front of this building at six.

“Now, is there any new business?”

No one said anything.

“Hearing none, this meeting is adjourned.” Eli’s voice took on a serious tone when he said, “Remember, these are perilous times. The Bigs are fed up with our nonsense. Watch yourselves.

“Or you might receive the same fate as our beloved Stella!”

Chapter Six

“That knee is rehabbing nicely,” Campbell said.

Mr. Thorne—an older gentleman of seventy-four years—smiled as he stretched his right leg out one last time. “Thank you. It’s because of you.”

Campbell smiled but shook his head. “No, sir. You’re putting in the hard work. Just a little while longer and that knee will be as good as new.”

“Son, at my age, nothing is as good as new. Not on this old body.”

Campbell held out his hand. Mr. Thorne took it and used it to pull his weight off the bench he was on. All around them, Pilates balls, yoga mats, resistant bands, and free weights were arranged around the room in an orderly fashion. There was a treadmill in one corner. Two parallel rails were fixed to the floor in the center of the space, allowing people to grip them as they walked their length.

Natural sunlight spilled in through the large glass wall to Campbell’s left. He was proud of his place, but it didn’t quite feel like his final destination. He couldn’t put his finger on it, but he often wondered why he wasn’t attached to the clinic.

In the small lobby, the home health nurse who’d brought Mr. Thorne was waiting. Campbell helped them both to the van outside, said goodbye, and then went back inside the facility. Now that his last client of the day was gone, it was time to close down and get ready for the dinner he was attending with Mallory. Some get-together to celebrate the fact that her gym was awarded best place to workout by the local newspaper. He was happy for them, but he wasn’t excited about going. Truth be told, he didn’t particularly care for Mallory’s co-workers.

They weren’t bad people. Just sort of snobby. It got on his nerves. But he’d endure for Mallory.

Speaking of, he thought, as he heard the front door open and he spun around to see her walking in.

“I forgot to lock that,” he said.

“You trying to keep me out?”

“Never. Trying to keep everyone else out. I need to get home so I can get ready for tonight. What’s up?”

“Just dropping by on my way home from the gym,” she said. “I wanted to check on you. You seemed distant earlier, on the phone. You okay?”

He internally cursed himself. He was so distracted with Lynnleigh leaving that he couldn’t think of much else. Not even important things. Like his girlfriend. He wasn’t exactly trying to hide it from her. But he didn’t want her to get the wrong impression, either. It probably wasn’t a good look for a guy to be so distracted with another woman. Even if it was a woman he thought of as a sister.

He didn’t want to lie to Mallory, though. He’d always figured honesty was the best policy. So, he gave it to her straight.

“I’m still worried about Lynnleigh. And, honestly, I’m going to miss her when she goes.”

“Ah.” A heavy silence hung over them for a moment. The copious amount of sunlight spilling in through all the glass made the lobby warm, despite the brisk October temperatures outside. Finally, Mallory said, “Maybe it’s for the best that she goes.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s just that, well, you look out for her a lot.”

“Yeah?”

“Maybe she needs to learn to lookout for herself. You won’t always be around. Eventually you’ll be married. I assume so at least.” A coy look shaded her pretty face. “Maybe even have kids. That sort of thing. You two were close growing up, but it can’t last forever. Not like this.”

Campbell took a moment to reflect on his girlfriend’s words. Was she jealous? That conversation last night at dinner sure made him suspect she was. He couldn’t blame her. He’d

constantly worried about that. And not just with Mallory. It had been a concern in every relationship he'd had. His "kid sis" had been a constant issue.

"We'll always be close," he said. "But I know what you mean. I think."

She nodded. "It's good to be close. Like you say, she's family. But you spend so much time worrying about her that you forget about you."

Or do you mean I forget about *us*? he wondered silently. It was valid criticism, he thought.

Do I need to examine my relationship with Lynnleigh? And my relationship with Mallory?

"You going to spend some time with her tomorrow before she leaves town?" Mallory asked. She didn't seem the least bit irritated by the prospect.

"Yeah. I've cleared my schedule. It's going to be kind of weird without her around. She's been a part of my life for so long. I remember that kid coming home from the hospital." He chuckled. "I wasn't very old, but I remember it like it was yesterday." He thought for a moment. "Hey, maybe she could come to the dinner tonight. You can bring as many guests as you want, right?"

"Oh. Uh, yeah, I guess." She stepped closer and looked into his eyes, a beauty pageant smile plastered across her face. He'd seen that smile plenty of times before. It was the one she used when talking to prospective clients. It was also the one she used whenever she was about to deliver bad news but wanted to disarm the person as she did it. "Campbell, you know I like Mallory. Right? But she doesn't really fit in with my friends. You know what I mean?"

She put her hands on his arms and traced his muscles.

He swallowed hard and then said, "No. I don't know what you mean."

"Don't get defensive. I'm just being honest with you. She's sweet and all but...can we just have a night without her?"

“We never hangout with her. Me and you and her. It’s not like she’s always around,” Campbell shot back.

“I know. But she’s not...tonight is going to be people like us. Gym people. You know what I mean?”

His muscles tightened as he realized what Mallory was saying. “Is this about her being curvy?”

“No! Oh my gosh. No. I’m not a horrible person,” she said. She laughed uneasily. “I just want to celebrate with you and my colleagues. You understand, right?” She craned her neck up to give him a kiss.

He only half-heartedly returned it.

“Sure,” he said.

But inside, he feared he knew the reason Mallory didn’t want Lynnleigh around. It was a bunch of gym rats. People who put a lot of time and effort—probably too much—into their appearance. For many of them, it wasn’t about their health, it was about how they looked. There was nothing wrong with being proud of your hard work, he thought, but this crowd took it to the extreme.

Or was it just his imagination? Maybe she was indeed jealous of Lynnleigh and didn’t know how to express it. Once again, he couldn’t blame her. He fully realized that his being so close to another woman might be difficult for her.

So, he didn’t press it.

But his mind was reeling.

Images of Lynnleigh from that morning, looking all adorable and innocent in her big, fluffy diaper, filled his brain.

See? She’s too sweet and innocent to be out there in the world all by herself. She can’t drive to Texas alone! Who will keep her safe?

He stifled a groan as he told Mallory goodbye. They both needed to run to their respective apartments and get ready for tonight’s event.

But his mind was a million miles away. Or about two thousand miles away.

In Texas.

With Lynnleigh.

Chapter Seven

Lynnleigh was so excited she couldn't settle down.

"Two more sleeps until we leave for Mountainville!" she told her stuffies.

She giggled as she held them.

While she was ecstatic, she was also a bit sad. She'd miss Campbell so much! When she thought of it, her heart ached. But she also knew maybe it was for the best. They needed some time apart. Things would never work between them as anything more than what they were. Not in a million years! So it was best that she get some distance, meet someone else, and maybe move on. They'd always be friends.

Not friends. They were family, she reminded herself.

But she needed to move on. So did he. Maybe this time apart would allow that to happen.

But gosh, it hurt so much just to think about the physical separation. He'd been in her life since day one. She couldn't imagine it any other way.

As if on cue, her phone lit up with a text from him. Her diaper crinkled loudly as she twisted around in her bed and grabbed the device from the nightstand.

Campbell: Care if I drop by?

Lynnleigh: Of course not.

Campbell: Good. I'm here right now.

Lynnleigh: LOL. I'll get the door.

She hurried from bed, grabbed a pair of shorts from a drawer, and slid them over her diaper. He would still know she was wearing the bulky garment, but it wouldn't be quite as embarrassing as it had been earlier.

She opened the door to see him waiting.

"Hey."

"Hey," he said. "You sure you don't mind?"

“You know you don’t even have to ask.”

He walked in and closed the door behind him. “What are you up to?”

“I was in bed. Aren’t you supposed to be at that thing with Mallory?” she said. “I figured it would still be going.”

“I left a little early,” he said.

She wondered if it was just her imagination, or had she sensed some uneasiness in his voice? She didn’t want to pry into his relationship. As close as they were, they talked about everything, yet she still felt strange about pressing too hard when it came to Mallory.

“I have some news,” he said.

She tensed, expecting him to reveal he’d broken up with Mallory. She wondered how she’d play it. She would hate it for him, if he was hurting, but deep down she’d never felt they were right together. Still, seeing her best friend mourning the loss of a relationship would not be fun. She would even postpone her trip to Mountainville if necessary. She wouldn’t leave him alone if he needed her.

“Everything okay?” she said.

“Yeah. I just wanted to let you know that...I’m driving you to Texas!”

“What?”

“I’m taking you to Mountainville. I’ll drive you down there and then fly back here.”

“Campbell. You don’t have to do that.”

“I know. It’s probably more for me than you,” he admitted with a sly grin. “I can’t stand the thought of you driving all that way by yourself. I don’t think I could take it. So, the only solution is I drive you myself. Then I’ll know you’re safe.”

“And what makes you think I want you to come? You didn’t even ask me,” she said, trying to sound a bit defiant.

Of course, she wanted him to come. She was nervous about the trip. Having him around would put her at ease. Plus, it

would give them some quality time together before she was away for a while. But she couldn't just roll over. She didn't want him thinking she was completely helpless.

“Come on, Lynn,” he said, using that nickname he sometimes gave her—especially when he was calling her out for something. “You know you like this idea.”

She relented with a smile. “Yay!” She bounced into his arms, causing him to stagger backward.

He remained upright, laughing as they hugged. After she pulled away, she appeared slightly sheepish as she said, “How does Mallory feel about this?”

“She’s cool.”

“Are you sure?”

“Why wouldn’t she be?”

“File it under that pesky problem of two best friends being different genders.”

“She knows there’s nothing between us. It’s family. She understands.”

Lynnleigh smiled and nodded, hoping what she was feeling inside didn't shine through. Mallory was right: they were just like family. Even if Lynnleigh wanted it to be something different. Something deeper.

There will never be anything between you two. He's like your protective older brother. Not your Daddy.

Your Daddy is waiting in Mountainville.

“What about work?” she said.

“I already sent out messages letting my clients know I was going to have someone filling in for me. You know my friend Luke that sometimes works for me?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, the hospital he does PT at cut his hours way back. So he has the time and needs the money. It all works perfectly.”

“Oh.”

“It’s all set,” he said with a huge grin. “Me and you, kid. We’re going to Texas. Together.”

Lynnleigh giggled some more as she hugged him again.

But inside, she wondered if Mallory was really okay with this.

She wondered if she herself was, too. She loved Campbell and wanted to spend as much time with him as possible.

And that was the problem.

More and more, she wasn’t sure exactly what kind of love she felt for him. She just knew that it was love.

A deep, abiding, strong love.

Chapter Eight

Lynnleigh and Campbell spent the following day taking care of things, preparing to leave town.

The morning after, they set out early.

“You wearing a diaper?” he asked as he put her car in reverse and eased out of the slot in front of her apartment.

In the passenger seat, she blushed hard, but answered, “No.”

“I wish you were.”

“Why?”

“I want to make good time. That would cut down on the number of potty breaks.” A few seconds passed before he added, “Besides, it’s kind of cute.”

She giggled and sank a little lower in her seat, staring straight ahead as her cheeks glowed red.

As it turned out, they made excellent time that day anyway. They left New Hampshire, zipping across Vermont right into New York. They stopped in Albany in the east for about five minutes before booking it west all the way to Buffalo, where Lynnleigh had to stop for a quick potty break.

It was after that, as they skirted Lake Erie, heading southwest toward Cleveland, that she broached the subject she’d been wondering about.

“So Mallory is really okay with this?”

“Yeah. She’s good.”

“Is it because she’s eager to get rid of me?”

“Why would you say that?”

“I think I annoy her.”

“No. She knows you’re my kid sis. I mean, you annoy me sometimes, but I love you.”

“Hey!” She playfully hit his shoulder and stuck her tongue out. He took his eyes off the road along that wide swath of

farmland long enough to crack a smile.

She didn't want to push it anymore, but Lynnleigh knew Mallory didn't like her. Of course Mallory wouldn't tell Campbell that outright. Not yet. She was probably waiting to see how this Texas thing worked out. With any luck, Lynnleigh would be staying there and Mallory would have her problem solved. If she did have to say something to Campbell, it risked damaging the relationship.

Lynnleigh understood all this. Mallory did, too. Campbell was oblivious. Typical guy.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Austinburg, Ohio," he said.

"This is a lot of countryside."

"The next big city we'll hit is Cleveland. We can stop there or push on and make it to Columbus tonight. You up for that?"

"How far is Columbus from Cleveland?"

"Few hours. I think."

"I can do it."

"We'll stop and get some more snacks," he said. "Stretch our legs and take a little break before hitting the road again. At this rate, we'll be in Texas soon."

Soon was a relative term, but they were moving quickly through their journey. By the time they hit Columbus that night, they'd traveled about twelve hours and were both exhausted and road weary.

"We'll be there before you know it," he said as they entered their hotel room.

"Don't worry. The trip doesn't bother me. Totally worth it!" Lynnleigh said.

They were on the fifth floor of a mid-range hotel. He'd looked for the safest one possible that wasn't too far from the highway, willing to spend a little more money on it than a roadside, no-name place would cost.

“I can pay for this room,” she said. “And we can really get two separate ones. It’s no big deal. I should be paying for yours. I mean, you’re the one taking time off to drive me all the way to Texas.”

“Stop. You know I pay. Besides, we’ll stay together. I need to make sure you’re safe, little girl.”

She rolled her eyes. “It’s a Holiday Inn. It’s not some fleabag joint.”

“Fleabag joint? Since when do you talk like that?”

She laughed. “I heard it on an old movie. You like it?”

He appraised her with a smile. “It’s cute.”

“Why thank ya. But I’m not cute. I’m a tough talkin’ dame.”

He chuckled. “Get ready for bed, tough talkin’ dame. I’m going to go get us some dinner. Don’t leave this room. Got it? And lock the door behind me.”

“Gee whiz. You’re so bossy.”

“Yep. It’s for your own good.”

“Hey, which bed do you want?” she said.

“One closest to the door.”

“In case someone busts in the room you can jump up and fight them?”

“Yep. Now get ready for bed and remember—”

“I know, I know,” she said. “Don’t leave the room.”

He nodded. “And?”

“Lock all the locks.”

“You got it. I’ll be back soon.”

“Hey, will you get me a Coke with dinner?”

“It’s too late for caffeine. You know how you get if you drink it at night. You won’t sleep well.”

She groaned. “But I want a Coke.”

“Well, you can have one in the morning. Now lock this door as soon as I’m out. When I get back, I’ll text you before I knock so you know it’s me.”

She rolled her eyes as he left. Once she was alone, she crossed her arms and plopped down on her bed. “It’s too late for caffeine,” she said in a mocking tone.

She sighed. A moment later, she was talking to herself again.

“He’s not your Daddy. And you’re a grown woman. He’s the one who insisted on driving you here. You had your trip all planned out. You can have a Coke if you want one.”

She stood and hurried to the door. Putting her hand on the knob, she waited before actually turning it. Had enough time passed for Campbell to be gone? What if he was stuck waiting for the elevator? Or lingering behind to make sure she obeyed. That sounded like something weird he’d do. She gave it another half minute and then hurried from the room. She’d spied a vending machine down the hall. She could grab a drink, chug it before he returned, and he’d never even know.

She was a big girl!

And besides, Campbell wasn’t her Daddy.

Chapter Nine

The aroma of the food drifted up from the bag Campbell held, filling the elevator and making him hungry.

He'd gotten chicken nuggets for Lynnleigh, a chicken sandwich for him, and fries and lemonade for them both. What had that little girl been thinking? It was way too late to drink Coke. She would toss and turn all night.

That is exactly why I came, he thought with a confident grin. Someone has to protect her. Even from herself. Alone, she would have loaded up on caffeine, not slept well, been tired on the road, and possibly gotten in an accident. Nope. Not on his watch.

He chuckled. She was something else. Cute, but trouble. Would she be able to make it without him? Texas was big. And there were some huge cities there. Some of the biggest in the nation with Dallas and Houston. San Antonio, too.

"She's staying in Mountainville," he said aloud, just as the elevator chimed and the doors slid open. "She'll be fine."

Maybe she'll even find a Daddy, he thought. Someone who would keep her safe. Of course, Campbell would have to approve of this Daddy, but still...maybe she'd find the right guy and he would protect her the way she deserved to be protected. The way she needed.

He rounded the corner and looked up to see someone standing near the door to their room. He picked up the pace, but as he got closer, he realized it was just Lynnleigh.

"What's wrong?" he said, practically running now. The drinks sloshed loudly inside the cups, but thankfully the lids kept the lemonade from spilling over.

"Nothing," she said. "I, uh, knew you were here so I thought I'd help you. Here, let me take those drinks so you can get the door."

He arched an eyebrow. "You know I can tell when you're lying."

“I’m not lying,” she said, waving off the notion. “Seriously. Let me get the drinks.”

“I’ve got them,” he said. “You get the door.”

She gulped. “Oh. About that. I sorta...”

“Got locked out. Didn’t you?”

She groaned, casting her eyes at the floor. “Yeah.”

“I can’t believe you left the room,” he said. He shook his head. “We’ll talk about this inside.”

He shifted the food in his hands, reached into the pocket of his jeans, and pulled out the keycard. A moment later, the door was open and they were inside. He put the food on the table, saying, “Go lock that door. All the locks.”

Lynnleigh obediently did so and then returned. He could tell by her demure demeanor that she was sorry. That wouldn’t spare her a lecture, though. She deserved more than that, too.

“Look at me, Lynnleigh,” he said.

She slowly raised her head and met his gaze. Her eyes were already damp. She hated disappointing him. He felt bad for her, but she needed to hear this, no matter how much it stung.

She’s lucky I’m not going to sting her little bottom, he thought. He kept that comment to himself. He didn’t want to overstep. But after the stunt that little girl pulled, she needed her bottom reddened.

“What did I tell you before I left?”

She sniffled before saying, “Not to leave the room.”

“Yet you left anyway. Why? What was so important that you needed to put yourself in danger?”

“I’m not a little kid!” she said.

He cleared his throat. “That’s not what I asked. I asked why you left the room. What was so important that you felt the need to endanger yourself?”

“I, uh, wanted...a Coke. I sorta forgot my keycard, though, so I got locked out.”

“Oh. So you left the room to get a Coke. Two things you weren’t supposed to do. And then, when I got back and caught you, you lied about it.” He shook his head. His nostrils flared as he exhaled loudly. “Little girl, you’re in an unfamiliar city. You left the room by yourself and didn’t even take your cell phone. What if someone would have taken you?”

“No one would—”

“Don’t argue with me.”

“I’m just saying no one wants to kidnap the fat girl.”

“You need to watch your mouth right now. I’ve already got a good mind to pull your pants and underwear down and spank your bottom so hard that you’d still be crying and squirming tomorrow in the car. Is that what you want?”

He knew he was crossing a line. He just couldn’t help it. Spanking her was truly what he wanted to do. It was almost a compulsive urge. Not for some sexual play. Not for that at all. But because she needed it. For her own good.

He didn’t do it, though. He finally shook his head once more and pulled her close to him for a tight hug. She instantly began sobbing into his chest.

“It’s okay,” he said soothingly. “It scared me to think of you locked out of this room with no way to get ahold of me if you needed anything. I know I have a bunch of rules. I’m sure it can get annoying. But they’re to keep you safe. That’s my job, Lynnleigh. I’m just trying to protect you.”

She nodded as she continued to bury her face in his chest and cry.

A moment later, he put his hand under her chin and gently tilted her head up. “If you do something so dangerous again, I’m going to take this belt off and thrash your naked bottom. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Campbell,” she said quietly.

“Good girl. Now let’s eat. You need to get to bed soon. We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow.”

He hugged her again and then let go.

Is she ready to be in Texas all by herself? he pondered silently. And am I ready for it?

It sure didn't feel like it on either account.

Chapter Ten

An hour later, as Lynnleigh was sliding into bed, she heard Campbell say, “Do you need to wear a diaper?”

She giggled and quickly covered her face. He’d seen her so many times padded. Yet every time they even talked about it, it embarrassed her beyond belief.

“I’m fine,” she said.

“You’re used to sleeping in one and you had a lot of lemonade,” he countered. “You don’t want to have an accident on that hotel bed.”

“I am a grown woman, you know, even if it doesn’t seem like it,” she said.

“Suit yourself,” he said. “But if I were you, I’d put one on.”

“Maybe *you* need a diaper,” she said playfully.

He laughed. “Hardly. Alright, Lynnleigh. Get some sleep. I want to hit the road early in the morning.”

“Goodnight,” she said, hugging her stuffed dog tightly.

“Goodnight,” he said as he flipped the lamp off.

A thick darkness covered the room. Lynnleigh realized that if she’d made the trip by herself, she’d totally be afraid right now. Sometimes, sleeping alone in her own apartment was scary enough. She couldn’t imagine doing it in a strange hotel room in a big city. She would have done it, though. Mountainville was worth it. But she was happy and relieved to have Campbell along.

Even if he’d lectured her.

She pinched her eyes closed tightly, trying to will sleep to come, but she couldn’t stop thinking of the way he’d scolded her. She knew he wasn’t her Daddy. He wasn’t anyone’s Daddy. But he sure acted like one, sometimes. He was always bossing her around and looking out for her.

And then there’s that threat of a spanking.

Her mind drifted back further to that one time. Long ago. When she'd been in college...

“Have you seriously never sucked cock before?” Chad said.

Lynnleigh was shaking, but she tried not to show it. She was completely inexperienced. It was by choice, too. She just wasn't ready to give that part of herself away yet.

But now, at the frat party, with the loud music blaring in another room, the throng of people mingling and drinking, she realized just how inexperienced she actually was.

And naïve.

She should never have come here.

“I think I'll just go grab another drink and—”

Chad put his hand on her wrist, stopping her from leaving the bedroom he'd pulled her into. “We can get a drink in a minute.” He transferred his grip to her hand and jerked her arm roughly toward his crotch. “You ever even touched one?”

“Chad, I want to go—”

“And I want you to suck my cock.”

“Please!”

A loud banging on the door interrupted the proceedings. She breathed a sigh of relief, but it was short lived as she thought of all the possibilities. What if it was some of his buddies wanting in on this...whatever *this* was going to be?

Her heart thumped so loudly she could feel the drumming all the way in her fingertips. But a sense of peace and safety washed over her when she heard the commanding voice of Campbell yell, “Lynnleigh! It's me! You in there?”

“Who is that?” Chad said.

“Help me!” she yelled.

The doorknob jiggled for a second, but as soon as Campbell saw it was locked, he went a different route. A loud crunch filled the room as the door splintered on its hinges. It flew

open, the top half completely broken and hanging limply. Campbell's muscular frame took up the entire doorway until he stepped in, hulking closer, his face twisted in a terrifying grimace, a growl emitting from his throat.

"Hey, man! I was just—"

Chad never finished his protests because Campbell's backhand caught him square on the chin with a loud crack. Chad flew back onto the bed—the same one he'd had other plans for—his eyes fluttering as he struggled to retain consciousness. He was okay, but he'd have one hell of a headache for a couple of days, the price of his wicked ways.

"You came," Lynnleigh said, hugging her best friend tightly as more tears began flowing.

"I'm just glad you texted me," he said. "Come on. We're going to my place and then me and you are going to have a talk, little girl."

"Talk" meant something else, as Lynnleigh soon found out. She was shocked twenty minutes later, in Campbell's apartment, when her pants were down and she was bent over the kitchen table.

She winced as she realized he was grabbing a heavy, wooden spoon from the kitchen. She was beyond humiliated with her bottom—covered only in her pink panties—on display and high in the air, just awaiting the spanking that was to come.

"I told you to stay away from frat parties, little girl."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I just wanted to be popular."

"What happened to you wasn't your fault. That idiot is responsible for his own actions. But you knew going to some place so dangerous was against the rules."

"Whose rules?"

She was pushing it, arguing with him like that. Still, she couldn't give up so easily. She had to have a little bit of dignity.

Ironic, she thought. Your pants are around your ankles, and you're bent over, about to get thrashed. Some dignity!

"Mine. I've been to college. Remember? I know how things work. You're only eighteen, little girl. Too young to be going to frat parties and crap like that." He shook his head. "I can't believe you did that. Now, you'll hold still, if you know what's good for you."

He swatted her bottom several times with his open palm. It was embarrassing, but not really painful. Still, she yelped and wiggled. It wasn't until the spoon came down with a sharp whack on her vulnerable cheeks that she really started squirming.

And squealing.

Her legs flailed, causing him to say, "I said hold still. You want to make this worse?"

"No," she said between sobs.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The large, flat wooden spoon rose and fell in a steady cadence.

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Lynnleigh screamed and cried and tried to wiggle free, but it was no use. Campbell wasn't having any of it. He was determined to punish her.

Just when Lynnleigh thought it couldn't get any worse, she felt Campbell's hands slide into the waistband of her panties. He tugged them down, exposing her trembling cheeks. She could only imagine how red they were.

This was by far the most humiliated she'd ever felt. But also the most loved. She didn't understand the strange dichotomy. But as bad as this was—and it was positively dreadful—she knew it was for her own good.

And that it was done in love. Unfailing, unconditional love.

Campbell swatted her now bare bottom over and over with the spoon, turning it an even brighter shade of red. She

screamed and sobbed, pleading for mercy, but it was no use. Campbell had no intention of showing her any.

Not until she was punished properly, anyway. She was a naughty little girl and had earned this spanking. She deserved every excruciating lick that hard spoon gave her.

But that didn't mean she liked it. Her bottom was set ablaze. It would hurt for some time.

When Campbell finally finished, he helped her stand. As he pulled her close and held her tightly, he whispered, "You'll always be safe with me, kid. Always."

And as the years passed, those words were proven true. She was always safe with Campbell.

She reflected on that as she drifted off to sleep in the hotel room.

What would life be like without him—when she was in Texas and he was back in New Hampshire? She couldn't imagine, but she needed to find out. They would always be close, but they couldn't keep this up forever. If he was going to be with Mallory, he needed some distance. She never wanted to harm one of his relationships.

And if she was going to find a Daddy, she needed that distance, too.

She just couldn't imagine anyone would be a better Daddy than Campbell—the guy who technically wasn't even one—could be.

Chapter Eleven

Lynnleigh opened her eyes with a gasp.

She sprang up and hurried across the dark hotel room but clipped her knee on the corner of Campbell's bed. She dropped to the floor, groaning more from being startled than actual pain.

"What's wrong?" Campbell said. Light flooded the space. He was by her side in a matter of seconds.

"I hit my knee," she said, rubbing it as she winced.

"What were you doing?" he said.

"I, uh, woke up and was starting to..."

"Yeah?"

She sighed. "Starting to wet the bed. So I had to hurry to the bathroom."

"I see," he said. "Go pee. Then get a diaper."

Her bladder ached too much to protest. He stood, helped her up, and then she scurried to the bathroom. A couple of minutes later, she was out and rummaging through her suitcase. "This is so freaking embarrassing."

"Why? I've seen you in a diaper plenty of times," he reminded her.

"I know, but it's still embarrassing."

"It's just me. Do you want me to go in there so you can have some privacy while you put it on?"

"Where? There's only one room."

"I can step by the door or go into the bathroom," he said.

"You're fine. Just don't look."

"I've seen you naked before, too. Remember?"

She threw a pillow at him. He caught it, laughed, and then laid on his bed, flipping around to where he faced the wall.

Her embarrassment grew as the diaper rustled loudly while she unfolded it and smoothed it out.

Gee! Could this thing be any noisier?

Due to her nervousness, she fumbled clumsily as she slid her shorts and panties off. It was even worse when she laid atop the disposable garment and tried to work the four tapes. She sighed in frustration.

“What’s wrong now?” he asked, still staring at the blank wall.

“I’m having trouble with it.”

“Want me to help?”

“But you’d have to see my...uh, princess parts.” She blushed as soon as the words left her mouth.

Seriously? Princess parts? Are you trying to make this even worse? Your dignity is already hanging on by a thread.

“Not necessarily,” he said. “Pull the diaper between your legs and have it at your waist. I’ll just come over there and tape it up when you’re ready.”

She thought it over. That would work. It was still humiliating as he was not only seeing her in a diaper, but he was putting it on her. But it was better than just laying there before him with her legs spread open wide, giving him a full view of her lady bits.

She winced even harder.

Lady bits might be worse than princess parts.

“Okay,” she said, bracing herself for the humiliation that was to follow.

But as he got up and walked around to where she lay on her bed, her sense of shame gave way to sheer excitement.

Is this what having a Daddy is like? she wondered. It felt heavenly. Maybe one day—one day very soon—she’d find a Daddy to care for her in such an intimate way.

“I’m just going to fasten these tapes,” he said, reaching out and taking ahold of her diaper.

“T-thank you,” she said. She hated the fact that her voice was trembling, but there was no hiding how nervous she was. Not when Campbell was so close to her, anyway. He could no doubt see her body quivering.

He confirmed that fact when he said, “Lynnleigh, look at me.”

She did so, finding nothing but warmth in his eyes. “It’s okay. You don’t have to be embarrassed or nervous. It’s just me. We’ve been through a lot together.”

She nodded. And just like that, all her apprehensions melted away. Campbell was there. He’d take care of her.

“There you go,” he said, securing the final tape. “You’re ready for bed, little girl.”

“Thank you,” she said.

“Don’t mention it. You should have worn that diaper in the first place like I suggested. Now go on. Get some sleep. It’s going to be another long drive tomorrow. We’ve still got a long way to go before we hit Texas.”

He was about to walk away when she sat up and quickly launched herself at him. Since she was still sitting, her head only came up to his stomach. She wrapped her arms around him and hugged him tightly.

“You’re the best friend ever, Campbell.”

She didn’t want to let go. It felt heavenly as he held her tightly, gently rocking her. His chin rested atop her head. For a moment, she wondered if he was going to kiss her. Oh, how she wanted him to! She hated to admit it, and the thought scared her more than she could even articulate, but she wanted it so badly.

He didn’t do it, though.

He broke off the hug, smiled down at her one more time, and then climbed into his own bed before switching off the lamp.

Hugging her stuffie, and snuggled safe and warm in her diaper, Little Lynnleigh drifted off to sleep and had very sweet dreams.

Chapter Twelve

It took two more days to reach the Davis Mountains in West Texas.

They zipped through Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, making it all the way to Tulsa, Oklahoma before they stopped for the second night. The next day, they cut southwest through the Sooner State, crossed the Red River, and saw a big “Welcome to Texas” sign just outside of Wichita Falls.

“We’re almost there!” Lynnleigh said with excitement.

“Closer,” Campbell said. “But don’t get too antsy yet. We’ve got some more miles to cover.”

He was right. There was almost seven hours’ worth of miles.

“How is Texas so big?” she asked. “This place seems like it’s going on forever.”

“And we’re not even seeing half of it,” he noted.

“It’s pretty. Looks like a western movie.”

“Have you ever seen a western?”

“Once. My grandpa loved them. I watched a John Wayne one with him. Have you ever seen one?”

He thought for a moment. “Yeah. That *Magnificent Seven* that had Denzel in it. It was good.”

“Maybe you’ll see more while you’re here,” she said. “Seems like the kind of place where they’d watch a lot of them.”

“I won’t be here long. I fly out the day after Halloween.”

She didn’t want to think about that, so she didn’t. Hopefully, by then, she’d be having so much fun in Mountainville that she wouldn’t miss him terribly. As of now, though, she feared the distance between them might rip her heart out.

By the time they reached Mountainville, the sun had already set. The entrance had plenty of mounted lights, but the black,

iron gate still nearly blended in with the pitch night as it slowly rolled away, allowing them entry.

“I can’t believe this is happening! I’m finally here!” She giggled and clapped her hands, squealing with delight.

She could feel Campbell watching her. She looked over at him to see an affectionate smile turning his lips up. The affection in his eyes was obvious, too.

“I’m so glad you made it, kid.”

She smiled back. “All thanks to you.”

“Nah. You could have done this on your own. Like I told you before, you’re more than capable. This was more for my peace of mind. It saved me from just sitting at home, worrying about you all day and night.”

He rolled the car in. The gate immediately closed behind them. They drove along a smooth road for a minute before a large, stately structure came into view.

“City hall,” he said, noting the sign. In the night, the building looked gorgeous with the lights shining on it.

“I don’t see any mountains,” Lynnleigh said.

“They’re there,” Campbell said. “Wait until the daylight. I bet it’s beautiful.”

The road split and they followed it left to see an adobe building standing out against the darkness. Lynnleigh looked at the clock. “It’s only eight but it feels like midnight.”

“Yeah. The desert sure gets quiet at night, I guess. And we’ve had a long day.”

“I know this place is cool, but it’s kind of spooky right now,” she said. She then gasped and pointed. “And that’s not helping any!”

Ahead, in the adobe building’s small yard, a figure dashed about. Another person was trying to wrangle them. They got a little closer and Lynnleigh’s jaw fell slack. “Is that w-what I think it is?”

“It does look to be a werewolf,” Campbell admitted. “But it’s just some sort of Halloween thing. Still, I want you to stay in this car, little girl.” He put the vehicle in park and got out. “Anyone need any help?”

“I got it,” a tall man with dark blond hair said. He was as muscular as he was long. “Nothing to be alarmed about. It’s just an animatronic. The AI is advanced. A little too advanced, if you know what I mean.”

“I actually don’t,” Campbell said.

“Stryker! I thought you had those blasted things under control!” another man said. He had just stepped out from the office, his broad shoulders filling the entire doorway. “That’s the second time one has gotten loose this week.”

“I got it. It’s all good,” Stryker said.

He closed the open ground between him and the werewolf. Reaching around the creature’s neck, he hit some kind of switch. The monster instantly fell limp, as if he’d passed out.

“So that thing isn’t alive?” Campbell said, still trying to make sense of what he’d just seen.

“Nope. I made it for the Mountainville Haunted House.” Stryker laughed. “Hey, you think this was bad, you should have been here about a month ago. A whole bunch of monsters got loose. We had a time trying to get ‘em. But we did.” He smiled proudly.

The other man—obviously the marshal, if the shining tin star pinned to his chest was any indication—clearly didn’t see the humor in the situation.

“I thought you were going to update the software with a patch that lets you control these things from your phone or something,” he said.

“I did. This one is the last one to get the new updates. I’ll take him to the garage, tinker with him a bit, and you’ll never see him running loose again.”

The marshal didn’t look so convinced. But he turned his focus to Campbell and extended his hand. “Marshal Dax

Trevor.”

“Campbell Fields,” he said, shaking the other man’s hand.

“And my name’s Stryker.” He shook Campbell’s hand next and then grabbed the lifeless werewolf, tossing him over his shoulder as if it weighed nothing more than a pillow. “Better get going. Nice meeting you.”

By now, Lynnleigh was out of the car and finding great delight in the monstrous shenanigans.

“That’s so cool!” she said.

“Wait until you see all that’s going on tomorrow. This town goes all out for Halloween! I’m Stryker, by the way.”

“I’m Lynnleigh.”

“You’re going to love it here. You want to meet up in the morning? I can show you around. Introduce you to my friends.”

“That would be awesome!”

They made the plan with the time and location before Stryker walked away, still carrying the limp werewolf as if he’d forgotten it was even there.

“Well, this is already working out great,” Dax said. “It’s nice to have you here in Mountainville, Lynnleigh. We’re excited you’re joining us. I think you’ll love it.”

“Thanks, marshal! I hope I’m not keeping you from Stella.”

“No. I just jogged over to the office a few minutes ago, waiting on y’all. By the way, how do you know Stella?”

Lynnleigh giggled. “Eli’s videos, sir.”

Dax smiled. “I should have known. We have movie stars. Pop princesses. Even a country singer in this town. But I swear Eli is the most famous among you Littles.”

He gave her a few instructions, made sure her Mountainville app was working with the directions to her rental house and the code to get in, then said goodbye.

When she and Campbell were back in the car, driving toward the rental house, he said, “So, it looks like you’ve already met a Daddy. Maybe.”

“Stryker?”

“Yeah.”

“He’s a Little.”

“But he’s big and strong and all that.”

“Littles come in all shapes, sizes, and varieties.”

“There are guy Littles?”

“Tons of them. Remember the guy whose videos I watch all the time—Eli? He’s the king of Littles!”

“Oh, yeah.”

They drove for another few moments in silence before Campbell said, “So you aren’t into Stryker?”

“I just met him. But he had a wedding ring on. And he’s a Little. I’m looking for a Daddy.”

“Oh.”

More silence followed before he said, “How did you know that guy is a Little? I didn’t hear you ask.”

She giggled. “Littles know these things. We have a radar.”

“Really?”

“Uh-huh.”

They arrived at the house with Lynnleigh wondering if Campbell had been jealous at the thought of Stryker being a Daddy—and asking her to hangout tomorrow.

“You want to go out and look around or do you want to go to bed?” he asked.

She yawned and stretched, serving as the answer to his question.

“That’s what I thought,” he said. “We had a long drive and these past three days have me worn out, too. Some shut eye would do us both some good.”

He insisted on carrying all the bags in and placing them in her bedroom.

“This place has it all,” she said.

“It’s nice,” he said.

“You’ll be good in the guest room?” she asked him.

“Yeah. You take the suite. This is your house. For as long as you’re staying here, at least.”

“Goodnight, Campbell. Thank you again for everything,” she said, hugging him tightly.

“Don’t mention it. Goodnight, kid.”

The two closed their respective doors and got ready to turn in.

But despite all the pleading with herself, she wasn’t actually ready to say goodnight to him. She wanted him right there with her. In bed, holding her close.

If only...

Chapter Thirteen

Lynnleigh awoke full of energy.

She grabbed her phone, checked the screen, and groaned when she realized she'd only been asleep forty-five minutes. Yet despite the short time, she felt refreshed. She was brimming with excitement.

It didn't shock her. She was finally in Mountainville. Sure, the drive there had been exhausting, but they'd made it. She was at her destination. The place she'd dreamed of for so long. Who had time to sleep.

She got up and quietly crept from the room. She didn't want to disturb Campbell. She knew that as tiring as the trip had been for her, it had been ten times more so for him. He'd been the one behind the wheel the entire time. He'd insisted on that. So, he'd had three long, grueling days of being hyper-aware, looking out for other vehicles and keeping them both safe. He needed his rest.

She opened the front door and stepped onto the porch. She smiled as she breathed in a lungful of crisp, clean, mountain air. She sighed wistfully. How wonderful was this? She had shorts on over her bulky diaper, but it felt wonderful not to worry whether or not anyone would notice. It was Mountainville. Many of the Littles were dressed much the same, she assumed.

Speaking of Littles, she thought, who is coming down the sidewalk?

They were laughing and talking as they walked by. She noticed they were wearing costumes and holding plastic pumpkin buckets. For a moment, she wondered if she'd slept a full twenty-four hours. Maybe it hadn't only been forty-five minutes! Was it already Halloween?

Suddenly, the cold air hit her, causing her to shiver. She was about to rush inside when she heard someone in the group say, "Hey, that's her. The one I told y'all about. Lynnleigh."

He was a full head taller than the rest of the group, and even though he wore a red devil costume, she recognized him as Stryker.

“Mind if we come up there?” he said.

She waved them forward excitedly. “Hi! Come on up.”

It’s happening! she thought. I’m already meeting Littles and making friends!

“Guys, meet Lynnleigh,” Stryker said. “Lynnleigh, these are my friends. Eli, Katie, Stella, and Harrison.”

“Oh my gosh! I’ve seen most of you in Eli’s videos. Except you. Are you—”

Harrison nodded. “I keep a low profile in Eli’s videos. I’m not ashamed of being a Little, but I don’t want to bring a lot of attention down on Mountainville. So, when I help with Eli’s videos, I do it behind the scenes.”

“I’ve seen all your movies!” Lynnleigh said.

The marshal had alluded to the fact that Mountainville had some celebrities running around. She didn’t realize that included the famous movie star, Harrison Trent.

“It’s good to have you here,” Katie said. She had long, silky brown hair. She was lush with curves, and whoever her Daddy was, he probably liked the way that nurse costume fit her. It was rather short, allowing her bulky diaper to hang out a tad underneath.

“Thank you,” Lynnleigh said.

“Where did you come from?” Eli asked.

Lynnleigh tried not to fan-girl too hard. As famous as Harrison Trent was, in the world of Littles, Eli was as big as you could get. A true super star. “New Hampshire,” she managed to say. “I love your videos,” she added.

“Hey, thanks,” Eli said.

He was a trim man of average height. He had large brown eyes with hair the same color. In most of the videos she’d seen, he wore shorts with a t-shirt beneath. His pacifier was

always clipped to one of the straps. Tonight, though, he was decked out for Halloween, wearing a vampire costume. That passy was still there, though, clipped to his collar. Fake blood dripped from the faux fangs that protruded from his lips.

“Hey,” he said, “we’re on our way to a Halloween party our friend Leah is throwing. Wanna come?”

“Yeah, it’s a Littles only party. No Bigs allowed!” Katie said. “You should come. It’s gonna be a blast!”

“I don’t have a costume,” Lynnleigh said.

“I bet we wear the same size,” Katie said. “We can run to my house and go through my dress-up clothes. I have a princess dress you could wear.”

Lynnleigh thought it over. Finally, she grinned, nodded, and said, “Let me run and tell Campbell. I’ll be right back.”

She hurried through the house. Quietly opening the bedroom door, she poked her head in and saw that he was sleeping. She thought about what to do but decided not to bother him. He was exhausted. He needed his rest. So, she let him be, changed into pants and threw on a coat, and then skipped happily to join her new friends.

“Ready?” Katie asked.

“Ready!” Lynnleigh said.

“Heads up,” Stella said. “I got a text that our friend April has been doing shots. She likes to take her top off when she’s drunk.”

Everyone laughed.

“This should be interesting,” Stryker said. “But let’s not get in too much trouble. The Bigs are really clamping down.”

“What’s up?” Lynnleigh asked, eager to learn the ways of Mountainville.

“They’re getting fed up with our naughtiness,” Katie explained. “And, I have to admit, with good reason. We’ve really escalated things here lately.”

Everyone agreed and vowed to have a good time but keep the trouble to a minimum. And Lynnleigh was just glad to be included. She was finally in Mountainville. It was time to let loose and have some fun.

It was time to be her best Little self she could be.

Chapter Fourteen

“It’s time we free the girls!” April said. She started tugging her shirt over her head.

“No, no, honey,” the woman with her said. “Let’s get you home.”

“Uh-oh. But the night’s just getting started,” Katie said. “You sure you need to get her out of here, Libby?”

The woman nodded. “She’s had a few too many. If we don’t get her to bed, she’ll be naked as a jaybird within thirty minutes.”

The others told April goodnight, but it was doubtful she’d even remember. She was staggering on her feet.

“I’ll help you,” Colt said. He was tall, dark, and athletic, having the build of a professional baseball player. He hadn’t played in several years, but now did color commentary for major league games. He was also a Little, but the world outside of Mountainville didn’t know that.

“But the boobies have been oppressed long enough! We must free them! We’ve got to free them all,” April insisted.

“And we will,” Libby said. “But right now, let’s get you home and safely in bed.”

“So,” Leah, their hostess, said, after April and her helpful friends were gone. She spoke loud as to compete with the music that filled her house. “That’s the regular punch. That’s the spiked stuff.” She pointed to the respective bowls to indicate which was which.

“Thanks,” Katie said. “I’ll stick with regular.”

“I’m going spiked,” Stella said.

“Same,” Lynnleigh said. She wasn’t a huge drinker, but a little sip to help her relax and let loose would be nice. A few minutes later, with drink in hand, she was mingling through the crowd.

She was a tad nervous, wearing the short, pink princess dress. It had plenty of lace and ribbons, but it didn't quite cover the bulky diaper she wore beneath it. That was okay, as it seemed most people's diaper was visible through their costumes.

She met plenty of Littles and knew she would need to see them several times before she remembered most of their names. But everyone was friendly. The costumes were amazing. At one point, they all did a group dance to "Monster Mash." She was laughing when she left the dance area hand-in-hand with Katie and Stella.

"Do you know who that was you were dancing next to?" Katie asked.

"The one dressed up like the Bride of Frankenstein?" Lynnleigh said.

"Yep."

"Nope."

"Thea Simpson."

"What! The singer?"

"Yep."

"She's the biggest star on the planet right now!" Lynnleigh said.

"She's our friend. She'll be trick-or-treating with us tomorrow night," Stella said. "You coming?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world!" Lynnleigh said. "Oh my gosh, this is already the best vacation ever!"

"Well, I'm glad you're enjoying yourself. Because I've been at the house worrying about you," someone behind her said.

Not just anyone, either.

Him.

"Oh crap," Lynnleigh said with a wince. She slowly turned to see Campbell standing there. He looked out of place in his gray shorts and navy blue t-shirt, the only one in the room not

in a Halloween costume. The muscles in his neck were bulging. So was a vein on his forehead. He was clearly not happy.

“Hey, buddy,” Lynnleigh said, not really knowing what else to add.

“Can we talk? At the house?” he said. There wasn’t even a hint of a smile on his face.

“Sure.”

She looked at her new friends and mouthed, “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Katie and Stella nodded.

And with that, Lynnleigh left the party with Campbell, feeling very much like a naughty little girl who had snuck out of the house without telling Daddy.

Chapter Fifteen

“I don’t see why you’re so irritated,” Lynnleigh said as they stepped into the rental house.

“What I’m feeling now is stronger than irritation,” Campbell said.

“Okay. I don’t know why you’re so mad.”

“Really? I woke up to find you gone. I thought you were in bed.”

“And I thought you were asleep. You weren’t even supposed to notice I’d left.”

“Don’t turn this around on me,” he said. “You told me you were going to bed. I woke up for a drink of water and thought I’d check on you. That’s when I found your room empty. I looked through the house and didn’t see any sign of you. I was worried.”

“I’m sorry,” she said, rolling her eyes. “I didn’t want to wake you up.”

“You didn’t think to leave a note? Or even shoot me a text so I’d see it when I checked my phone?” he countered. “Which I did, by the way, hoping you’d texted or called.”

She chewed on the inside of her cheek before shrugging. “I didn’t think about that,” she said quietly.

“I know. And you had me worried sick! Sort of like when you left the hotel room after I told you not to.”

“That was different! We’re in Mountainville. It’s safe. What’s going to happen to me here?”

“Well, you went to a party with people you don’t know and were drinking. And again, I didn’t even know where you were, so I couldn’t have rescued you if need be.”

She shuffled on her feet and cast her eyes downward, staring at a spot on the floor. She swallowed the lump in her throat and said, “I wasn’t drinking! And they’re good people.”

“But you don’t know that for sure,” he said. “You don’t know anything about them. I know you’ve seen their videos or whatever, but that doesn’t mean much. You put yourself in a very unsafe situation. Besides, don’t lie to me.”

“I’m not lying!” she protested.

He stepped closer. “I can smell the alcohol on your breath. We had this problem back at the hotel. You lied about what you were doing in the hallway, didn’t you?”

She looked away.

“Didn’t you?” he said, this time louder.

She nodded.

“I’m disappointed in your actions, Lynnleigh.”

She sniffled as tears began to fall. But Campbell wasn’t going to let her off that easily.

“If I was your Daddy, I’d pull that diaper down, bend you over, and blister that bottom of yours so hard you’d hesitate to sit down for a day.” He shook his head and exhaled loudly. His eyes were trained on her, considering his options. “In fact, that’s exactly what I’m going to do.”

“What?” she cried.

“You heard me. I might not be your Daddy, but someone has to look out for you. You need to learn a lesson, little girl. I’m going to be gone in a couple of days. I won’t be here to take care of you. Maybe this will make you remember not to do something so dangerous again.”

She knew she could say no. If she absolutely didn’t want this, she could tell him to stop and he would honor her wishes. But he was right. She’d put herself in a bad situation. She could trust the people of Mountainville, but that didn’t change the fact that she’d been inconsiderate by making Campbell worry. She should have at least left a note or sent a text. And of course, she shouldn’t have lied. There was no excuse in that.

She was surprised when Campbell left the room. Had he changed his mind? Was he not going to spank her after all?

Those questions were answered a second later when he returned, carrying a paddle and a bar of soap. “This house has everything. I found these items in the nursery. I went in there looking for you earlier.” He shook his head, the irritation still evident in his eyes.

She started sobbing louder.

“Open wide. That dirty little mouth of yours has told a lot of lies recently. I think it needs cleaned out.”

She whimpered and reared her head back, pinching her lips closed tightly.

“Little girl,” he said.

She took a moment to look at the intensity in his eyes. Finally, she opened her mouth.

He put the soap in. “You keep that right there while you take your swats. Don’t even think about spitting it out.”

“Ahh,” she groaned as her teeth bit into the soap. Her lips curled, trying to stay far away from the bar, but it was no use. The clean taste filled her mouth and almost made her gag.

“Now, let’s get that diaper down and bend you over the couch, little girl. You don’t even know how red your bottom’s going to be when I’m through with you.”

Her heart raced and her stomach fluttered. This wasn’t the first time Campbell had paddled her, but it had been a while. Since all those years ago in college.

Her diaper was now pulled down. He laid the paddle on the couch, then he bent her over the arm and rubbed her backside a few times. His touch felt wonderful, even under those grave circumstances.

Oh, how she wanted him to touch her more. To explore her body. To claim her as his own.

But he didn’t. He was too focused on the discipline to even think of anything else.

Now, Lynnleigh couldn’t think of anything else, either. Because the paddling began.

She wiggled and squirmed, crying and begging as the unforgiving wood crashed down again and again. Her words were muffled by the soap, and Campbell couldn't understand anything she said—not that it would have mattered. He had no intention of letting up.

Her bottom felt like it was on fire. And the taste of the soap only made things worse. She tried to push it out with her tongue, but it wouldn't budge.

She cried loudly, the sound distorted by the bar. Just when she thought it couldn't get any worse, the next swat brought fresh waves of pain that had her dancing about on her feet, desperate for relief. None came, though. In her agony, she accidentally bit down on the soap even more. She could feel it stuck to her teeth. She worked hard to suppress her gag reflex. She only barely kept from retching.

She lost track of how many swats she received, but that spanking seemed to last forever. By the time the paddling was finished, she was a mess. She was sobbing. Tears, drool, and snot ran down her face.

“Come here,” he finally said after the paddling tapered off. He removed the bar of soap and sat it down on the coffee table, along with the paddle.

She fell into his arms, sobbing loudly in his chest.

“There, there, little girl,” he said, stroking her hair and swaying her.

Finally, the sobs slowed and her crying stopped. He wiped her eyes with his thumb and smiled down at her. “Feel better?”

“Y-yes,” she said.

“I hate to punish you, but it was necessary. I care about you, and I just want what's best for you.”

“I know,” she said. “I'm sorry I've been such a brat.”

“I accept your apology,” he said. “And it's a good girl to offer it. It takes a big person to admit when they made a mistake. I'm proud of you, kiddo.”

She nearly melted at the praise.

“I should go to bed,” she finally said.

“Yes, you should. Get some rest. Tomorrow is a new day. This ugliness is all behind us now.”

“May I rinse my mouth out, sir?”

She hated that she’d called him *sir*. She hadn’t meant to. It just slipped, seeming very appropriate under the circumstances.

“Yes, little girl. Is your diaper dry?”

She blushed hard as she nodded. He reached down and pulled it back up until it was snugly around her waist. He patted her bottom several times. “Be a good girl and go right to sleep.”

“Yes, sir. I promise.”

He hugged her one last time and then watched affectionately as she waddled away, toward the hall.

In that moment, Lynnleigh didn’t understand why she felt so close and connected to Campbell. As strong as their bond had always been, it seemed to be growing even more so. Something she hadn’t thought possible.

He has to leave, she thought. He has to go.

Because if he doesn’t, I’m going to confess my feelings.

And it just might ruin everything.

Chapter Sixteen

The following day, Campbell wasn't sure what he felt.

His emotions were all over the map. Had he been too hard on Lynnleigh? It wasn't his place to discipline her. It wasn't like he was her Daddy.

Okay, that's not entirely accurate, he thought.

It feels a lot like I'm her Daddy. And that's the problem. I'm not. I've taken on a role I shouldn't. I'm overstepping.

Yet it felt so right. But deep down he knew it was wrong. Things wouldn't work between him and Lynnleigh. Would they? How do you go from being like family to being together?

And was he worrying for nothing? He spanked her. It wasn't as if they'd slept together. It hadn't been sexual. He'd reexamined his feelings all morning to make sure. No, he hadn't been feeling anything when he'd disciplined Lynnleigh other than concern over her unsafe actions. He'd acted out of a desire to teach her a lesson. He wouldn't be around to keep her safe. It was imperative she make good choices in his absence. For her own good.

But how would Mallory feel if she knew about this? If the shoe was on the other foot, wouldn't he want to know if some man had spanked Mallory? Wouldn't he have questions and lots of emotions?

I'd probably thank the guy. Mallory deserves a good spanking for that bratty attitude she can have.

Campbell smiled at the thought. He shook his head and tried hard to focus on the day at hand. He'd worry about all this later. He'd tell Mallory. He wasn't the type to keep secrets like that. It wasn't right. But he'd figure out the best way to go about it first. And, with her all the way back in New Hampshire, that conversation would have to wait. It was one best had in-person.

“Good morning,” he said as Little Lynnleigh sauntered into the kitchen.

And Little was right! She was decked out in a short, pink, baby doll dress and a matching diaper cover. Her hair was in pigtails. She looked adorable. His stomach muscles clinched tightly at the sight, a feeling of desire stirring deep within his core. An overwhelming urge to scoop her up and twirl her nearly overpowered him.

“Good morning,” she said.

“You’re clearly excited about being in Mountainville. Where did you get that dress?”

“Don’t worry. I didn’t leave without telling you and buy it this morning,” she said.

He rolled his eyes.

“I ordered it online and the store had it waiting here for me. I’ll go shopping to buy more later. I’m in Mountainville, so I might as well look the part.”

“Well, you nailed it,” he said. He raised his coffee mug, allowing the still curling steam to rise up and warm his face. “There’s coffee if you want any. Do Littles drink coffee?”

“Littles can drink whatever we want.”

“Like the booze last night?”

This time, it was Lynnleigh who rolled her eyes. “Some Littles stay in character, so to speak, when in Little Space. Like they might only drink juice or milk or something. Others have a hybrid thing going on. That’s what I’m doing now,” she said as she grabbed a pod, put it in the coffee maker on the counter, and then placed a mug beneath it. A moment later, the machine hissed to life. The aroma of the coffee filled the air, causing her to smile.

“I’m sorry if I overstepped last night,” he said.

She cast him a glance, revealing that there wasn’t even a hint of anger in her eyes. “I’m sorry I left without telling you. I know this has to be hard for you.”

“Letting go?”

She nodded.

He took a sip of coffee and then said, “It is. Your whole life, I’ve been looking out for you.”

“Aren’t you ready for a break?” she said.

“Hardly. It’s not my duty. It’s an honor. The way things are supposed to be.”

“And what happens when I find a Daddy. It will be his role then.”

The words stung a little, though he knew that had not been Lynnleigh’s intent. Was he feeling jealousy that another man would be taking over the role of her protector or was it something more? Something even deeper?

“Then I guess I’ll have to back off a little. But I’ll never stop completely. And this Daddy better treat you right! He doesn’t want to answer to me.”

She was smiling as she took her coffee in hand. She held onto it a moment, letting it warm her, not raising it to her lips yet.

“Are you sure you aren’t a Daddy?” she said.

The question nearly blew Campbell off his feet. He knew exactly why she was asking it. He couldn’t blame her, either. And no, he wasn’t sure. But he was lost as to how to respond. It was quite unclear even for him.

“That spanking you gave was exactly something a Daddy would do,” she said. She shot him a knowing glance. There was something playful in it, but her words were more than mere teasing.

He wasn’t sure how to respond. He was used to having the control in their relationship. Right now, though, it was evident who had the upper hand. And he didn’t like it.

“What are you going to do today?” he finally asked, ignoring her observation.

“It’s Halloween! I’m going to have as much fun as possible. I’m going to hangout with my new friends, eat candy, go to the haunted house, and then trick-or-treat later.” Her smile disappeared. “But I want to spend time with you. I know you leave tomorrow.”

“Ah, you hang out with your friends. You’ll be back in New Hampshire soon enough. We can hangout then. Besides, you’ve been with me your whole life,” he said.

He hoped the sadness he felt wasn’t evident in his voice.

“But we have to hangout some,” she insisted. “Pretty please?” She clasped her hands together, sticking her lips out in a display of pouting that melted his heart.

“Kid, you’re impossible to resist. You know that?”

She nodded, smiling wide.

“You just think you’re in charge,” she said. “But I’ve always got you right where I want you.”

He took another sip of coffee as he chuckled.

He couldn’t argue with her about that. Not one bit.

Chapter Seventeen

They went to lunch at a cool pizza place that had a giant arcade and singing animatronics.

The puppets wore giant diapers and Little outfits. And the Littles who sat in the dining room cheered in delight as each song ended.

“This town really has it all,” Campbell said. He reached for the piping hot pizza that sat in the center of the table. He put a slice on a plate and started to pass it across to Lynnleigh but stopped. “It’s too hot. Let’s wait a minute for it to cool.”

“I can eat it,” she protested.

“You’ll burn your tongue. Just give it a minute.” He blew on it. “You sure you’ll be okay on your own? Without me, you would have taken a big bite and scalded your mouth.”

“I’m a big girl who can take care of herself.”

“Uh-huh. How’s your diaper?”

She blushed. “Wet, actually.”

“You need to change it.”

“I will. After we eat.”

“No. Now. You’ll get a diaper rash. Kiddo, you need to take care of that or you’ll regret it later.”

“Because you’ll spank me?”

“No. Because of that rash.” He gave her a hard stare. “No pizza until you do.”

She groaned. “Fine. But it’s hard to do it here by myself.”

“Good thing I’m here.”

“But you can’t—”

“I saw your bottom last night when I popped it with that paddle. Come on, kiddo. Let’s go.”

“You can just tape it up,” she said, standing and grabbing the diaper bag they’d brought along.

“Oh, so you tell me what I can and can’t do now?”

“Campbell, this is embarrassing!”

“Okay, okay. All I care about is getting you dry. We’ll do it however you want.”

And that’s what they did. In one of the built-in changing stations, outside of the dining room and in the back of the restaurant, she discarded her old diaper, cleaned herself, and then laid a fresh one beneath her. She called to him when she was ready. He turned around, adjusted the diaper’s position slightly, and taped it up. A few minutes later, their hands washed, they were back at the table to find the pizza had cooled down.

“Now you can eat it,” he said after checking it.

She ate one slice and then pushed her plate away.

“You can’t be done,” he said. “One piece isn’t enough.”

“It is when you’re as fat as me.”

“Whoa there. Too bad we didn’t pack that bar of soap in the diaper bag.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You know I hate it when you talk like that about yourself. You need your mouth washed out.”

“Gee. I can’t wait until you’re back in New Hampshire. That way you’ll mind your own business.”

“You are my business.”

She smiled. “You know I didn’t mean it. I’ll miss you when you go.”

“I’ll miss you too, kiddo. But let’s not talk about it right now. Let’s just have fun. And that means you need to eat more pizza.”

“Yes, sir,” she said playfully, before giving him a crisp military salute.

He laughed. “That’s better.”

She rolled her eyes but was all smiles. Twenty minutes later, they were finished eating when Katie and her Daddy came up to the table.

“Hey!” Katie said.

“Hey!”

“I saw you from across the room but didn’t want to interrupt your lunch. Isn’t this place great? My Daddy takes me here once a week!”

“I love it,” Lynnleigh said.

The women hugged.

“Have you played the basketball game yet?” Katie asked.

“No. But it looks amazing.”

“Want to go with me?”

“Sure!” Lynnleigh looked across the table. Campbell nodded. “We’ll be back,” she said.

She left, holding hands with Katie, and giggling. Katie’s Daddy looked at the empty spot where Lynnleigh had just been and said, “You mind if I sit?”

“Not at all,” Campbell said.

He slid in the booth and then extended his hand across the table. “Bradley McAllister.”

“Campbell Fields.”

They shook hands.

“Your Little sure is a cutie,” Bradley said.

“Oh. She’s not mine.”

Bradley couldn’t hide his bewilderment.

“She’s just my best friend,” Campbell explained.

“Oh.”

It was evident Bradley was not convinced.

That’s okay, Campbell thought. Sometimes I’m not convinced, either.

“This town has it all,” Campbell said, eager to change the subject from the dynamics of his relationship with Little Lynnleigh.

“Yep. Including naughty Littles. I heard about that party they had last night. I knew Katie was going, but I didn’t know about everything that was taking place there. It got a tad wild. I heard your Little—uh, your friend—was there.”

“She sure was,” Campbell said. “Only I *didn’t know* she was going. I woke up, found her gone, and got scared.”

“Whoa. Not cool,” Bradley said. “These Littles can sure be trouble. I had to spank Katie this morning. I’m thinking about taking her to Dr. Mannix to get some solution for an enema. Figure that might teach her a lesson.”

Campbell smirked as he leaned in a bit. “You can do that?”

“Of course. These Littles need to know we call the shots. It’s our job. We’re trying to keep them safe.”

“Exactly!” Campbell said. “It’s for their own good. Someone has to look out for them.”

“Amen, brother. You’re among kindred spirits here. Hey, if you want, I’ll introduce you to some of the other guys later. Be happy to buy you a beer.”

“I’d love that,” Campbell said.

Maybe this town would be good for Lynnleigh. With guys like Bradley around, she’d be safe, he silently noted.

Of course, no one could look out for her the way he could.

He didn’t know what the future would hold, but he knew one thing.

Leaving tomorrow would sure be hard.

Chapter Eighteen

The excitement among the Littles was palpable.

They were gathered outside the community center, all in costumes, holding bags or plastic pumpkin buckets. The sun had gone down. The air was cool, but not so cold as to be unpleasant. Orange lights had been strung in the trees in the nearby park. Jack-o-lanterns were placed about, lights inside them flickering eerily. Someone, somewhere, had a fire going, and the smell of the burning wood and smoke swirled beneath Lynnleigh's nostrils, warming her soul.

It was autumn. It was Halloween night. It was perfect.

"Who wants to visit the haunted house before we go trick-or-treating?" Eli asked.

Everyone was on board. So, they walked deeper into town as one big group. They arrived at the haunted house to find a spooky looking structure on the south end of town, sitting in a large field. It had been built to look like a creepy mansion, a cross between the *Psycho* house and the Munsters' home.

Spooky sounds emitted from it—witch's laughter, maniacal cackling, along with screams and howls. There was already a line of people out front. There were even scare actors going up and down the line, trying to frighten people as they waited.

"Who are these monsters?" Lynnleigh asked.

"Just people who live in town. See Frankenstein's monster over there?" Eli said.

"Yeah."

"That's Mason. He's the town dentist. His wife is Candace. She co-owns the daycare with Aubrey."

"Yeah, they aren't scary anywhere else," Katie said. "But they sure do a good job here. This place gives me the creeps!"

"Are you sure you want to go in?" Lynnleigh asked.

"Are you kidding? I wouldn't miss it! It's so much fun."

Soon it was their turn to go through. Since there were so many of them together, they had to break up into smaller groups. Lynnleigh found herself going in with Eli, Katie, Stella, Harrison, and Stryker.

They twisted through the winding, creepy corridors and rooms. They encountered ghosts, zombies, vampires, and a giant bat that swooped down from the ceiling, causing them all to scream. A couple—including Lynnleigh—made use of their diapers thanks to that flying menace.

They were all screaming and laughing when they spilled out of the exit, twenty minutes later. They waited for the rest of the group and then went trick-or-treating together. When they approached Katie's house, Lynnleigh was surprised to find Campbell there, sitting on the porch, talking with Bradley and Dax.

"Hey," she said.

"Hey?" Campbell said. "Aren't you forgetting something." He made a show of drawing his arm back, keeping the candy he held at a distance.

"Trick-or-treat," she said.

"That's better," he said with a smile and wink. "Are you having fun?"

"Oh my gosh, so much fun! We did the haunted house earlier. It was amazing. So scary."

"I'm glad," he said.

Even in the faint light, she could see the affection in his eyes. Was there longing in them, too?

She sure felt a sense of longing. There was no question about that. As she watched Stella and Katie hug their Daddies, Lynnleigh couldn't help but wonder if she'd ever experience that.

What really got her, though, was that she wanted to experience it with Campbell. She'd known that for so long, she'd just tried hard to stuff those feelings deep down. It wouldn't work between them. There were a million reasons

why. First and foremost, he had a girlfriend. A super-hot girlfriend. But beyond that, there was just too much history between them for a romantic relationship to work. They were too close. Too much like family.

Maybe not, though, she thought. Maybe all that shared history would actually strengthen their relationship. Of course, there was still that little problem of Mallory.

She told herself to stop thinking like that. She should be happy for her best friend. He was with someone he liked. Good for the two of them. She'd find her Daddy soon. Hopefully.

"What's on your mind?" he asked.

"Nothing," she said, waving it off. "Just thinking of all the fun we're going to have. We still have a lot of houses to hit. Some of the businesses are passing out candy, too. Eli says the store is going all out."

Eli nodded. "We're talking full-size candy bars."

The Littles cheered.

"Well, you better get to it," Campbell said. He gave her a quick hug.

Oh, how she wished it would last longer. She wanted nothing more than for him to hold her that night and every other night. But she tucked those feelings away and said, "I hope you have fun with your new friends."

He laughed. "We're enjoying ourselves."

"You know that's right," Bradley said, taking another beer from a cooler that rested beside his chair. "Guy time. Us Daddies need a support group or something."

Dax laughed. So did Campbell. Lynnleigh waited for him to correct Bradley, stating he wasn't a Daddy, but it never came.

Don't read too much into it. It doesn't mean he is a Daddy. He's just enjoying his time with his new buddies.

She hugged him one more time and then rejoined her friends as they hurried away to the next yard. There was more

fun to be had and more candy to be gained. She would soak in every second.

But deep down, she knew tomorrow would hurt.

She'd have to say goodbye to Campbell.

Chapter Nineteen

Lynnleigh awoke on the first of November, feeling a mix of excitement and disappointment.

On one hand, she was in Mountainville. Already, she felt as if she'd made lifelong friends. Last night had been magical. Easily the best Halloween of her whole life!

On the other hand, she was saying goodbye to Campbell today.

It's not forever, she reminded herself. She was only in Mountainville for a month. Well, initially. If she met a Daddy or things went really well and she just decided to stay...she'd cross that bridge when she came to it.

A month without Campbell. She could do it. It was probably best for both of them. She relied so much on him. True, she never asked him to do stuff—he just took it upon himself. But she sure benefited from it all. And she loved it.

She loved him.

But did she love him in *that* way?

Her mind was reeling as she thought about it all, standing outside the rental house. Bradley sat in his pickup truck, the motor idling as he waited on Campbell.

"I could have driven you to the airport," Lynnleigh said.

"No you couldn't. Because I told you not to," Campbell said. "You don't know this area. The desert is a big place. What if you got lost on your way back to Mountainville?"

She rolled her eyes but smiled. "I'm a big girl."

"Sure. You think I'd let you roam around the desert by yourself? Not happening, kid."

"You're going to have to let go," she said. "You won't be around here to protect me."

"I know. But don't think you can get away with doing dangerous stuff. Bradley and Dax are going to look after you."

They'll let me know if you're doing anything you shouldn't be. So be safe. Or you'll answer to me."

"You'll be hundreds of miles away," she said with a smirk. "You can't spank me."

"You want to push it?" he said, arching an eyebrow but smiling slightly.

She gulped. "I'll be good. I promise."

"That's what I like to hear. Now give me a hug," he said, opening his arms.

They both lingered in the embrace before he finally said, "I need to catch that flight. You be good, kid. I'll call you later."

She gave him one last hug and watched him ride away, taking a piece of her heart with him.

The next few days passed by with Lynnleigh having fun, but still missing Campbell terribly. They talked every night, even if it was just for a few minutes. They texted some throughout the day, too. She was careful to mind her P's and Q's, remembering what he said about Dax and Bradley keeping an eye on her. She wasn't sure what they could do—if anything—if she got into trouble, but she didn't want to find out.

It was on a cool, cloudy, lazy afternoon when she was at the daycare with her friends that Stella said, "You miss him, huh?"

"Is it that obvious?" Lynnleigh said.

"You seem distracted. I figured he was the cause. And I get it. He's hot!"

"You can say that again. But he's just my friend."

"Do you want him to be more?" Stella put her hand on Lynnleigh's arm. "You can mourn the absence of a friend. It doesn't mean you want to be anything more. But, in this case, well...it kinda seems like he's your one. You know what I mean?"

Lynnleigh knew exactly what Stella meant. But she couldn't give into that. She had physical distance from Campbell. Now

she needed some mental distance, as well.

As if reading her mind, Katie chimed in. “If you want to distract yourself and forget about him, we might have the ticket. But I’ll warn you—you could get in trouble.”

“I’m interested,” Lynnleigh said with a devilish grin. “Besides, I don’t have a Daddy to spank me.” She giggled, but it was short lived.

“But I overheard my Daddy talking to Stella’s Daddy,” Katie said. “They’re watching you on behalf of Campbell. They promised they would.”

“Oh yeah.”

“Sorry to bring him up.”

“Don’t be. I’ll talk to him later. We call each other every night. I can’t forget about him long.”

“Well, you can for a while. If you want to help us. Here’s the plan.” Katie went on to tell Lynnleigh about how the Littles were trying to spy on their Christmas presents, and their past endeavors on that front.

“This sounds like a lot of fun,” Lynnleigh said.

“It’s all fun and games until you get an enema,” Stella said.

Lynnleigh could picture Campbell doing something that extreme. He said he wasn’t a Daddy, but he sure acted like one sometimes. Okay, *most* of the time. Enema discipline seemed like something he’d turn to. Yuck! But he was all the way back in New Hampshire. Surely Marshal Dax and Bradley wouldn’t do *that* on his behalf.

“No one blames you if you want out,” Katie told Stella. “Especially after what you went through.”

“You kidding? And let the Bigs win? Huh-uh. I’m in this,” Stella said.

“Well, Eli said there was some news. Y’all want to go talk to him and see what we can find out?” Katie said.

They all agreed. A minute later, they left the daycare and hurried to Stryker’s house. They arrived to find Eli, Harrison,

Thea, Colt, Libby, and Leah all standing around the large worktable in the center of Stryker's detached garage. All around them, on shelves and leaning against the walls, were projects and devices in various stages of development.

"Did we miss much?" Katie asked.

"Nope. We haven't started yet," Eli said.

Stryker grabbed a tablet from the table, tapped and swiped several times, and then turned it around for everyone to see. On the screen was a hi-def image of a boxy, brown delivery truck backed up to the rear of Nancy's store. "A new shipment came in yesterday. It appears as if the Bigs are still ordering through Nancy rather than directly. It makes sense. She has access to manufacturers and gets good deals. But it also allows the store to serve as a central hub for all Christmas gifts that come in. If you see here—" He swiped to reveal another image and then used two fingers to pinch it and zoom in. "This box has Flint Coburn's name on it."

"Who is that?" Lynnleigh asked.

Leah raised her hand. "My husband and Daddy," she said proudly.

"Ah. So this gift is for you."

"We believe so," Leah said, mischievous glee in her eyes. "And I'm going to find out what it is before Christmas morning."

The Littles cheered and voiced their support.

"If you look at this pic," Stryker said, swiping to another, "it's intended for Penny. She's at work right now but is on board with us trying to see what it is. She'll help any way she can."

"She works for the city," Katie said to Lynnleigh. "One of the attorneys."

"So what's the plan?" Stella said.

"Stella, maybe you need to sit this one out," Eli suggested. "There's no shame in that. Especially after what happened last time."

Everyone nodded and voiced their sympathy and support.

“Thank you, guys, but I’m in this,” Stella said. “We’re a team. Always.”

“I know, and we all appreciate that, but what if you took a less central role?” Eli said. “Still involved, just more behind the scenes?”

“I guess I could do that,” Stella said. “But you know me. I need to be where the action is.”

“It’s your call,” Eli said.

“Do we have an idea of what our plan of attack is?” Katie asked.

“Not yet,” Eli said. “That’s what we need to do now. Who’s in?”

They all voiced their agreement.

Lynnleigh couldn’t suppress her smile. This was just like she’d dreamed. She was in Mountainville, getting into mischief with other Littles. The only thing that would make it better was if she had a Daddy to go home to.

A Daddy that’s not Campbell, she pleaded silently to herself.

A strong, handsome Daddy who would make you forget you kinda, sorta are in love with your best friend. That kind of Daddy!

Despite how loud her mind was screaming at her, trying to convince her, it did little to calm the aching yearning in her soul.

Chapter Twenty

New Hampshire

It had been over a week since Campbell had left Lynnleigh in Mountainville.

Alone.

He'd heard from Dax and Bradley several times. She was doing well. Staying out of trouble and not endangering herself in any way. But he knew those guys couldn't look after her every second of the day. Besides, they had their own Littles to worry about. What if Lynnleigh was doing something they weren't aware of?

All of this was on his mind as he sat across from Mallory at her favorite café. She had a grilled chicken salad before her. Campbell had a sandwich. Or what that place called a sandwich. The bread was listed on the menu as "delicious grain bread featuring flax seed." He didn't really know what flax seed was. But whoever wrote the menu clearly defined "delicious" differently than he did. Mallory loved this place, though, so he'd come with her.

Trying to forget all about Lynnleigh for a few moments, he put on a smile and said, "Thanksgiving is less than two weeks away."

"Oh. Yeah. About that. I meant to tell you," she said. "Me and some of the crew at the gym were thinking of doing a run that day. Sort of an anti-Thanksgiving."

"What?"

"For the gym's social media," she explained. "It's typically a day when people overeat. They make themselves miserable. So we thought of doing like a protest thing. We're going to have smoothies and then go on our own half-marathon at the park and then through town. Anyone who wants to join us can. We might give out free t-shirts and stuff."

"Oh," was all he managed to say. He chewed on that info for a minute, along with the "delicious" flax seed bread.

Finally, he said, “But I thought we were going to my folks’. I mean, I’d be happy to go to your parents’, but they don’t really do anything for the holidays.”

“Cam, you know that really isn’t my thing. I don’t want to sit there and eat pie.”

“You don’t have to eat pie,” he said. “There’s turkey. It’s healthy. And a little pie wouldn’t hurt you every now and then. Right?”

She laughed. “I eat too much and I’ll start looking like Lynnleigh.” She gasped, realizing what she’d said, and then quickly took a drink of water. After she choked it down, she cleared her throat and said, “Hey, I didn’t mean anything by —”

“Why would you say something like that?” he said.

“Cam, I said I didn’t mean anything by it.”

“But I think you did.”

She snorted and spread her hands. “What do you want me to say? I know she’s your best friend, but I’m just saying she and I have different goals. It’s no big deal and it’s okay.”

“It is okay to have different goals,” he said. “But it’s not okay to make fun of her.”

“I wasn’t making fun of her. I was just saying I don’t want to look like her. I fight hard to have this body. Okay? I’m not going to throw it away on some stupid holiday that doesn’t mean anything.”

Campbell pushed his plate away and stood.

“Where are you going?” she said, the irritation in her voice obvious.

“I need some space.”

“From your girlfriend?”

He thought for a minute. “Yeah.”

She stood and put her palms on the table, leaning in and appraising him with hard eyes. “How much space?”

“I honestly don’t know.”

“So me making a comment about *her* caused this. Maybe you need to think about your priorities.”

“Maybe I do.”

A heavy silence hung between them for a moment.

“I’ll call you,” he said, leaving the café.

On his way out, the lady at the counter gave him a hard stare, clearly taking Mallory’s side.

“Your bread is disgusting, by the way,” he said as he walked by.

Both women were completely incensed as he left them behind.

Campbell hit the ground running hard.

He’d dropped by his place, changed into shorts and a t-shirt, and set out for a jog. The air was outright cold, but the briskness felt good on his legs and face, clearing his mind and allowing him to sort through all the thoughts that swirled about his brain.

Ironic, he thought, since the talk of running was what had started that little spat back at the café.

He knew that wasn’t all, though. Things had been brewing between him and Mallory for a while. It wasn’t that they fought all the time. Far from it. That incident earlier in the evening had been the first real argument they’d had in a long while. No, their differences stemmed from just that: they were different. Very different. Their goals didn’t line up. Their hopes and dreams didn’t quite match.

And then there was the Lynnleigh issue.

He didn’t appreciate what Mallory had said. He wouldn’t tolerate anyone making fun of Lynnleigh.

Yet he understood that she was an issue in the relationship that needed to be addressed. He had to give Mallory credit, too

—she'd put up with him spending a lot of time and attention on another woman. Far more than most women would.

It wasn't fair.

If the relationship—or any relationship—was going to survive and thrive, he needed to set healthy boundaries with Lynnleigh. But what did those boundaries entail? There were multiple possibilities.

He could continue the relationship with Mallory. If he did that, he would need to talk with her and figure out what they were both comfortable with when it came to Lynnleigh being a part of his life. He would need to discuss it with Lynnleigh, too.

But he wasn't sure that was the option that was best for any of them. Were he and Mallory even good for one another? He understood if she was apprehensive about his closeness to Lynnleigh. That was reasonable. What he couldn't understand was her attitude. She'd made several comments about Lynnleigh that went beyond jealousy. He suspected Mallory looked down her nose at her. That he couldn't abide by.

But if he broke up with Mallory, there were still options. It wasn't exactly cut and dry as to what life would look like.

Should he be with Lynnleigh? Of course, to do so, she would have to feel the same way about him that he felt—or possibly felt—about her. And, honestly, he wasn't sure how he felt. He hadn't named it. But would it even work between them? Could it? And is that what he wanted? What she wanted?

He could always date someone else. Just because Mallory wasn't the one for him didn't automatically mean Lynnleigh was. Perhaps he should spend some time being single. Finding himself and all that.

He continued to pound the pavement with his feet. Things were so complicated now. Perhaps they'd always been, and he'd chosen to ignore it. Whatever the case, he couldn't ignore it any longer. He had decisions to make. He had a life to live.

He had to follow his heart.

Chapter Twenty-One

The days passed in Mountainville with the Littles trying desperately to concoct a plan that would get them closer to the incoming Christmas presents.

One cool, crisp November day found them in the ball pit, discussing the dire situation.

“More are coming in all the time,” Stryker said. “My drones picked up the arrival of four yesterday. And every day we don’t gain access to them, the Bigs win!”

“They’re playing hardball this time around,” Eli said. “Not only did Nancy take my keys to the store away, but I was able to find out that inside the storeroom, the packages are secured in a closet that is also locked. So that means we have to get into the store, into the back room, and then into that closet. That’s three layers we have to somehow get through.”

“It gets even worse,” Katie chimed in. “I overheard my Daddy talking to some of the other Bigs. It sounds like school is going to start in December. Maybe even before. A new teacher is arriving in town any day now.”

“What?” Stella said, nearly shouting. She took a deep breath, exhaled, and then spoke in a lower tone when she said, “They could at least wait until after the Holidays. This sucks!”

Everyone agreed.

“Well,” Eli said, “if we’re going to have to go to school anyway then we might as well live it up and get into trouble in the meantime. We’re going to find a way to peek at these presents!”

The others cheered.

Harrison had been contemplating it all, thinking of a way. Finally, he said, “We can’t get to them once they’re in Nancy’s shop. So what if we got to them before they ever reached Mountainville?”

“We’re listening,” Eli said.

“Well, the principle is the same we used in the store a few weeks back when Katie and Stella got into that glitter fight. We cause a distraction on the roadway. Obviously, nothing dangerous. Just something that would cause the delivery driver to pull over for a few minutes. The plan would take some effort. We’d have to distract the driver with something long enough to give some of us time to sneak into the back of the truck, find the merchandise, and scope it out. It’s risky, but it might be our only way.”

“Hmm. I like it,” Eli said.

“Me, too,” Stella said. “And the best part is it will take place outside of town. Sure, we could still get in trouble if we get caught, but that’s a big if. With no Bigs around, how will they find out?”

“Well, the driver could mention something,” Thea Simpson said. “When he’s dropping off the goods and talking to Nancy. What if he describes us?”

“Remember how you wore that disguise when you first came to town?” Stryker said.

“Yeah.”

“Let’s build off that. With a little Hollywood magic, I can make us all unrecognizable. Besides, we’ll make this look legit. I have more than enough props and special effects to pull this off. What do you all say?”

Everyone, including Lynnleigh, agreed.

The Bigs would not win this year. The Littles would reign victorious.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The bell above the ice cream shop's door jingled as Lynnleigh pushed it open. Warmly lit against the early November evening, it was just the spot to indulge in a chilly dessert despite the cold air outside.

“Lynnleigh, why are we getting ice cream? It's already freezing!” Stella remarked, rubbing her hands together for warmth. “It can get cold out here, but this is a bit colder than average, I think! The high was only 50 today and I bet it's ten degrees cooler now.”

“I guess compared to New Hampshire, this isn't that bad,” Lynnleigh said. “Besides, there's never a bad time for ice cream.”

“Truth!” Thea said.

The four women—Lynnleigh, Stella, Katie, and Thea—walked to a cozy table in the corner. With its gingham tablecloth and pastel-colored chairs, it looked straight out of a scene from a 1950s diner. To complete the atmosphere, Brook Benton was singing “It's Just a Matter of Time”, the sounds emitting from a yellow, pink, and blue neon infused jukebox leaning against the back wall.

As Lynnleigh was sliding into the booth, she caught a glance of a tall, muscular man at the counter. Even without seeing his face, there was something strikingly handsome about the broadness of his shoulders and the way he carried himself with a confident yet humble air. He reminded her a bit of Campbell. She smiled but quickly tried to hide it.

Katie nudged Lynnleigh, her voice barely above a whisper, “So you see Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome over there?”

Lynnleigh was still struggling hard against that grin, but it was a losing battle. Her cheeks glowed a warm red. Following Katie's gaze, Lynnleigh's eyes met those of the man. He seemed equally as interested in her presence as she was in his. Their gazes locked momentarily, and she felt that warmth still

growing in her cheeks. He was, without a doubt, very attractive.

“Why don’t you go over and say hello?” Thea teased, wiggling her eyebrows.

Stella giggled, “I second that idea.”

“Maybe he’s just what you need to help you forget about Campbell,” Katie suggested.

Lynnleigh looked away from him, trying to appear as casual as possible. “I do need to go up there and order our ice cream.”

“Uh-huh,” Thea said, still beaming. “We’ll hang back. You’ve got this.”

“Who is he?” Lynnleigh said, her tone low.

“Never seen him before,” Stella said.

“Me, neither,” Katie said. “Only one way to find out, though. Go chat him up.”

The other women jerked their heads toward him, encouraging Lynnleigh to go.

She shifted in her seat, suddenly very aware of the thick diaper she wore. That wasn’t a big deal in that town. Why be self-conscious about it? The guy at the counter was probably a Daddy. She certainly wasn’t picking up Little vibes from him.

She really wanted to talk to him. Well, part of her did, at least. She wasn’t the type to just approach random guys, though. She’d never had such confidence. But maybe it was because she missed the familiar touch of Campbell’s hand or the warmth of his embrace, or maybe it was because she wanted to find a Daddy so badly, that, in the moment, she was practically compelled by some unseen force to do something very out of character.

“How’s my makeup?” she whispered.

“On point,” Katie said.

“Anything between my teeth?”

“Nothing,” Thea said.

“You’ve got this,” Stella added.

Lynnleigh nodded and then slid from the booth. She exhaled before sauntering over to the counter, casually standing next to the man. “Chilly day for ice cream, isn’t it?”

Gosh, she felt ridiculous. She didn’t have anything better to say than that? It sounded so freaking cheesy!

He looked down, flashing a radiant smile that showcased a charming set of dimples. “I always thought that was the best kind of day for it.” He took a bite from the cup of chocolate ice cream he held.

Okay, so he’s fine with cheesy, she thought.

She felt a tingle, a fluttering in her stomach. It was different from what she felt with Campbell—not nearly as strong—but it was something. “I’m Lynnleigh.”

“Adam,” he replied, extending a hand which she took, noticing how firm and warm his grip was.

At the table, Stella whispered, “She’s going for it! This is happening!”

Katie smirked, “I think she’s trying to move on from Campbell.” Her heart ached a bit for her friend. She knew how deep Lynnleigh’s feelings for Campbell ran. But maybe this would truly help her move on.

“Or maybe she’s just having a little fun,” Thea suggested. “I mean, if I didn’t have a Daddy, he’d be the type I’d flirt with.”

They all quietly giggled and agreed.

Back at the counter, Adam was clearly intrigued. “Have you been around town long?”

“I’ve been here for a while. Couple of weeks. How about you?” Lynnleigh replied.

“Just got here yesterday.”

“It’s a great town.”

“Seems to be. The perfect spot for a Daddy.”

More excitement swirled in her core. Okay, so he's confirmed he is in fact a Daddy, she thought. That's a point in his favor.

"I know I'm being forward, but would you like to join me for dinner sometime?" Adam asked, his voice gentle yet certain.

Okay, so he's asking me out, she thought. That's another point in his favor.

Yet Lynnleigh hesitated for a moment. Thoughts of Campbell rushed through her mind—their last conversation, the way he always looked into her eyes, the times he had held her close, even if they were just hugs. But he wasn't here, and Adam was. Could she really continue to put her life on hold for a love that might never be?

She took a deep breath. "I'd like that."

Adam smiled, clearly pleased. "How about tomorrow evening?"

"Sounds perfect," Lynnleigh replied, her heart racing.

They exchanged information and then Lynnleigh ordered ice cream for her and her friends.

"I hope you have a good evening, Little Miss Lynnleigh," Adam said, his voice rich and deep.

"You too," she said.

He left, allowing Lynnleigh to release the giggle she'd been pinning up. Returning to her table, the other women bombarded her with questions. "You've got a date with that hottie?" Thea asked. "Look at you go!" They high-fived.

Lynnleigh kept giggling, her mind a whirlwind of emotions: excitement, guilt, longing, and a strange sense of freedom she hadn't felt in a long time. She'd always been so consumed with Campbell—even though they were "just friends"—that she'd never really dated much before. Of course, some of that had been her poor self-image holding her back. Right now, though, she felt so emboldened and excited. But there was also

that guilt. She reminded herself she wasn't cheating on Campbell. They weren't actually together.

Later, as the women left the shop, the cold November air wrapping around them, Katie pulled Lynnleigh into a hug. "Are you okay?"

Lynnleigh blinked back tears. "I miss him, Katie. Really bad."

Katie nodded. "But he's not here. You need to live your life. Or, you could always call him and confess your true feelings." She smirked.

"No way!" Lynnleigh said.

Katie nodded and held her hand as they walked.

While the girls made their way home, Lynnleigh's thoughts wandered to Campbell. But for the first time in a long while, they were also filled with thoughts of someone else.

She was also dreaming of Adam and the possibility of new beginnings.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The following day, Lynnleigh was a bundle of nerves.

She was counting down until her date with Adam, but it wasn't all excitement she was feeling. That guilt she'd experienced yesterday still plagued her. She hadn't even told Campbell about the date. Was that wrong?

She was at the town's daycare with Katie, Stella, Thea, Harrison, Stryker, and Eli. A few others had come in and out, playing for a bit and then moving onto other things. There were quite a few in on the plan to discover the Christmas presents, and excitement among the Littles was growing.

"I should tell him," she opined aloud. "We're best friends. We share everything."

"What would bring you the most peace?" Stella asked.

"For him to be here with me, confessing his true love as I confessed mine," she admitted. "Gosh, it feels so good to say that out loud! Do you know how many years I've held that inside?"

Katie squeezed her hand. "Then maybe that's what you should do. I mean, I know he's not here and all, but you can still call him. Maybe he's waiting on you to make the first move."

"Maybe. But he's so bold and confident. A little cocky," Lynnleigh said with a giggle. "I can't imagine he's intimidated by anything. Besides, he's with someone else. I don't want to be a homewrecker."

"They aren't married," Stella pointed out. "They don't even live together."

"True. But she's super hot. Skinny and tone. I mean, she's a personal trainer."

"And you're beautiful," Thea said. "Don't sell yourself short." She grinned and arched an eyebrow. "Adam sure liked what he saw."

They giggled.

The conversation was interrupted when Eli approached, saying, "I heard Nancy on the phone. She's getting a shipment tomorrow! This is going down quickly."

Other Littles began to gather around as Eli gave the details. An air of excitement hung over them. Mischief was afoot, just the way those naughty cuties liked it.

Lynnleigh looked in the mirror one more time.

She was sporting a pink and white gingham baby doll dress, a frilly diaper cover, and pink shoes. Her hair was in pigtails. It seemed strange going on a date in Little clothes.

It actually seemed strange going on a date at all.

But here she was. She turned to Stella and Katie. "You sure this is okay?"

"You look amazing!" Katie said.

"Super cute," Stella said.

They were in Lynnleigh's nursery, having gathered there to help her ready for the evening. Thea and Leah had stopped by, but they had to leave to help Eli and the guys prep for tomorrow's big scheme.

Lynnleigh's stomach flipped a nervous somersault. She drew a deep breath, held it in her lungs, and then slowly released it. She brought her hand up a few inches away from her face and studied it. Sure enough, she was trembling slightly.

"It's going to be okay," Katie said. "You're going to have a blast."

"Should I at least call and tell Campbell? He'd want to know. Right?"

Stella shrugged. "He sounds pretty protective. He'd probably try to talk you out of going."

"True. I've been hearing his voice in my head all night, telling me that I don't even know Adam and that it's not safe to go out alone with him." She sighed. "But Mountainville

screens everyone. And we won't really be alone. I mean, we're going to the pizza place and arcade. The place Campbell took me before..." She trailed off and groaned.

Stella and Katie exchanged sympathetic glances with one another, but before anyone could speak again, the doorbell rang.

"He's like ten minutes early!" Lynnleigh said, now frantic. "Oh crap!"

"Everything will be alright," Stella said. "You're going to have fun. Remember, this is just a date. It doesn't mean you're marrying Adam. There's literally no pressure here."

"She's right," Katie said, the two women keeping pace with Lynnleigh as she hurried through the house, toward the front door. "And there's no reason to feel guilty. You're not cheating on Campbell. He has a girlfriend. Remember?"

"I know," Lynnleigh said. "Why am I so freaking conflicted about all this? I should be excited! I came here to make friends and find a Daddy. I've done half that. Maybe this date is my first step in doing the other half."

Katie and Stella hung back as she put her hand on the doorknob. She exhaled sharply one last time, steadied her nerves, and then pulled it open.

She gasped, blinked, and waited for her mind to stop playing tricks on her. But it didn't. The tall, handsome man before her never morphed into Adam.

"Campbell!" she cried.

"Oh snap!" Katie said.

"Whoops," Stella said.

Lynnleigh nearly passed out.

Chapter Twenty-Four

“Surprise, kiddo,” Campbell said, wearing a grin.

“It sure is a surprise,” Lynnleigh said. It took her another few seconds before she could speak again. “What are you doing here?”

“Well, I was missing you. And with Thanksgiving coming up, I thought it would be nice to spend the holiday together. What do you think?”

Lynnleigh’s heart raced, her throat tightened, as a nearly overwhelming flood of emotions swirled within her. How was this happening? Here she was, in her Little clothes, ready for a date with another man, and Campbell, her best friend and long-held secret love, was standing on her doorstep. Unannounced. A total surprise.

One hell of a giant freaking surprise.

“That’s really sweet of you,” she finally managed to say, her voice shaky. “I’ve missed you too.”

She hugged him, but it was tense and not full of the usual warmth their embraces were.

Behind her, she heard Katie whisper to Stella, “So awkward.” The tension in the room was thick.

Campbell, always observant, took in Lynnleigh’s appearance and the atmosphere in the room. “Are you heading out?” he asked, nodding toward her outfit.

“Heading out? Like on a date?” she said, her voice cracking a bit.

“I didn’t say a date,” he said with a chuckle. “Did I interrupt a girls’ night or—”

“You ready, cutie?” a man’s voice said.

A moment later, Adam appeared, stepping up onto the porch.

Campbell turned, his eyes flicking over to the newcomer, and Lynnleigh felt the air grow even heavier. She wished she

could just disappear, or at least rewind time to a simpler moment. Like when she'd accepted Adam's offer. Of course, she had no way of knowing Campbell would show up unannounced. But here they were. It felt surreal—being caught between two men—one she'd loved for years and another she was hoping would make her forget that love.

“Hey, Adam. So, this is Campbell. My best friend from New Hampshire.” She gulped and then quickly added, “He's more like a brother, really. He's like my brother. Sorta like we're related. We grew up together.” She laughed uneasily. “Campbell, this is Adam.” Her voice was barely above a whisper now.

The two men sized each other up. Campbell's grin remained, but there was a guarded look in his eyes. Adam was all smiles and appeared easygoing and not in the least bit bothered. He offered his hand. “Nice to meet you.”

Campbell took it, the handshake firm but brief. “Likewise.”

The silence that followed was palpable. Katie and Stella exchanged more glances, trying to figure out how to diffuse the tension. There wasn't much they could do. This was getting rather interesting.

“I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt your plans this evening,” Campbell said. “I guess that's one of the risks of a surprise drop-in.”

“Hey, you traveled a long way to be here,” Adam said. “We could reschedule.”

“Thank you,” Campbell said. “That would be great.”

“No!” Lynnleigh said. “Campbell, you mentioned being here through Thanksgiving. So we have plenty of time.”

Adam shrugged. “I'm good with whatever. I really don't want to interrupt.”

His gaze never left Campbell as he spoke. Campbell returned the stare. It wasn't aggressive, but the mood was certainly not overly friendly.

“Lynnleigh, could I talk to you for a second. Maybe in the kitchen,” Campbell said.

“Sure,” she said. She looked at Adam. “Be right back.” She smiled and then hurried off, following her newly-arrived best friend.

Once they were in the other room, out of earshot of the others, Campbell said, “How well do you know this man?”

“Not well,” she admitted. “Just met him yesterday and—”

“You’re going out alone with someone you just met yesterday?” he said.

“That’s how people get to know each other sometimes. They go on dates,” she said.

“But he could be some creepy stalker just looking for his next victim,” he countered.

“He had to pass a background check to get into Mountainville. Same as you and me,” she countered. “Everyone does.”

“Well, maybe there’s nothing on his record yet. Every stalker has to start somewhere,” Campbell said.

She rolled her eyes. “Look, I’m glad you’re here. Seriously, you don’t know how happy this makes me. I’ve missed you so bad.” She hugged him once again and felt some of the tension drain from his body. And her own. “But I need to go with Adam. It would be rude to cancel. Besides, maybe this will be my one. You know, like you have Mallory. Maybe he’s my Mallory.” She smiled warmly, looking up at him as she said it.

“Yeah. Me and Mallory broke up.”

“Oh!”

He nodded. “Lot to catch up on.”

Inside, Lynnleigh was reeling. So the guy she secretly loved and dreamed of being her Daddy was now single and in town for over a week?

And she had a date with another man?

Great timing.

“Campbell, I’m so sorry. You okay?”

“I’m good. Trust me. It was my decision.”

Holy cow! she thought. What was going on here?

“You sure? Do you need me to stay and talk?” she said.

He shook his head. “Nah. You’re not leaving town with this guy, are you?”

“Just going to the pizza place.”

“Good. Then I’ll be around if you need me. And watch yourself, kid. You know some guys only want one thing and he sure as hell isn’t getting it from you. Go on. Have fun. Just be extra careful. And call if he even hints he might step out of line.”

She smiled, kissed him on the cheek, and then hurried toward the door. She stopped and cast a glance over her shoulder. “Let’s talk when I get back. You staying here?”

“Do you mind?”

“Of course not.”

He nodded. So did she.

She left him behind to go meet Adam once again at the door. “Sorry about that. You ready?”

“I am if you’re sure you still want to go,” the man said in an affable tone.

“I can’t wait,” she said.

Stella and Katie waved goodbye. Lynnleigh shot them a look that said, “What in the world is happening?” but didn’t say anything aloud.

What a night this is shaping up to be, she thought to herself.

She’d been thrown for a loop. But one thing was clear—she had some thinking to do.

The town of Mountainville was full of surprises, and Lynnleigh was at the center of them.

Chapter Twenty-Five

The arcade lights bathed the room in a kaleidoscope of colors. Amidst the cacophony of sound, Lynnleigh tried to focus on the evening with Adam. But it seemed as if every game they played, every laugh they shared, was overshadowed by the looming presence of Campbell back at her rental house.

“You’re pretty good at skee-ball,” Adam said.

“Thanks!” she said, grabbing the tickets that jetted out of the machine. “I play a lot back home. Of course, the arcade I go to isn’t anything like this.”

“Yeah. This town is something, huh?”

“I love it here! Where are you from originally?”

“New Mexico,” he said. “Santa Fe. For now, at least. I was born in Phoenix. Work took me to Santa Fe.”

“What line of work are you in?” she asked as they meandered to a game where they’d throw balls at clown faces, trying to see how many they could knock down in thirty seconds.

“Real estate,” he said proudly. “And Santa Fe is a great market. Phoenix is, too. That city is growing all the time. But my speciality is luxury vacation properties.”

The game began, and they both tossed balls at the smiling, plastic clown heads. But her mind drifted as she thought of the evening so far.

Adam was indeed charming. Each time she’d lost a game, he would gently tease her and then wrap an arm around her shoulder, comforting her. His presence felt safe, and he made her laugh. She remembered why she had agreed to this date in the first place. He had a quality that drew her in and made her feel cared for. Even barely knowing him, she could sense that much about him. The paternal side of him was evident, too. It wasn’t just about the games; it was the way he guided her, looked out for her, and made sure she was having fun. He was a Daddy, through and through.

But was he *her* Daddy?

Despite the fun she was having, her thoughts kept drifting to Campbell. The warmth in his eyes when he saw her earlier, the concern in his voice, and the revelation of his breakup with Mallory played on her mind like a constant hum.

“You okay?” Adam asked.

Lynnleigh blinked, realizing she’d been lost in thought. “All good. Sorry. Just thinking about some stuff.”

Adam arched an eyebrow. “Campbell?”

She hesitated, then nodded. “Yeah. He just...surprised me... earlier. I wasn’t expecting to see him. I had no idea he was coming.”

Adam led her to a quieter corner, away from the dazzling games and raucous laughter of the other Littles and Bigs. “Lynnleigh, I know you two have a history. You both care about it each other a great deal. It’s obvious. I don’t want to come between you.”

She nodded. “I appreciate that, Adam. And I’m sorry if I seem distracted. It’s just, well, like I said, Campbell showing up was unexpected.”

He smiled, “Life often throws us curveballs, doesn’t it? But that’s the fun part. Figuring them out and navigating through the highs and lows.”

Lynnleigh looked into his eyes, seeing genuine warmth and understanding. “I guess you’re right.”

“Do you want to go home and see him? No hard feelings. Seriously,” he said.

She smiled and hugged him. “No. But thank you. Right now, I want us to have some more fun.”

“You read my mind,” he said.

They spent the next hour playing more games, sharing slices of pizza, and getting to know each other better. He’d been married before, but after the relationship ended a year ago, he decided it was time to find a Little.

He asked her questions. He wanted to know about her friendship with Campbell and what had led her to Mountainville. She shared a lot, too, realizing just how easy he was to talk with.

As the night drew to a close, Adam escorted her home. Standing outside her door, he said, “I had a great time tonight, Lynnleigh. And I’d love to see you again.”

Her body tensed. On the other side of that door, probably sitting in the living room, waiting up to make sure she arrived home safely, was Campbell.

He’s probably hiding somewhere behind a bush or up in a tree, spying on us, she thought with a sly smile. That would be more like him.

“I’d enjoy seeing you, too,” she said.

He nodded, a hint of a smile playing on his lips. “No pressure.”

Gosh, could he be any nicer? she wondered. He’s perfect!

Except he isn’t Campbell. But should that matter?

They exchanged goodbyes. For a moment, she thought he was going to kiss her, but he just gave her a friendly wave and then strolled off the porch and down the paved walkway. She watched him leave, feeling a mix of emotions—gratitude for Adam’s understanding, anxiety about her feelings for Campbell, and confusion about what to do next. But one thing was clear: Mountainville was turning out to be a roller-coaster ride, and Lynnleigh was strapped in, ready for wherever the journey would take her next.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Campbell was trying to appear casual when Lynnleigh came inside, but she knew him too well to buy the act.

He was on the couch, the lamp on the end table beside him on, reading the latest thriller from Gregg Hurwitz.

“How’s the book?” she asked. She kicked out of her shoes and plopped down into the chair, putting her feet up on the ottoman.

“Great. I think Orphan X is going to defeat the bad guys.”

She laughed. “Doesn’t he always?”

“You’ve never read these books.”

“But I’ve heard you talk about them. They’re not your favorite but they’re close.”

He put his bookmark in, closed the book, and said, “What’s my favorite?”

“Is this a quiz.”

“Yep. Best friends quiz.”

“The Elvis Cole series by Robert Crais. What’s my favorite?”

“Easy. You read a lot of Daddy Dom books.”

She laughed. “True. Okay, what’s my favorite besides those?”

“Janet Evanovich. Stephanie Plum.”

“Yep. Those were softball questions. Hmm.” She tapped her chin. “What’s my favorite meal.”

“That’s even easier! Clam chowder. At least in the winter,” he said. “What’s mine?”

“Steak, but you rarely have it because Mallory gets all weird about red meat.” She winced. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have brought her up.”

“I don’t mind,” he said. “And you’re right. The red meat thing should have been a red flag.”

A few seconds of silence ticked off the clock. “Do you want to talk about it?” she finally said.

“I like steak. I’m glad I can eat more of it now.”

She laughed loudly. “Not talk about steak, silly. Talk about her. What happened.”

He was grinning. “Just playing around, kiddo.”

“I know. But do you want to discuss it or drop it?”

“I just realized we were all wrong for each other. We have different values and want different things.”

“What made you realize that?”

“Would you believe it was Thanksgiving? Sort of. She wanted to do some run on Thanksgiving and I wanted to do the traditional turkey and all that.” He shrugged. “That wasn’t all. But it got me thinking even more about stuff that was already on my mind. This was brewing for a while.”

“How come you didn’t tell me?”

“I didn’t want to bother you. You were so excited about Mountainville and I didn’t want to ruin your trip.”

“Campbell?”

“Yeah?”

“Am I part of why you and Mallory broke up? Did I get between you two?”

Campbell opened his mouth but paused, reflecting a moment before saying, “She never told me not to spend time with you. She never even said it bothered her. But I realized that it probably wasn’t fair. I needed to either set boundaries in our relationship or end things with her.” He smiled warmly. “I’m here. With you.”

The words hit Lynnleigh like a ton of bricks. She choked down the lump in her throat and worked hard to control her breathing. What did he mean by that statement? Was he

implying what she thought he might be? Or was he still talking about their friendship?

Suddenly, she was very tired. Her brain hurt. She stood and said, "I need to get some sleep. Want to pick this up in the morning. Over breakfast?"

"Sounds good to me," he said. "Goodnight, kid."

"Goodnight."

She started to leave the room but stopped.

"Campbell?"

"Yes?"

"I'm glad you're here."

"Me, too, kid. Me, too."

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Lynnleigh awoke the following morning with just as many questions floating around her brain as she'd had before going to sleep the night before.

Plus, she was still thinking about Adam. That date had been amazing. It was also a dream come true. She'd gone to Mountainville hoping to meet a Daddy. True, there was no indication Adam was *the* one—even if Campbell wasn't in the picture. It was just one date. Nothing earth shattering. But Campbell's sudden appearance certainly complicated things.

Ironically, it was Adam's words from last night that put her at ease. Life was full of curveballs. Part of the adventure was choosing how you handled them and which path you would take. Why not enjoy the ride?

Plus, that day was going to see some pretty serious mischief by the Littles. Just the thought made her giggle with excitement.

She got out of bed and scurried across the hall to Campbell's room. Maybe they could hangout before it was time to meet up with Katie and the others. Besides, they already had plans for breakfast.

"Hey, you up?" she said, pushing his door open and stepping inside. "Whoa!"

Campbell stood there, his body lean, hard, taut with rippling muscles.

"You don't have any clothes on!" she said.

He laughed. "Well, I did just get out of the shower. Shouldn't you have knocked?"

Embarrassment washed over her. She knew she should turn and leave—or at least avert her eyes—but it was impossible to move. She couldn't so much as blink.

She'd seen him naked before. Never intentionally, of course. And each time she was just as shocked as she was now. His pole was absolutely massive!

He was grinning as he stepped closer. “Lynnleigh.”

She giggled. Finally, she said, “I’m sorry. I should, uh, go.”

She turned around and awkwardly dashed from the room. She was almost to her room when she collided with the doorframe. Bouncing off it, she went down hard on her butt. Thankfully, the padding of her diaper kept any pain at bay.

“Are you okay?” she heard Campbell say.

He appeared a minute later, this time with a towel draped around his waist.

“Yeah. I’m f-fine.”

He knelt down, scooped her into his powerful arms, and carried her into her bedroom. “You sure? Did you hit your head, little girl?”

“Not really. More my chest.”

“And does it hurt?”

“No.”

“But you seem dazed.”

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

She gulped. “Uh, because, you know...” She started giggling, burying her head in his chest.

He chuckled as he gently deposited her atop the bed.

“Can I touch it?” she said. She gasped once more. “Oh my gosh!” She grabbed a pillow, covered her face, and fell back.

Could this be any more humiliating? She hadn’t meant to say that aloud. The words had just sort of slipped out.

“Lynnleigh,” Campbell said softly.

It took her a few seconds, but she finally removed the pillow from her face and looked up at Campbell. The towel was gone now. A knowing look shaded his dark eyes. A certain tension swirled between them.

Is this really happening? she wondered. She'd had dreams like this so often that it was now hard to distinguish between them and reality. Yet the nerves she felt reinforced the fact that this was very real.

"I've never been with anyone," she admitted.

He nodded. "I figured as much, honey. It's okay. Do you want me to teach you?"

Her heart was beating so fast she thought it might pop. She wanted nothing more than for him to teach her *everything*! But would it ruin the friendship? What if things didn't work out and they lost what they had.

What they had was beautiful and she would be crushed if it went away.

But she would be crushed if she didn't pursue this, too. She'd always wonder what might have been.

When she moved, it was as if she was not in control of her own body, being directed by some unseen force. She scooted to the edge of the bed and reached out, taking hold of his pulsating member.

She felt him grow harder, stiffening even more in her hands. Her fingers traced every inch, from the tip to his full, ripe balls.

For a moment, that question came back, and she again wondered if this was a dream. But the emotions—and intense arousal—she felt told her this was very real. She didn't know what this new reality would bring, and how it would change things, but there was no stopping it now. She couldn't even if she wanted to.

But she had no desire to halt the proceedings. She needed this. She needed *him*.

He stepped back, allowing her to inch forward. Her mouth reached him, but she paused and soaked in the sight of him before continuing. A few seconds later, she licked him, first the tip, and then slowly making her way down the shaft and then back up. She continued licking until she reached the top.

When her lips parted and enveloped his manhood, she heard him groan with pleasure.

Her mouth was so full! It was a chore to take him all in. She did the best she could, though she had to fight her gag reflex as he bumped the back of her throat.

She began moving her head back and forth, her mouth growing wetter and slicker as she worked.

“Just like that, little girl,” he said. “You’re doing so good.”

The praise drove her wild. She sucked and bobbed even more. Pre-cum seeped down her throat, the salty sweetness hitting her tastebuds. She wanted more, but Campbell put his hands on her head and gingerly slid his cock out, saying, “You know what Daddies like, little girl. And I want you. But we’ll take it slow. I’m going to make you feel good and then you can make Daddy feel good.”

Did he seriously just use that word? Did he call himself Daddy? Lynnleigh was reeling. There wasn’t time to contemplate the ramifications, though. He was on his knees now, spreading her legs open, inching his mouth forward toward her sopping womanhood.

“Oh!” she cried out, as his tongue touched her. She’d never experienced anything like this.

He licked and kissed her. He sucked on her clit. He teased her, flicking his tongue across her pussy lips before sliding it inside. She was flowing now, spurting her juices all over him. He didn’t mind one bit. He furiously lapped up everything she gave him.

A ball of tension was expanding inside her. She wouldn’t hold out much longer. She was about to arrive.

That’s exactly what happened a second later. Just when she thought she couldn’t stand any more, she came. Hard. She gripped the bedspread and screamed out in ecstasy, her body trembling, her voice raw.

Campbell didn’t stop, though. He kept licking and kissing. She didn’t have a chance to recover before another orgasm washed over her, even more intense than the first.

Her head was spinning. She was a babbling, incoherent mess. But Campbell wasn't letting up.

He stood and guided her head forward, once again slipping his throbbing cock into her mouth. He moved in and out, driving deep into her throat. He was so gentle yet assertive. She'd never felt more safe. Yet she knew exactly who was in control. She was at his mercy. He'd take what he wanted from her.

"I'm gonna cum," he said. "Drink up, little girl. Make Daddy proud."

She dutifully obeyed. His hot, sticky cum jetted down her throat, leaving a gooey trail as it slid down and warmed her belly. She swallowed and gulped, drinking up everything he had to give.

He slowly pulled out, kissed the top of her head, and collapsed onto the bed. He pulled her to him until she was snuggled up beside him.

Well, Lynnleigh thought with a devilish smile, this *friendship* just took an interesting turn.

A very interesting turn indeed.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

The Littles gathered at the park beside the community center to discuss the day's plan.

It was about ten in the morning and Lynnleigh could see her breath in the crisp air. Her brain was still a bit muddled with all the change that had taken place. Campbell was there. What's more than that, he'd broken up with Mallory. And even more than that, they'd...fooled around.

We didn't *go all the way*, she told herself. There's still time to reverse course and save the friendship. But what if this was the direction the friendship was supposed to go?

She tried to shake off those lingering questions and doubt and focus on the mission at hand. This was an important day. She and her new friends would strike a mighty blow for Littles everywhere. She needed a clear head. That other stuff would still be there to worry about later.

"You all good?" Stella asked.

"Just a lot on my mind. But I'm fine. Maybe better than fine."

"Ooh. Is it Adam, Campbell, or both that have you so happy?"

"Both?"

Katie nodded. "Our friend, Evangeline, has two Daddies. And Cash and Ranger are both smoking hot!"

"Yeah, you'll meet her here today," Stella chimed in. "There's nothing wrong with having two."

Lynnleigh giggled. The thought was intriguing, and more than a tad exciting, but she couldn't see herself being with two guys. She barely had experience with one! Plus, she got the impression Campbell was not the type who would share. She probably wouldn't want to be shared, anyway. She was looking for *the* one. Her person. Her partner.

"It's actually Campbell," she admitted as they walked toward the playground where other Littles were waiting. "We

sorta fooled around this morning. I guess that's what you'd call it."

"Oh snap!" Katie said. "That's huge!"

"Yeah."

"Well," Stella said, "how did the date with Adam go?"

"Great, actually. He's a terrific guy. Seems nearly perfect. But Campbell is here and—ugh! I'm just torn. Don't get me wrong—I'm not saying I'm torn between the two. I don't know Adam really. But I'm torn between exploring options or throwing caution to the wind, risking my friendship, and dating Campbell. Does that make sense?"

"Total sense," Stella said. "But what if this was how it's supposed to be? What if Campbell was always the one, y'all just took the long road to get there?"

"That's what I'm trying to figure out," she said.

Both Stella and Katie held her hands as they approached the playground. They'd have to hash this out later. Right now, Eli, Harrison, and Stryker were in the center of a gathering throng. Eli began, speaking loud enough for all to hear but not so loud that anyone outside of the circle could make out his words.

"Thank you all for coming. This is a big day. If everything goes right, we'll know quite a few Christmas gifts. From what I can gather through peeking at Nancy's store records, there's a big shipment coming in. Thirty different boxes."

People gasped and chatted quietly until Eli spoke again.

"You all know your positions. We'll breakup into our pre-arranged groups and cover the town. We need eyes on Marshal Dax and his deputies. We need eyes on Bradley, too, and the fire crew. Really as many Bigs as we can keep tabs on. If they start to move in our direction—if anyone leaves town—we need to know!"

"Do you all have your radios?" Stryker asked.

Folks nodded.

“Good. They’ve got a good range. Keep them locked to channel three. If you hear anyone say, ‘It’s cold outside,’ that’s code for we’re being monitored. Abort the mission then!”

Everyone continued to nod as they listened to the instructions.

“So the plan is simple,” Stryker continued. “Marshal Dax would know if we left Mountainville because he gets an alert when the gate is opened. Plus, it would be mighty suspicious if some of us left town. But this way—”

“The Bigs think we’re all still here,” Eli finished, smiling devilishly. “That’s why we don’t want y’all to hide. Be visible when you keep tabs on the Mommies and Daddies. Just don’t let them know you’re spying on them.”

“Act casual,” Harrison chimed in. “Like you’re playing. You can even engage them in conversation. This allows you to monitor them, but it also establishes alibis for us.”

Some of the Littles, including Lynnleigh, laughed gleefully. This was just too naughty! But the best part of the plan hadn’t even been spoken of yet, until Stryker said, “I’ll take care of the airlift portion. I’ll be controlling the sleigh. We’ll fly two groups over the town fence. Are we all clear on what to do and how this is going to go?”

“Yes,” everyone said in quiet unison.

“Good,” Stryker said. “I have a drone watching the road to alert us when the truck is approaching. Should be in about forty minutes. That gives everyone time to get into position. Let’s do this, Littles!”

They cheered as quietly as possible, not wanting to alert any Bigs that mischief might be in the air, but too excited not to show it.

“Meet at the ball pit today at four,” Eli said just before everyone scattered. “Hopefully, we’ll have exciting news to share and many of you will find out your Christmas gifts!”

As the group dispersed, Stella said to Lynnleigh, “You sure you want in on this? The sleigh is safe, but there’s always a risk.”

“Are you kidding? It’s a drone sleigh. Santa’s Sleigh! I have to ride it!”

“Ironic, isn’t it?” Stella said. “We’re using Santa’s sleigh to snoop on our Christmas gifts.”

The women laughed.

It was indeed ironic.

And oh so naughty.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Lynnleigh was buckled in, but she still held on tight as the sleigh ascended straight up into the air.

Her stomach muscles tightened. This wasn't the most thrilling thing she'd ever done, but it was close! The most thrilling had been her morning encounter with Campbell. That kept playing on her mind on loop!

As exciting as this day was already shaping up to be, she was more than a little curious as to what else it could possibly hold.

She was about to find out.

"This is safe. Right?" she said through gritted teeth.

"Yep," Stella said. "Stryker invented this for Christmas one year. It's basically just one giant drone."

Lynnleigh was starting to get a little frightened, but the sleigh didn't ascend very high. It cleared the fence, lowered, then hovered not far above the ground as it whisked them about a mile toward their destination. They were low enough now where a fall wouldn't be detrimental.

They cut across the desert and to the road that led to town. They were around a curve, so the folks back in Mountainville couldn't see what was taking place. Lynnleigh was grateful for that. Had any of the Bigs known, all the Littles would be in major trouble. And with Campbell now in town, she figured she'd be right there with everyone else, getting her bottom thoroughly busted.

With a little luck, though, they wouldn't be caught.

"Thanks for helping us out," Katie said as the sleigh gently touched the ground and came to a halt. "I know you don't have to be doing this. You don't even have gifts coming in. But you're risking a spanking to help us. You're the best!"

"Don't mention it," Lynnleigh said. "I wouldn't miss out on the fun for anything!"

She was telling the truth. She'd dreamed of being in Mountainville for so long and finding mischief with the people she'd seen on Eli's videos, that she was compelled to take part in the shenanigans herself.

They unbuckled and stepped out of the sleigh to find the first crew that had been transported had already set up. A group of the town's guys—Eli, Harrison, Colt, and Michael—were all wearing jeans, t-shirts, and bright yellow construction vests. They had on hard hats and sunglasses, too. It was strange seeing Eli in anything but his trademark shortalls.

"Y'all look like you're about to rob a bank," Katie noted.

"Kind of feels like it, too," Harrison said.

He and the other guys were busy laying out road cones to block the path. Stryker's voice came through on the radios. "Moving the sleigh now. Going park it behind that hill to the south, just out of view." The sleigh began to move away, as if being driven by an invisible Santa Claus.

"That's so weird," Lynnleigh noted.

"Stryker's tech is amazing," Stella said. "I think he's a genius. Comes in handy for all the movies he directs."

"And for our adventures!" Katie added.

The women found their place behind a pile of boulders just off the road.

"No snakes," Stella said after inspecting the area.

A chill traced Lynnleigh's spine. She hadn't even thought about that. She didn't have to worry about slithering critters where she lived in New Hampshire.

"Are there a lot of them here?" Lynnleigh whispered, suddenly extra aware of every blade of grass around her feet.

"Only during the spring and summer," Katie reassured her. "In November, they're mostly hibernating. But it's always good to check. This is Texas. Our temps can run kind of warm."

They crouched down and waited.

“I hope this works,” Katie said.

“It’s pretty genius,” Stella said. “I have a good feeling about this one.”

“This one?” Lynnleigh said. “Do some of your schemes fail?”

Katie and Stella exchanged knowing glances.

“Uh, sometimes,” Stella admitted glumly.

“Truck is incoming,” Stryker’s voice said over their radios. “Probably two miles out. At the most.”

A few moments passed before the women heard the unmistakable rumble of a truck approaching. Out on the road, the guys waved their arms, signaling for the truck to stop.

It came to a halt with a loud hiss and a few pops. The smell of exhaust filled the air. The driver—a man of about fifty years old, wearing jeans, a flannel shirt, and Dallas Cowboys ball cap—stepped out. “What seems to be the problem?”

“Had some complaints about this stretch of road. Had to shut her down for a bit and check her out. We’re almost done. Can you wait about two minutes? We’ll get these cones out of your way and you can move on through,” Harrison said.

The man took off his cap and scratched his head. He squared it back on and studied Harrison. “Have we met before?”

Behind the rocks, the women could hear enough of the conversation to realize what the trucker just asked. They held their breath. Perhaps having one of the world’s most famous movie stars do the talking wasn’t a wise decision. But he was a great actor and was really selling it. Besides, the hat and sunglasses went a long way in concealing his true identity. At least, Lynnleigh hoped they did.

“Don’t think so, friend,” Harrison said. He’d injected a little more Texas twang into his voice than usual.

“Yeah. I meet so many people driving all over this state. They all start looking like each other,” the driver said with a chuckle.

“I hear that, brother. We’ll be out of your hair in a minute. Appreciate you playing along with us,” Harrison said.

Lynnleigh, Katie, and Stella giggled. *Playing along* was right! That driver just didn’t know how accurate it was.

While the guys distracted the driver with their elaborate ruse, Lynnleigh, Stella, and Katie snuck up to the back of the truck, pulling it open just enough to climb in. Stella was the first one up, helping the other two into the boxy compartment. The smell was a mix of oil and musty cardboard.

“We gotta hurry!” Katie said. She went to the first tall box and read the black lettering printed on the side. She then went to the other, and then a third.

“They’re all the same,” she said.

“Desks!” Stella said. “All I see are desks.”

“Oh snap! These aren’t Christmas gifts at all. It’s the opposite, actually. They’re stupid new desks for that stupid school!” Katie said, her voice louder than it had been, dread filling her words.

Lynnleigh looked around and shook her head. “This sucks balls!”

They hurried from the back of the truck. The moment just kept getting worse, though. Suddenly, the unmistakable sound of sirens blared, and a flurry of vehicles, dust rising behind them, appeared on the horizon. They were coming straight towards them.

“It’s my Daddy!” Stella exclaimed.

“We’ve been busted!” Katie gasped. “But how?”

Lynnleigh’s heart raced. She could imagine how Campbell would respond if he knew about all this. He’d probably take her over his knee! The girls ducked and scrambled behind the boulders, managing to find cover just in the nick of time.

Eli and the guys raised their hands in mock surrender as Marshal Dax and the other Daddies pulled up.

“Guys, lower your hands,” Dax said, a fair amount of amusement in his voice. He shook his head. “Road construction, huh?”

Colt sighed, throwing down the caution sign he’d been holding. “How did you know we were out here?”

“Eli,” Harrison said.

“Hey! I’m not rat!” Eli said.

Dax laughed. “No. You’d never tell on your friends. But you did leave your phone on the kitchen counter where Nancy could read the group chat about this little operation. We’ve been anticipating this.”

The Littles groaned.

“So who else is here?” Dax said.

Beside him, his deputies Bo and Vance craned their necks to see better as they looked toward the boulders on the side of the road.

“You stay here,” Katie said. “Can you walk back to town?”

“Sure, but how do I get in once I get there?”

“Text Stryker. He’ll get you over the gate.”

“But I did this crime. I can’t leave you two to take the rap ___”

“Katie’s right. You’re a guest here. And Campbell seems strict! Just stay low and wait until we’re gone,” Stella said. “Stryker has to call the sleigh back. You can ride it back over the fence. Just stay low so no one sees.”

Lynnleigh didn’t like it, but she remained hidden behind the boulder, her heart thudding in her chest. Katie and Stella stood. “Just us,” Stella called out.

“Baby girl!” Dax said. “I was hoping you weren’t too big a part of this.” He shook his head. “I guess someone has a good, long spanking and timeout coming.”

She nodded and trudged beside Katie, walking to meet the others.

“Sorry about this, sir,” Dax told the driver.

He laughed. “Hey, I’ve been delivering to Mountainville for a while. I’m used to this sort of thing.”

Dax made sure everyone had a ride back to town. After the truck and police vehicles left, Lynnleigh waited about three minutes and then began walking toward Mountainville. She was extra mindful of snakes, too.

Suddenly, she heard an engine approaching. A moment later, it was behind her. The window rolled down to reveal none other than Adam.

“Lynnleigh?” He called softly. “Need a lift?”

She didn’t hesitate, instantly climbing in. “What are you doing out here?”

“Met some friends at the diner in the nearby town for breakfast. The bigger question is what are you doing out here?”

She laughed nervously.

“Let me guess,” he said. “Mischievous?”

She nodded.

He chuckled. “So, am I smuggling you back into town?”

She nodded once again.

“Okay, get low,” he said. “I can’t believe I’m aiding and abetting a naughty Little. You know, as a Daddy, I shouldn’t be doing this.”

“But you are because you’re the best!” she said as she slid down in the seat.

“I don’t know about that. But you’re lucky you’re so cute. How can I say no to you?”

Lynnleigh was all giggles and smiles as the car took off once more, rolling toward Mountainville.

“Were you out here alone the whole time? That’s dangerous,” he said.

“My friends were here. They got caught.”

“Ah. Might I ask what this was about?”

“Trying to snoop on incoming Christmas presents.”

“You Littles are rotten.”

“Seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“Well, your secret is safe with me. This time.”

She giggled some more.

Inside, she was a tangled mess of emotions. She was relieved to have a ride, nervous for her friends, feeling guilty about her own part in the scheme, and also confused. Adam seemed so nice. He'd be the perfect Daddy. And there was virtually no risk in dating him. If it didn't work out, oh well. No big deal. With Campbell, she stood to lose so much if things didn't work out. Like a lifelong friendship. A brother, even, as weird as that sounded. But she'd secretly loved him for too long not to pursue this. Whatever *this* was.

She'd thought Mountainville would make it easier to be a Little in search of a Daddy. But so far, it wasn't working out that way.

She was more confused than ever.

Chapter Thirty

“Did you hear about what happened today?” Campbell asked Lynnleigh that afternoon.

“What happened?” she said.

They were standing in the kitchen of the rental house. Lynnleigh had just made a mug of hot chocolate. She was still cold from her time outside earlier, seemingly unable to warm up.

“Bunch of Littles tried to get an early peek at their Christmas gifts. They even blocked the road coming into town! Stopped a delivery truck. That’s a pretty elaborate prank. Glad you weren’t in on that.”

“You and me both! I’d be in trouble for sure,” she said.

Oh crap, she thought. I’m not a good actor like Harrison. Hopefully Campbell doesn’t see right through me.

“You bet your ass you would be,” he said. “They used some sort of flying sleigh to clear the town’s fence. If I caught you getting in something so dangerous, I’d pull that diaper down and paddle your little bottom until it was black and blue. I might not be your Daddy, but I don’t think I could stop myself if you put yourself in harm’s way like that.”

“Probably not,” she said. “Sure glad I wasn’t involved in that. Sounds crazy!” A pang of guilt stabbed at her insides.

“Me, too. I’d hate to have to spank you.” He stepped closer. “I know that’s something a Daddy would do. I also know I kind of bestowed that title upon myself. Earlier. We should probably talk about that. Especially after what happened this morning.”

The look in his eyes told her this was not a conversation of, “Oh, we shouldn’t have done that.” He seemed to like the idea of being her Daddy.

She tensed. She’d dreamed of this conversation for so long. Now that it was here, though, she wasn’t sure she could go through with it. Again, that fear that it might ruin everything

gnawed at her. Her hand began to tremble so badly that she had to sit the mug of cocoa down.

“Campbell, I—”

“Is it Adam?”

“No. It’s...I need you to listen to me here. I’m so glad you came. I’ve missed you terribly. But right now, I need some space. I don’t know how to process this morning. I just need —”

“I get it,” he said softly, nodding. “When you’re ready to talk, I’m here. I want to. I think we need to. But it’s on your timetable.”

She nodded, too. She left him in the kitchen as she went to her bedroom. A few minutes later, she was out of her Little clothes and in jeans, boots, and a baggy sweater. She needed to go for a stroll to clear her head. She left the house without saying goodbye, walking along the sidewalk that led toward the front of town.

As she walked through the neighborhood, she saw a few other Littles out playing but she didn’t recognize any of them. Most of her friends were probably at home, grounded after the stunt they’d pulled that morning. She should be in trouble, too, she reminded herself. But she didn’t have a Daddy.

Or did she?

Was this supposed to happen with Campbell? Why, after years of harboring secret desires and feelings for him, were they so hard to embrace now?

Clouds hung overhead. The air was brisk. Jack-o-lanterns had been removed from porches, replaced by plain pumpkins as people prepared for Thanksgiving. One house was already in the process of putting out their Christmas decorations, though that holiday was still well over a month away.

She arrived at the town’s ice cream parlor and studied it for a moment, trying to decide if she wanted to go in. She definitely wanted something sweet, but would she just be eating her emotions?

“You seem lost in thought.”

She turned to see Adam approaching. He looked handsome in his boots, jeans, and flannel shirt.

“Debating on if I want ice cream or a long walk.”

“You could do both,” he said. “Go for a longer walk but end it with ice cream.”

“I like that.”

“Want some company or do you need some alone time?”

“Company,” she said, after thinking it over.

They went past the businesses and into the town’s main park. Around them, gold and brown leaves clattered loudly as a chilly wind pushed them along the ground. The branches overhead were bare, save for a few late season stragglers that were barely hanging on.

“Did you get away with it earlier?” Adam asked, referring to the events of the morning.

“Sure did. Thanks to you.”

“Glad I could help. I assume whatever is on your mind goes beyond a guilty conscience.”

“Yeah.”

They walked along the paved path a few moments before Lynnleigh elaborated.

“I’m really torn about something.”

“I suspect I know what. Or who.”

“Yeah. Kind of weird talking to you about it.”

“Doesn’t have to be. I’m here to listen if you want to share.”

“You sure?”

“Absolutely.”

She spent the next fifteen minutes laying out her history with Campbell. She covered everything from their childhood and teen years to their relationship as adults. She talked about his exes, her lack of serious romantic relationships, and

everything in between. By the time she was done, she exhaled loudly and said, “I sorta word vomited, huh?”

“That was a lot,” he admitted with a good-natured grin. “But does it feel better to get it all out?”

“It does,” she admitted. “But I still don’t know what to do.”

He stopped walking. There was no one else in the park besides them. The wind was practically howling now. “But I think you do.”

“What do you mean?”

Looking into her eyes, Adam said, “It sounds like you and Campbell are supposed to be together. Call me mushy, but I believe in that sort of thing. And it’s pretty obvious he’s your soulmate. You’re worried that you’ll be together, it won’t work out, and then you’ll lose him as a friend. That’s one possibility. But if you two are as close as you make it sound, then even a breakup couldn’t rip you apart.”

“Well, yeah. I guess that’s true. There’s nothing he could do to drive me from his life,” she said.

“I have no doubt he feels the same way about you,” Adam said. “But look at the other possibility. You two will live happily ever after. You won’t spend your life wondering what could have been or suffering in silence as you watch the man you love with other women. And he won’t have to watch you with other guys. Besides, if you two are supposed to be together—and I truly believe you are—then none of those relationships would work out for either one of you. So really, you only have one option here. Go to him.”

She thought about it, nodding and giggling. “Adam, how are you so wonderful?”

He shrugged. “It’s a curse.” He winked.

She laughed again.

She threw her arms around his neck, kissed his cheek, and said, “Thank you.”

“No need to thank me. Believe me, I wish I could’ve told you he’s no good and you should be with me. You’re quite the

little cutie. I just think you are Campbell's little cutie. Not mine."

"Maybe you'll find yours soon," she said.

"I bet. But don't worry about me. My happily ever after will come in time. Go on and get yours," he said.

He waved to her as she ran away. She looked over her shoulder, waved back, and hurried toward the house.

She hurried to Campbell.

Chapter Thirty-One

Campbell was in the living room when Lynnleigh burst through the front door.

She ran into him so hard, jumping upon him and wrapping her arms and legs around his body, that he almost fell over.

“Daddy,” was all she managed to say.

Their lips found each other in a hungry kiss. He worked up the side of her cheek, kissing her, going to her ear and whispering, “Daddy’s got you, baby. I always have. I always will.”

They kissed again as he carried her from the living room.

Straight to the bed.

“I’ve never been with anyone,” Lynnleigh whispered as Campbell began undressing her.

“It’s okay, baby girl. Daddy will teach you,” he said, his voice caring and gentle.

He finished freeing her of her clothes and took a moment to drink in the sight of her naked body. She instinctively tried to cover her breasts, but he put his hands on her wrists and guided them away. “Don’t ever cover yourself around Daddy. You’re perfect. In every way.”

He swooped his head down and took her right nipple into his mouth, darting his tongue over it, causing it to grow hard. He began to massage her left breast with his hand, tweaking her nipple between his fingers.

She let out a soft, throaty moan.

Campbell moved his mouth from one breast to the other.

Her pussy was absolutely drenched now, her juices dripping down her thighs.

“Lay down, baby. Daddy’s going to start by making your little pussy feel good.”

She was trembling so badly that she could barely make her body comply with his words. He helped her, gingerly guiding her until she lay on the edge of the bed, her legs hanging over the side.

“Good girl,” he said.

He kissed her lips and neck before moving to her stomach.

“Mmm, Daddy needs to taste his sweet girl again.

His lips moved up and down her thighs before finally finding her womanhood. His tongue traced her slit up and down. He gave her tender kisses. Finally, his warm, wet tongue darted into her opening, tasting her sweetness.

She cried out with pleasure, her body tensing.

He lapped her up, taking his time, enjoying the experience as much as she was. Then, he found her swollen, aching clit and sucked, gently but firmly. She felt as if she might explode.

Something inside her did.

She arrived with a mighty quake that fluttered her legs while a torrent spilled from her pussy. Campbell didn't stop until he'd completely consumed her. He stood, smiling down at her as her wetness glistened on his face. He licked his lips just as he began to strip free of his clothes. She took a moment to admire his incredible body. He was fit and strong. Every part of him was muscular. He looked like a Greek statue, sculpted from clay and brought to life.

His cock, already so stiff, was even bigger and thicker than she remembered. She sucked in her bottom lip and whimpered.

“W-will it hurt, Daddy?” she asked, the desperation and apprehension evident in her voice.

“A little, baby. But Daddy's here. Everything will be okay, honey.”

He moved her up and then climbed atop the bed and spread her legs.

“Hold Daddy's hand, baby.”

She eagerly did so, gripping it tightly as the head of his cock bumped her pussy lips, threatening entry.

“Daddy’s proud of you, honey. You’re so brave,” he whispered.

She whimpered and then bit down hard on her bottom lip as his rod split her virgin valley.

“Good girl, honey. Don’t fight it,” he said.

She nodded as she winced again. Tears escaped the side of her eyes. A white-hot pain seized her, nearly blinding her for a few moments as she got used to the sensation. Just when she thought it would subside, it actually intensified as he pushed deeper inside.

“Such a good girl,” he praised her again. “Look at me.”

She opened her eyes and exhaled loudly.

“I’m proud of you. The worst part is almost over.”

She shrieked as he pushed all the way in, squeezing his hand hard with one hand as she clawed at his back with the other.

“Shhh. It’s okay. Daddy’s in. It’s all okay,” he said in that low, comforting voice.

He started thrusting. Slowly at first but picking up steam and speed with each pass. She felt herself opening for him, accepting all of his length and girth.

The sound of their bodies clapping against each other filled the air, mixing with her whimpers and moans. He slammed against her hips. He grunted with pleasure, his muscles tight as he staved off a climax. Her tight, unused pussy was almost more than he could stand. But he wasn’t ready for it to be over. Not yet.

He slowed his movements, bringing her back from the brink. He leaned forward, kissed her forehead, and whispered, “You’re doing such a good job, baby.”

She smiled up at him. “Am I making you proud, Daddy?”

“So proud, my love.” He kissed her lips. “Now, be a good girl and turn over.”

She moaned in displeasure as he withdrew his cock, but she obeyed, flipping around. She moaned again—this time from delight—when he patted her bottom.

“Good girl.”

She was on her knees now. Campbell lifted her up by her hips, pulling her onto her hands. She arched her back. He took a second to admire the view. Her beautiful, round ass cheeks, the valley between her legs, the small of her back. All so perfect.

“Your poor little pussy is purple, baby.”

“It hurt, Daddy.”

“I know. But this will feel good. I promise. Ready, baby?” he asked.

“Yes, Daddy.”

He grabbed hold of her hips once again and plunged his cock deep into her.

She released an ear-piercing screech but was soon squealing in delight, her cries growing more and more frantic. He plowed her without mercy, holding onto her sides as he drove deep into her womb. Her body shook.

“It’s happening, Daddy!” she yelled.

An orgasmic tidal wave crashed into her, sweeping her away into pure bliss. That same wave swept him away, too. His hot, sticky seed jetted out powerfully, blasting into her womb and completely coating it. He grunted and groaned, digging his fingers deep into her hips and holding her in place until he’d finished draining every last drop of cum.

It was only minutes later, as she lay nestled in Campbell’s arms, that the reality of it all hit Lynnleigh. They had finally crossed that line. After years of yearning in secret—and sometimes pushing the boundaries of friendship versus romance—there was no going back now.

And she was finally living her dream.

Chapter Thirty-Two

The following morning, Lynnleigh woke up still just as excited as she'd been the day before.

After their first round of lovemaking yesterday, they'd eaten, watched TV, and then made love once again. That was the second of three times. The last time had been just before falling asleep for the night. Now, as she lay in bed reflecting on it all, she still couldn't believe it was actually happening.

"I love you, Daddy," she said, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

"Mmm. I love you too, baby girl. But I want a kiss on the lips."

She shook her head. "I have morning breath."

"I don't care about that. I want a kiss. And when Daddy tells you he wants something, you do it."

She eagerly kissed him.

"That's a good girl. How's your diaper?" His hand slid between her legs as she blushed. He poked in on the squishy plastic and cotton. "As wet as I suspected."

"Are you sure you don't mind being my Daddy?" she asked. "I know you didn't really know about this Age Play stuff until I introduced it to you."

"Hush, silly girl. Of course I don't mind. It fits. I think I'm a natural."

"I think so, too."

"Then come on. Let's go to the nursery and get you dry."

He carried her across the hall and laid her on the changing table. It felt heavenly as he gently cleaned her with a wet wipe. She cooed softly when the baby powder landed between her legs. Once her new diaper was taped up, he dropped the old one in the diaper pail, washed his hands in the nursery's sink, and then carried her to the kitchen.

"How about pancakes for breakfast?" he said.

“Maybe I should just have yogurt and fruit.”

“Is that what you want?”

“No. I want pancakes. But I’m fat enough!”

“Whoa there. You just hunting a spanking this morning?”

“I didn’t do anything to get a spanking!” she cried.

“I’ll be the judge of when you need spankings, kiddo. You spoke poorly of yourself. When we were *just* friends, I couldn’t do anything about it. Now, though, well, I’ll bust that bottom so hard you won’t sit for a day. Am I clear?”

She gulped. “Yes, sir.”

“Good. I’ll let you off this time because you didn’t know the rule. Now you do. There’s no excuses. Are we clear?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good girl. The other rule—and this is very important—is do whatever Daddy says. Repeat it back to me.”

“I am to do whatever Daddy says.”

“Good girl. You’re as smart as you are cute.”

He winked, causing her to giggle. He then got busy making breakfast. After they’d eaten, he took her to the bathroom where he ran a nice, warm bath for her. He tested the water, made sure it was good, and then undressed her. After picking her up and gently placing her inside, he said, “We need to get you some bath toys, baby girl.”

“Ooh. Can we go shopping today? Miss Nancy has some in her store.”

“You bet. What else do you want to do today?” He began washing her.

The sensation felt heavenly, the pleasure written all over her face as she answered. “I might go play with my friends. Is that okay, Daddy?”

“Sure. But I’m not sure they can play. They’re all in a lot of trouble after that stunt they pulled with the semi outside of town. Dax and Bradley both texted me. They’re making Katie

and Stella go to school to meet the town's new teacher. Seems they'll be going to school a couple of days a week now."

Lynnleigh fought hard to control her reaction. She hoped she didn't look as guilty as she felt. Did Campbell suspect anything? Was there any evidence out there linking her to the crime?

He rinsed her, pulled her from the tub, and then delicately dried and dressed her. Once she was ready, he said, "I have a surprise for you, baby."

"Ooh. Is it a new toy, Daddy?"

"Not a toy. You'll see."

He carried her downstairs, through the utility room, and into the garage. There, sitting beside her car, was a brand new, adult-sized stroller.

"Just for my little girl."

Lynnleigh squealed in delight, kicked her legs, and giggling as she kissed Daddy.

He chuckled. "I thought you'd like it. Come on. Let's go to the park."

With Campbell dressed in jeans, hiking boots, and a flannel shirt, and Lynnleigh wearing leggings over her diaper and a sweater and boots, they set out toward one of the town's parks.

"I'm sorry your friends won't be able to play. Daddy can still push you on a swing, though," he said.

It was once again cloudy. The aroma of an apple pie baking filled the air, and Lynnleigh assumed someone was practicing for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday. Or perhaps they just wanted a pie. Whatever the reason, it sure smelled good.

"Hey, look, there's the school I've been hearing so much about," Campbell said.

Lynnleigh tensed. She wasn't sure why just the sight of it made her so nervous. Perhaps it was the guilt she carried over being free while her friends were having to attend class. But school was the least of her worries. She knew how stern

Campbell could be. He'd busted her butt when they were *just* friends. Now that they were more—and he was officially her Daddy—how bad would the punishment be if he learned what she'd done?

The park—one of the smaller ones in town—was beside the old-fashioned, red schoolhouse. The playground served double duty, being for the students and anyone in town who wanted to have a good time.

“Should we go to another park?” Lynnleigh asked, hoping her voice didn't betray the nervousness she felt.

“What's wrong with this one?”

Oh crap! Is that suspicion I hear in his tone? Does he already know and he's just dragging this out?

Get this under control, Lynnleigh. You're just being paranoid. He can't possibly know.

Can he?

“Nothing. I just don't want to interrupt the school,” she said.

“We won't bother anyone. I think all the Littles are already inside. Come on. Let's swing, kiddo.”

He stopped the stroller beside the swing set, reached in and picked Lynnleigh up, and then put her in one of the swings. It was a “baby style” swing, only big enough for adults. Lynnleigh's legs had no trouble fitting through the provided holes.

“I like this swing,” Campbell said. “It's safe.”

“You like safe.”

“Yes, I do. Especially when it comes to my baby girl. It's my job to protect her.” He winked and then moved behind her, pushing her gently to get the swing started.

“I wanna go high, Daddy!”

“We'll work up to that. You just hold on tight.”

A minute later, it felt like she was soaring. She laughed loudly each time the swing descended, her stomach feeling

that dropping sensation. “This is the best!”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it.”

Lynnleigh forgot about the fun, though, as she saw someone approaching. It wasn’t hard to tell who it was. Stryker’s tall frame gave him away instantly.

“Hey, Lynnleigh!” he said, stopping in front of the swings.

She gripped the chains even tighter. She tried to sound as casual and normal as possible. “Hey, Stryker.”

“What happened to you yesterday? I knew you weren’t with the others and when you didn’t come back on the sleigh, I got worried. Katie said you were all good, though, so I didn’t go out looking for you.” He shrugged. “That’s all she said. She was in pretty bad trouble. Guess we all got in bad trouble, huh?”

“What’s this about?” Campbell said.

Lynnleigh tried to convey as much as possible with her eyes, but she wasn’t sure how successful she was. Stryker was able to read her, though, because he gave a slight apologetic nod, realizing now that Campbell was not in the know.

“Good thing you weren’t in on that Christmas present operation,” Stryker said. “We are sure paying for it now. Anyway, I, uh, better get to class. See ya around. Maybe we can play this afternoon when we all get out.”

Stryker hurried to the school.

He was clearly not the actor that Harrison was. It must be why he sticks to directing movies instead of starring in them, Lynnleigh thought.

“Baby girl,” Campbell said, his voice now taking on a stern quality. “What is this about.”

Her swing had lost momentum now and she was coming to a halt just as he appeared in front of her. His arms were crossed. His gaze steely.

“Oh. We were all playing the other day and got separated,” she said. “No big deal.”

“Really?”

“Yep.”

“Are you lying to me?”

“Nope.”

The weight of her guilt was nearly as heavy as those boulders she'd hidden behind during the prank. Her heart was drumming something fierce.

“I know enough about that little incident to know it sounds like you were involved. Did you take a ride in that sleigh?” He shook his head, his nostrils flaring. “Do you have any idea how dangerous that is?”

Suddenly, she burst into tears, rushing from the swing and throwing her arms around him. “I’m sorry, Daddy!”

He hugged her but his voice was still quite disapproving when he said, “Not nearly as sorry as you’re going to be, kiddo.

“Not by a longshot.”

Chapter Thirty-Three

Campbell was escorting Lynnleigh by the elbow as he led her into the bedroom.

“Not only did you ride in that drone sleigh thing, which is ridiculously dangerous, but you were doing something naughty in the first place by trying to snoop around and see those Christmas presents.”

“But none of them were for me,” she said, her voice defiant.

“Now is not the time to test me, little girl.”

“Sorry, Daddy.”

“As I was saying, you did something dangerous. You snooped on things you had no business snooping on. And then you lied to me and the other Bigs about it. Does that sum it up?”

She groaned and hung her head.

“Answer me, little girl. Does that about sum up your actions?”

“Yeah.”

“Nope. Try it again. This time giving me the proper respect.”

She snapped to attention. “Yes, sir.”

“So let me tell you what’s going to happen now. I’m going to get those clothes off you. You’re going to lay down on this bed in the diaper position and I’m going to swat your little bottom with the belt until you think it’s on fire. And that’s just for starters. Now start taking off those clothes. And I wouldn’t take too long if I were you.”

He was already unbuckling his belt when she started to shirk out of her sweater. She thought of protesting but knew it was no use. A moment later, she was wearing only her diaper, suddenly very self-conscious as of how wet and sagging it was.

“Did you poop your little diaper?”

“No, Daddy!” she cried.

“Turn around. Let me see. I have to check because you lie to Daddy. I don’t want to take your word for it only to find a mess when I pull it down.” He tugged the waistband back and peered down at her bottom. “Okay. Do you need to potty again before I take this off you?”

She shook her head.

“Try anyway. I don’t want you to have an accident on the bed.”

She blushed hard as she tried, indeed sending more wet warmth into her already flooded nappy.

“Good girl. Wait here while I grab the wipes.” He returned a moment later and took her diaper off. It fell to the floor with a heavy, dull thud. “Lay down. On the edge of the bed.”

She was shaking but did as instructed.

She lurched as he spread her legs and then cleaned her with the wet wipe.

“Here’s how this spanking is going to work,” he said as he methodically went about his task. “You will hold your legs together and up. Exposing your little rear. Just like if I was sliding a diaper beneath your both. You will keep that position until I tell you it is okay to break it. Am I clear?”

“It will hurt, Daddy!”

“You bet your soon-to-be-red butt it’ll hurt, little girl. It’s to make you think. I’m very disappointed in your actions. I love you. Nothing can change that. But you cannot behave this way. I won’t tolerate it.”

She was already sobbing as she brought herself into position. There was something so humiliating about it all. She felt so exposed! Her most sensitive parts were on full display. She trusted Campbell, but she was still a crying, sniffing mess at the mere realization of her predicament.

It only got worse.

The belt cut across her bottom hard, slapping at her upper thighs and bringing with it a terrible stinging sensation unlike anything she'd ever felt.

“Daddy!” she yelled.

“You’ve got a long way to go, little girl. You best just settle in and take it.”

She obeyed, but it was the hardest thing she'd ever done. Swat after swat, searing pain swept over her. She cried out, telling Daddy how sorry she was, but the spanking kept going. She lost count of how many times that belt lashed at her.

Finally, the dreadful ordeal ended. She felt a little better once she was in Campbell's arms, but her rear end was still on fire.

“There, there, kiddo. It's okay to cry. Get it all out,” he said in a soothing tone, stroking her cheek as he kissed her. “Daddy doesn't like disciplining you, but you left him no choice. We're not finished, but it's over for now. Daddy's got you, sweet girl.”

There was more? Lynnleigh thought as dread seized her.

She couldn't worry about what was next. Right now, her bottom hurt too badly to focus on anything else.

Yet despite that, she felt totally safe and loved in Daddy's arms.

It was better than she'd ever dreamed.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Lynnleigh pulled a peanut butter and jelly sandwich from the brown paper sack and looked across the picnic table to where Stella and Katie sat.

“Stryker feels just awful about it all,” Katie said.

“It’s not his fault,” Lynnleigh said. “He didn’t know. Besides, it’s my fault for lying, anyway. I should have gotten caught with y’all. It wasn’t fair to skip out like I did.”

“It was our idea,” Stella pointed out. “I’m just sorry you got busted. But I’m glad we’re able to meet for lunch. I was worried I’d be grounded for a week!”

“Same,” Katie said.

“How bad was school today?” Lynnleigh asked. She then shrugged. “Guess I’ll find out soon enough. My Daddy is making me go tomorrow.”

“It’s not awful,” Katie said. “The teacher, Mrs. Garrison, is pretty nice. But she’s making us do a Thanksgiving performance.”

“What?” Lynnleigh asked.

Katie and Stella both nodded.

“That’s all we’re working on since the holiday is so close,” Stella confirmed. “And we’re going to practice every day!”

“It gets worse,” Katie said. “You know the big community wide Thanksgiving dinner?”

“Yeah.”

“We have to perform the song there for everyone. And we have to dress up like Pilgrims,” Katie said. “It’s pretty bad.”

Lynnleigh groaned. “This is going to suck.”

“You can say that again,” Stella said.

“No sense in worrying about it right now,” Katie said. “At least we only have to go to school part of the day. And we’re

done today. Y'all want to go find some other Littles and play?"

"Sounds good to me," Lynnleigh said.

But she realized that wasn't meant to be. Campbell was walking toward her. He stopped in front of the table.

"Hello, girls."

"Hi," Katie and Stella said in unison.

"Did you tell Little Lynnleigh all about school?"

"Yes, sir," Katie said.

"Good. She'll be joining you there tomorrow."

"Is it okay if she plays with us now?" Stella asked.

"Yeah, we were going to go find some of our friends after our picnic," Katie added.

"Well, I'm afraid Lynnleigh has a doctor's appointment right now. But she could play after that."

"I do?" Lynnleigh said.

"Yes, kiddo. We're going to drop by Dr. Mannix's office and have a visit."

Katie and Stella both tried to hide their reactions, but they feared they knew what the visit was about. Lynnleigh feared she did, too.

Yikes!

Lynnleigh sat atop the exam table, awaiting the physician's arrival.

A heavy silence hung in the room. She wasn't sure what to expect, but she'd heard the rumors floating around among the Littles of town. Would they give her an enema right there in the office or would she at least be able to go home first? The unknown was nearly as bad as the event itself, she thought. Of course, that might only be because she'd never experienced the actual event before. She was certain it would be awful.

A few minutes went by before the door opened and Dr. Duke Mannix strolled in. He was tall, fit, and wore a prerequisite white lab coat, complete with a stethoscope hanging around his neck. He had dark hair, a well-manicured, thick dark beard, and wise but kind eyes. He didn't seem arrogant, but an air of confidence surrounded him.

“Good afternoon. This must be Little Lynnleigh. And what a cutie she is!”

Lynnleigh smiled, but her stomach still roiled in uneasiness.

“Dr. Duke,” he said, giving his hand to Lynnleigh and then to Campbell.

Campbell introduced himself.

“It's nice meeting you both,” the doctor said. He looked at the chart he held, reviewing the questionnaire Lynnleigh had completed. “I like what I'm seeing here, Lynnleigh. No big risk factors in your lifestyle for major adverse health effects, especially at your age.” He sat on a stool in front of a computer monitor that was attached to the wall. He studied the information the nurse had input. “Blood pressure is a little high, but I assume you're nervous. We'll check that again in a minute.” He looked up at her. “Why are you nervous, honey? It's okay.”

Tears began flooding down her cheeks. “You're going to put medicine in my bottom!”

“Oh, my,” Dr. Mannix said.

Campbell was up now, beside Lynnleigh, with his arm around her shoulders. “What are you talking about?”

“I've heard the Littles talking,” she said between sobs. “I know what's going to happen. And you said my discipline wasn't over!”

Campbell chuckled, gave her a kiss atop the head, and then said, “You're not getting an enema, kiddo. But I did want the doctor to explain something. Besides, I thought it was a good time for a checkup.”

“I'm not?” she said.

“Nope.”

She looked at Dr. Mannix. He shook his head, too.

She dried her eyes, now embarrassed about her reaction. “Oh. Well, I guess I’m not nervous.”

Dr. Mannix, wearing a knowing grin, said, “We’ll give you a few more minutes to calm down and then I’ll check that blood pressure. Right now, I’m going to listen to your heart. No big deal.”

He put the stethoscope in his ears and then moved the bottom around various places on her chest and back. “Sounds great to me,” he said. Once the device was back around his neck, he turned his attention to Campbell. “Now, what was it you wanted me to address?”

Campbell, once again in the chair across from the exam table, said, “Well, this little girl was naughty and rode in some sort of drone sleigh.”

“Ah. Stryker’s famous—or infamous—sleigh. That thing has been mixed up in quite a bit of shenanigans. My own Little, Norah, has gotten involved.” Duke shook his head and sighed.

“Well, I think it’s very dangerous,” Campbell said.

“I concur,” the doctor said.

“Could you explain to Little Miss Lynnleigh what might happen if she were to fall from it, please?”

“Be happy to.” Dr. Mannix shifted his focus to the awaiting Little.

“I didn’t go that high,” she said. “Just enough to clear the fence.”

“That fence is twelve feet high, if I’m not mistaken. But it doesn’t matter,” Dr. Duke said. “You can break a bone merely by falling over. Any of us in this room could do it right now. It’s about how you land, not about how high you fall from. Obviously, though, the higher you go the greater the chance is for serious or lasting injury. Or worse. People can break their necks from any height, young lady.” His gaze was stern.

“What you did was incredibly risky. I assume, based upon what I’ve heard, you’ve received some discipline over this little matter.”

She hung her head. “Yes, sir.”

“And she’ll receive more,” Campbell said.

“Good. I was going to prescribe some,” the doctor said with a chuckle.

“I was thinking a three-page report,” Campbell said. “Researching and detailing the dangers of falls.”

“I think that’s a great idea!” Dr. Mannix said, his eyes lighting up. “It’s genius, actually.”

Lynnleigh groaned, her diaper rustling loudly as she shifted on the exam table. Her lips protruded in a pouty display.

“Falls can cause significant injuries. Remember that, young lady. Your Daddy is doing this for your own good. And I never want to see you in my office—or more likely the small emergency room we have—because of a traumatic injury. Am I clear?”

He waited until she brought her eyes up to meet his.

“Yes, sir,” she said.

“Good girl,” Dr. Mannix said. “Now, let me check that blood pressure again. Though it might still be elevated after the news of that punishment.”

Both of the men laughed, but Lynnleigh didn’t see any humor in it.

“Now that’s more like it,” the doctor said a minute later, after he removed the blood pressure cuff from her arm. “Well within normal range. Quite good, actually. I think you have a very healthy Little here. But if you have any problems—like upset tummy or constipation—we can in fact get some medicine in that cute booty of hers.”

“I’ll let you know if it comes to that,” Campbell said.

“Please do. Also, I was wanting to talk to you about something.”

“Me?”

“Yes,” Dr. Mannix said. “I spoke with Bradley and Dax. They mentioned you’re a physical therapist.”

“Yeah. I have my own practice up in New Hampshire.”

“How married to that part of the country are you?”

Campbell shrugged. “I like it. It’s home. But I’m not super attached.”

“Have you ever thought about relocating?” Dr. Mannix asked.

Lynnleigh hung on their every word. She had an idea where this conversation was going.

Her suspicion was proven correct when Dr. Mannix continued. “Because we are looking to expand our medical complex here. And as it turns out, PT is the next area of service we want to offer. It’s a growing need. Mountainville is so remote but it’s expanding by leaps and bounds. The closest town doesn’t have much in way of healthcare. We want to provide everything right here in our community for our people. We’d love to have you aboard.”

“Really? You have an open slot?” Campbell said.

Shockwaves of excitement rumbled throughout Lynnleigh. Would they move to Mountainville? She loved the community. She was all for it. She’d just assumed that now she was with Campbell, she’d go back to New Hampshire where his practice was. That thought didn’t upset her, either. She’d love wherever they chose to do life, as long as they were together.

Dr. Mannix nodded. “Please think it over. But it seems like a match made in heaven.”

The men exchanged contact information with promises to discuss the proposal more in-depth later on. It was almost enough to help Lynnleigh forget that she had to write a stupid, boring report as part of her punishment.

Almost.

Chapter Thirty-Five

The next day, some of the town's Littles—including Lynnleigh—were gathered at the schoolhouse.

The teacher was a shapely woman of about fifty. She had short blond hair that showed hints of silver. Her eyes were blue, wise, and caring, but her confident demeanor told the Littles she was up to the task of handling naughtiness. So did the wooden paddle that rested on her desk.

“Now, class, we are going to form rows, just as we practiced yesterday, and go over our song,” she announced.

There were groans but no one protested too much.

“Little Lynnleigh, you’ll be on the second row, on the end here,” Mrs. Garrison said, guiding the new class member to the right spot. “We’ll have risers to stand on during the actual performance. Oh, it will be adorable! Your Mommies and Daddies will just love this.”

She waited until everyone was in position and then used hand gestures to begin the song. Lynnleigh had only read the words, so it took her several tries before she was singing along with everyone in the right spots. Soon, though, she had it down.

They practiced for an hour, going over a new song to be added to the first, and then sat down to learn about Thanksgiving facts. In total, class went on four hours. By the time they were dismissed, everyone was relieved.

“Man, this sucks!” Eli said as they all filed out and into the park. He breathed in a lungful of air and savored it, as if he’d been buried alive for the whole morning.

“It does,” Stella agreed. “I’m kind of surprised you didn’t pull any pranks.”

Eli looked ashamed. “Me too. I expected better of myself than such upright, morally sound behavior.”

“But you’re actually behaving,” Stella said.

“Exactly. And that’s what has me so embarrassed.”

“Why are you holding back?”

Eli sighed. “I feel like my pranks are just getting you all in trouble. Like you’re paying the consequences for my actions. This school thing is partly my fault.”

It was Katie who pointed out, “You don’t force us to go along with anything.”

“I chose to get in on that Christmas present thing,” Lynnleigh said. “I was even excited about it. That’s on me. Not you.”

“Yeah, but I gave you the opportunity,” Eli countered.

“We all did,” Stella said. “That was a group effort. Don’t be too hard on yourself, Eli. We need your shenanigans. We can’t let the Bigs win.”

Eli promised to give the matter some thought before the group disbanded. Katie, Stella, and Lynnleigh walked through the park, toward the playground.

“You okay, Lynnleigh?” Katie asked.

“I think so.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Well, during class, I got a text. From Campbell’s ex.”

“Oh,” Katie said. She and Stella exchanged concerned glances.

“What did it say?” Stella asked.

“Just that she needed to talk with me.”

“Do you have any idea what it’s about?” Stella said.

“Nope. I have no clue why she’d even want to talk to me about anything. She never really liked me. She never said that. I just got the impression.”

“That makes sense. You were her boyfriend’s best friend. She was probably super jealous of you,” Stella said.

“Yeah. Is that why she wants to talk now? To gripe at me?”

“Hmm. Could be. What do you think you’ll do?”

Lynnleigh thought for a moment. “Probably ignore it.”

“Might be best,” Katie said. “Hey, you could even block her number.”

Lynnleigh vowed to think it over, but then tried to forget all about it. She wanted to enjoy the afternoon now that they were finished with school for the day. She decided not to tell Campbell, either.

This would remain her little secret for now.

But deep down, she was worried.

What on earth was Mallory up to?

Chapter Thirty-Six

Thanksgiving rolled around and Lynnleigh was excited to celebrate the holiday with her new friends.

They were starting to feel like family, and after a series of conversations with Campbell, the couple decided to move there permanently. It would take some work back in New Hampshire, shutting his practice down, packing up their stuff, and saying goodbye to friends and family, but both felt it was worth it.

“What has you more excited—Thanksgiving or moving here?” Campbell asked as they walked to the community center.

“I love it all! And I’m excited that school is on a holiday break,” she said.

He chuckled. “That school has done you Littles a lot of good. This town, too. From what I hear, trouble has been kept to a bare minimum. By the way, you did good on your report, kiddo. I’m proud of you. And I bet you will think twice about doing anything that might break a bone.”

They arrived at the community center to see the large dining hall adorned with pumpkins, colorful fall leaves, and other seasonal decorations. The aroma of all the food had everyone’s mouths watering.

“I want some glazed ham,” Lynnleigh said.

“Me, too,” Campbell said. “With a whole bunch of turkey. And is that homemade rolls I smell?”

They stopped in front of the dessert table and surveyed the assortment of sweet treats.

“May I skip my meal and go straight for pie?” she asked.

He chuckled again. “Not hardly, little girl. Come on. Let’s go find a seat.”

The Bigs and Littles were happy to see the couple, and plenty of hugs and handshakes were exchanged. They sat on

the end of one of the long tables, near Dax and Stella, Katie and Bradley, and Eli and Nancy.

Harrison and his wife and Mommy, Diana, were nearby, as was Stryker and his wife and Mommy, Amelia Pine. Once again, Lynnleigh was shocked by how many famous people were around that town. Amelia was one of the biggest movie stars on the planet. Who would have guessed that she was a Mommy, too.

A moment later, another man wearing a marshal's badge appeared with his Little. He was a powerfully built Black man, with a bald head, and lots of rippling muscles. He wore an easygoing smile. His wife and Little was as cute as could be, wearing a pink, frilly dress.

"This is going well," he said to Dax.

"You can say that again. Have you met our latest guests? This is Cambell and Lynnleigh. Guys, this is Bo and Megan."

They all exchanged greetings.

"It's going a little too well," Bo said, keeping his voice low and leaning in so that Eli couldn't hear anything. "That table of pies worries me. Maybe we've just had too many pie fights around here, but that seems like a beacon for trouble. I'm seriously concerned."

"Same," Dax admitted. "But something tells me the Littles will be on their best behavior. I think the school is doing the trick."

A few feet away from them, the Littles were discussing the very same thing. "So we're just going to sit here and obey?" Katie said, shocked.

"Do you want to get into trouble?" Stella asked.

"No. But it seems like the perfect time to try and spy on our Christmas gifts. Everyone is distracted by Thanksgiving. We might be able to get away with it."

"That's the key word," Eli said. "Might. They've been cracking down so hard, it has even me scared." He shook his head. His voice was full of defeat when he said, "I never

thought I'd see the day." He cast a glance over his shoulder. "That table of pies is mighty tempting. They're just asking to be thrown at someone, but we aren't even in a feud with anyone right now. Who am I supposed to toss a pie at?"

"Maybe this is our cue to just enjoy a nice, relaxing holiday free of trouble," Stella said. "And free of spankings!"

"Yeah. Usually, I don't hunt trouble. But this just feels weird," Katie said. "Huh. But you're right. Let's try to enjoy it."

Eli looked back at the pie table one more time. It sure was tempting.

Mighty, mighty tempting.

They were only halfway through the meal, and already Lynnleigh was stuffed.

"You don't want any more candied yams?" Campbell asked her.

"No, thank you."

"But they're your favorite."

"I'm saving room for dessert."

"I gotcha," he said.

He turned his attention to some of the Bigs who were sitting around them, picking up where their conversation had left off. Lynnleigh started talking to the other Littles, but her phone vibrated twice, alerting her to several messages. She finally checked the screen again, afraid of who was texting her.

Sure enough, it was Mallory.

"What does she want?" she said quietly, with a frustrated sigh.

"Is it her?" Katie said.

"Yep."

"Ugh. You going to read it?"

“I’d block her ass,” Stella said. She then looked quickly to her Daddy to see if he’d heard the curse word. Thankfully, he was too lost in conversation with the other Bigs to notice.

Lynnleigh winced as she read the messages. “She’s...here! In Mountainville. She wants to talk to me in private. But how?”

“That’s impossible. Unless she applied for membership,” Stella said. “But my Daddy made sure no one was arriving today. The city offices are closed for Thanksgiving.”

“Maybe I should go see what she wants,” Lynnleigh said.

“Tell your Daddy.”

“She said not to. That she just needs to talk to me one on one.”

“Alone? Nope. What if this is some kind of trap?” Katie said.

“If you go, we’ll have your back,” Eli said, chiming in for the first time. “We can watch from a distance.”

“He’s right,” Stella said. “We can tell the Bigs we’re just going to walk off some of this food and get ready for dessert.”

“Okay. But what if this is a joke? How does she even know where I am? Unless Campbell told her, but I doubt it,” Lynnleigh said.

“We’ll find out,” Stella said.

They told the Bigs their story about needing a walk and then quickly left the dining hall.

“We’ll sneak out through the back,” Stella said.

“Hey, why don’t you dial us in a group call and then hold your phone casually or something so she doesn’t know we can hear her,” Katie suggested. “But we’ll be listening.”

“That’s a good idea!” Eli said. “Come on. Let’s get in position.”

A few minutes later, after giving her friends some time to get where they wanted to go, Lynnleigh slowly went outside,

swallowing hard as she pushed the door open and stepped into the cold wind.

She looked across the street but didn't see anyone. She looked to her right and then left, finally spotting Mallory. The woman was leaning against a silver car that was parked at the curb. Lynnleigh wondered if this was a bad idea. Nothing good could come from it. Should she go inside and get Campbell?

She pressed on, though. She needed to find out what this was all about.

"Hey," Lynnleigh said.

"Hey," Mallory said.

Lynnleigh thought she caught movement behind the woman, among a cluster of trees. It was probably some of her friends hiding and watching, just in case they were needed.

"What are you doing here?" Lynnleigh said.

"I've been trying to get ahold of you," Mallory said.

The tension between them was so thick, it could've been cut with a knife.

"So you drove all this way?"

"No. I flew and then rented a car."

"Oh. Still a long way to come just to chat."

Mallory sighed. "I didn't come just to chat. I came to...get Campbell."

"What?"

Mallory nodded. "He wants to come home. With me. He's just...too nervous to tell you. He's worried about hurting your feelings and breaking your heart. I'm sorry."

Lynnleigh's mind was reeling. It felt as if the world was spinning and it was all she could do to remain upright. She felt bile rising in her throat. For a moment, she thought she was going to lose her lunch.

"That's not possible," she finally said.

“Lynnleigh, I know this is tough, but you need to accept this,” Mallory said, her tone a tad harsh. “Come on. Did you really think he’d pick you over me? I mean, he did for a little while, but he came to his senses. It’s over between you two.”

Lynnleigh’s heart was beating fast. Panic had a tight grip over her entire body. “You’re lying!”

“How do you think I got in here? I sure as hell didn’t apply. I’m not some freak like you,” Mallory said, shaking her head in disgust. “He asked me to come get him. Gave me his code. We’re leaving this afternoon.” She let a few minutes go by before saying, “Like I said, you need to face the facts. He wants out, he’s just too worried about hurting your feelings.”

“Why are you doing this to me!” Lynnleigh said. She took off running, heading into the park, crying so badly that she could barely stay on her feet.

Mallory smiled before crossing the street and going into the community center.

Now it was time to talk with Campbell.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Campbell asked.

“She doesn’t want you. She’s been trying to tell you, but you just showed up here, assuming she wanted you to be her Daddy or whatever.” Mallory shook her head. “She’s afraid of hurting your feelings.”

“That’s impossible,” he said.

“I don’t know what to tell you. She’s been texting me and calling me, asking for help.”

“How did you even get in here?” he said.

“How do you think? She invited me. Come on, Campbell. She’s not into you.”

“But—”

Before he could say anything else, Eli, Katie, and Stella made their presence known. They had come in behind

Mallory, standing a few feet away behind a wide column in the community center's foyer.

"She's lying!" Stella yelled, pointing a finger squarely at Mallory.

"Who are you?" Mallory said, looking all kinds of offended that someone would dare speak to her that way.

"I'm the one who just heard everything! And guess what, so did our friend," Stella said with a devilish smile. She held up her phone, putting it to her ear. "Did you get all that, Lynnleigh." She nodded as she listened. "We'll be here."

Dax and Bo came around the corner. "Everything okay here?" Dax said.

"Nope!" Stella said.

"This woman broke into Mountainville!" Katie cried.

"I didn't break in. Not really," Mallory said. She looked utterly defeated, knowing her plan had failed. It had been a long shot, anyway.

"How did you get in here? How did you even know where I was?" Campbell asked. "And I want the truth this time." His voice was stern, as if he was talking to a Little who might be about to go over his knee.

Mallory backed up, staggering toward the dining hall behind her. "I sorta guessed your email password. It wasn't hard. It was Lynnleigh's name and birthday." She rolled her eyes and snorted in contempt. "I found your application and all that."

"And what was your big plan? To come here, break us up, and I would just go back with you without ever talking to Lynnleigh, never piecing together the truth?" Campbell said. "Come on. You can do better than that."

"I don't want you back." Mallory practically spat out the words. "I just don't want you with her! You dumped me for *her*? Seriously?"

"Hey!" Katie said. "She's our friend."

"Everyone just calm down now," Dax said.

“Uh, Dax, you-know-who is eyeing those pies,” Bo said, a worried look on his face.

Mallory had backed all the way up into the dining hall now. Eli was smiling, nodding, a faraway look in his eyes as he stood by the pies, watching her.

“Eli, bud, not now. Please! We were so close to having a normal Thanksgiving dinner,” Dax pleaded.

By now, Lynnleigh had arrived. She rushed into Campbell’s arms. “I shouldn’t have believed her, Daddy. She just got into my head.”

“You don’t have anything to be sorry about, kiddo. Daddy’s here. You’re mine forever. Nothing will change that,” Campbell said.

“I gotta do it,” Eli said, picking up a pie and aiming it at Mallory.

Nancy had joined the fracas now. Everyone in the dining hall had stopped eating and talking, all watching the drama intently.

“Eli, don’t you throw that pie!” Nancy said sharply.

“Oh boy. This is spiraling out of control!” Dax groaned.

“Eli!” Nancy snapped. “I said don’t do it, little boy.”

Bo shook his head. “Nance, this day has been tough for him. He’s been like a caged lion at the zoo. Not living his best life. What if we let him have this one and get it out of his system?”

A few tense moments ticked off the clock. Everyone watched with bated breath. “Oh, alright,” Nancy finally said, groaning and slapping her palm to her forehead.

“Bombs away!” Eli yelled.

The pie soared through the air before landing smack in the middle of Mallory’s face with a wet splat. It began sliding down, leaving a trail of cream filling as it descended. She raked her fingers across her eyes and then said, “What’s wrong with this freaking town?”

“You know,” Dax said, “I find myself asking that same question sometimes.” He then smiled. “But nothing is wrong. This is Mountainville. And, in typical Mountainville fashion, we’re celebrating a holiday. Now, it’s illegal for you to even be here without applying, so I can arrest you. But instead, in the spirit of the Holidays, I’ll just ask you to leave.”

She was still cleaning pie off her face, shaking her head in disgust.

“If I may,” Lynnleigh said. “It’s Thanksgiving. No one should be alone today. What if we let her stay? I know she broke the law, but...” She shrugged.

“You would do that for her?” Campbell said, a mask of pride on his chiseled face.

“I don’t think she’s a bad person. She’s just snobby. But maybe she’ll have some fun here. She might loosen up,” Lynnleigh said.

Lynnleigh looked at the crowd, seeing Adam front and center, smiling and giving her a thumbs up.

She gave him one back, silently praying he’d find his own baby girl soon.

Campbell hugged her. “I love you so much, kid.”

“And I love you, too, Daddy.”

“I guess she can stay,” Dax said. “If you’d like, Mallory. But you’ll have to be on your best behavior.”

Mallory was busy sucking pie filling from her fingers. “It’s so good. Oh my gosh. It’s been so long since I’ve had sweets. I need more.”

“Well, you better hurry,” Eli said. “Because I can’t stop myself. It’s a damn pie fight, everyone!”

“No!” Dax, Bo, and Nancy yelled in unison.

“But you can’t get messy!” Mrs. Garrison said, running toward the crowd, waving her hands. “You still have to perform your songs! We’ve worked so hard on them!”

The Littles were all up now, too, rushing the dessert table, chaos having erupted.

“You know what I’m thankful for?” Katie yelled over the raucous chatter. “Anarchy!”

“Woo-hoo!” Stella said, grabbing a chocolate pie from the table.

It was now utter pandemonium.

And it was indeed a typical Thanksgiving in Mountainville.

The End.

Thank you so much for reading,
Cuties.

We'll return to Mountainville—and The Crosslands—soon.
Until then, remember—you are valuable. You belong in this
world!

Have fun, Cuties!

About The Author

Amy Cummings

Amy loves writing fun, sweet Age Play fiction. To learn more, and to join the discussion, check out [facebook.com/groups/welcometomountainville](https://www.facebook.com/groups/welcometomountainville).

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