

TATE

DADDIES OF THE SHADOWS BOOK 8.5

KATE OLIVER

TATE

DADDIES OF THE SHADOWS

BOOK 10

KATE OLIVER

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Written by: Kate Oliver

Cover Model: Kevin R. Davis

Copyright © 2023 Kate Oliver

“ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This book contains material protected under International and Federal Copyright Laws and Treaties. Any unauthorized reprint or use of this material is prohibited. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without express written permission from the author/publisher.”

CONTENTS

[Declan's Coming!](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Trigger Warnings](#)

1. [Aria](#)

2. [Tate](#)

3. [Aria](#)

4. [Tate](#)

5. [Aria](#)

6. [Tate](#)

7. [Aria](#)

8. [Tate](#)

9. [Aria](#)

10. [Tate](#)

11. [Aria](#)

12. [Tate](#)

13. [Aria](#)

14. [Tate](#)

15. [Aria](#)

16. [Tate](#)

17. [Aria](#)

18. [Tate](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Declan's Coming!](#)

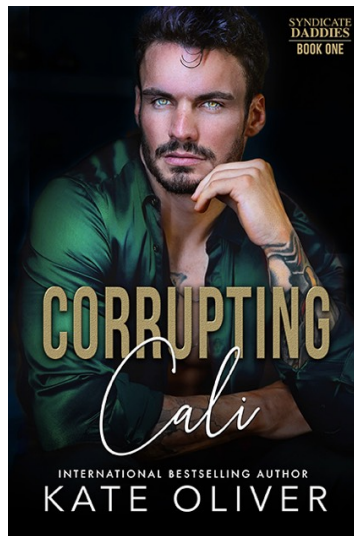
[New Series Announcement!](#)

[Also by Kate Oliver](#)

[Please leave a review!](#)

[Keep Up with Kate on Social Media](#)

DECLAN'S COMING!



Coming September 19th, 2023

[Pre-Order Now!](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my amazing readers,

I just want to take a moment to say thank you. When I started this series, I had no idea how much you all would love this family and it has been such a pleasure bringing each character to life for you.

I hope you'll love my Mafia Daddies (Syndicate Daddies) and Small Town Daddies (Daddies of Pine Hollow) just as much as you've loved these guys. I promise to always strive to create a world just as fun, loving, and fulfilling as this one.

I'm grateful to each and every one of you. The reviews, comments, emails, messages, posts, shares, and everything else you all do. It never goes unnoticed, and I hope you all can feel just how much I love you, because I truly do.

I want to also take a moment to thank the people who have helped me throughout this series. Rose Chaplan, Rhonda Butterbaugh, Pat Bernal Johnston, Sara Webb, Becca Jameson, Cheryl Maddox, Sara Dreps Titus, my entire amazing ARC team and Street team. I couldn't do any of this without all of you.

Love, Kate

TRIGGER WARNINGS

This book is a Daddy Dom, little girl, age play romance. Age play falls under the BDSM umbrella. The MMC in this book is a Daddy Dom and the MFC identifies as a Little. This is an act of role-playing between the characters. This is a consensual power exchange relationship between adults. In this story there are spankings and discussions of other forms of discipline. The MFC also wears adult diapers and uses a pacifier, and sippy cup in this story.

Please do not read this story if you find any of this to be disturbing or a trigger for you.

ARIA

What a crummy, bummy day.

Not only had she had the grumpiest of all grumpy customers, but they apparently also didn't believe in tipping any more than five percent. Even after they spilled their soda, complained about the slow service, complained about the food, and anything else they could find to whine about. Sheesh. And she thought she was a baby.

But, despite all that, nothing was going to bring down her mood. Nope. It wasn't. Okay, maybe just a little. She was a little stressed about funds this month and having the terrible tippers didn't make her feel much better about that. It didn't help she had to get two new tires on her car because one got a nail in it and the tire store said it wasn't fixable, and even if it was, her tires were too bald for them to fix it anyway. And of course, she couldn't just have one tire replaced since it was a front wheel drive sedan. So, she had to scrape up the money to get two stupid tires. Why tires were so expensive, she'd never know. They were literally a rubber band but bigger. Unfortunately, because of all of that, she was worried about making rent the first of the month.

It was Thursday, though, and Thursday night was Littles and Ladies' night at The Playground, so women and Littles who were members of the exclusive club got in for free. It was the highlight of her week and it didn't matter if she had to work a five A.M. shift at the diner the next day, she never missed going. She had friends at the club and the playroom for

the Littles was like a dream come true. It was a space she'd only ever be able to dream about having.

Looking into the clamshell container that had been sitting under the warmer for hours because whoever had called and ordered it had never come to pick it up, she wrinkled her nose but took the container from under the heat anyway. She disliked burgers. But she would eat the fries and that would be plenty for her to eat for dinner. It was a free meal and it was hot... okay, it was semi-warm, but she wasn't going to complain. It was certainly much better than having a cup of noodles for dinner.

Waving to her co-worker who was taking over for the night, Aria made her way from the diner to her car. Her sad, sad, little car. It used to be blue at one time. Or gray. She wasn't really sure. It was nearly twenty years old and had about a bazillion miles on it, but it had two brand new tires and got her from point A to point B. Most of the time anyway.

The drive to her apartment took about fifteen minutes and when she pulled into her parking spot, she saw the creepy next-door neighbor standing outside smoking a cigarette with a forty-ounce bottle of beer in his hand. She grimaced and debated staying in the car until he went inside, but she'd tried that before. When the guy was drinking, it seemed his favorite place to chain smoke was right out on the front porch. He gave her the heebie-jeebies and she avoided him like the plague. But there was no way she was letting smokey the bear stop her from going in to shower and change so she could go to The Playground.

Grabbing her purse and the container of food, she got out of the car and made her way to her front door, pretending to be looking through her purse for her keys even though they were already in her hand. Maybe if she didn't look at him, he wouldn't talk to her.

“Hey, Ari,” he slurred.

Her skin prickled and the hair on the back of her neck stood up. She hated when he called her that. She always reminded him her name was Aria, but he didn't seem to care.

Glancing in his direction, she gave him a tight smile and slid her key into the door. “Hey, Lance,” she murmured.

He brought his cigarette up to his lips and took a drag while his eyes roamed over her body. She was pretty sure she vomited in her mouth a little and before he could say anything else to her, she opened the door and hurried into her apartment, closing and locking the door behind her. She didn’t know what it was about that guy, but he really gave her the creeps.

She hung her purse on the hook by the door and took the container of food into the kitchen, standing at the counter to eat it. She didn’t have a dining table and since she lived in a tiny studio apartment barely large enough to fit her queen-size bed, most of her meals, if you could even call them that, were eaten over the kitchen sink.

After eating a dozen or so of the soggy fries, she threw the container away and went into the small bathroom to take a shower. Leaving her hair up in the messy bun she’d worn to work, she stepped under the spray of water and used her bubblegum-scented body wash to lather up her body. Every time she used that body wash, she instantly felt herself falling into her small headspace. And since money was tight, she only used it on Thursday nights. The rest of the time she used a cheap body wash from a dollar store. But Thursday night was her night to indulge.

It wasn’t that she didn’t spend time in Little Space at home because she did. Every night when she went to bed, she slid a pacifier between her lips and snuggled her only stuffie to her chest while she watched an animated movie until she fell asleep. On the rare occasion she could afford a pack of diapers, she’d wear one to bed but that hadn’t happened in a long time. Money had been tight since... well, for a long, long time.

When she finished rinsing herself, she turned off the shower and grabbed a towel to dry herself. Padding out of the bathroom, she went to her dresser and opened the drawers to figure out what to wear. She really didn’t have any clothes made specifically for Littles, but she’d found clothes over the

years from thrift stores that worked and still made her fall into that headspace. She had splurged at one point and ordered a package of brand new panties that were designed especially for Littles. They looked just like little girl panties but were in adult sizes. Not that she really needed adult sizes. She could fit into children's clothes if she wanted to but for some reason, she just never did. There was always something in the back of her mind that thought people would judge her if she brought children's clothes up to the cash register. Why she even cared what anyone thought was beyond her, but she did which was why her Little was only present on Thursday nights at the club and at night when she went to bed.

Appearances matter, Aria.

Her mother's words played in her head. She had no idea why her mother had always said that to her, especially when it felt as though she was completely invisible to the woman. To both of her parents. She couldn't even remember the last time they'd called her. It didn't matter anyway. She wanted nothing to do with them. The only thing that mattered to them was their social lives and what cruise they were going on next. She knew being born had been something they hadn't wanted, and it was obvious every day of her life that she really wasn't wanted there. It was a lonely life but as soon as she'd turned eighteen, she had left their home and been on her own ever since. The past six years had been hard, and she had hoped she'd be more stable by now but unfortunately, that wasn't the case. She still lived paycheck to paycheck and even though she struggled terribly at times, she always made it through, and she didn't have to be around the parents who so obviously had never really loved or accepted her as theirs.

Letting out a sigh, she pulled out a soft pink cotton dress that came down to her mid-thigh. It was long-sleeved so it would keep her warm enough since her legs wouldn't be covered. She matched it with a pair of socks that had ruffles around the ankle and a pair of black Mary-Jane style flats. It was a simple outfit, but made her feel Little and that's all that mattered.

Once she was dressed, she went to the bathroom and pulled her messy bun loose, then combed her hair into pigtails that sat high on each side of her head. She dug through the top drawer of the vanity and found a set of matching pink bows that coordinated with the dress perfectly. After clipping the bows at the base of her pigtails, she looked at her reflection and smiled. It was going to be a good night.

BY THE TIME she got to the club, the parking lot was almost full. That was one thing about Thursday nights, it was always busy. This was good because it meant she had lots of friends to play with inside. Even though she knew lots of the Littles inside, she didn't talk to them outside the club. She wasn't sure why. It wasn't that she was against it or anything, she'd just never gotten around to exchanging numbers or planning playdates. It wasn't like she could invite someone over to have a playdate at her apartment. It was much too small to play in and she was pretty sure if anyone pulled into her apartment complex, they would turn right around. It wasn't really the type of neighborhood that made someone feel safe. But it was what she could afford. Barely.

Grabbing the small fuzzy backpack she was using as a purse for the night, she opened it and pulled out her pacifier tether that had her favorite pacifier clipped to the end of it and clipped the other end to her dress near the neckline. Her pacifier was soothing for her and she used it a lot in the club and at home.

As soon as she stepped inside, the receptionist at the desk smiled kindly at her. "Hi, Aria. I have you checked in. Have fun."

Smiling back at the woman, she nodded and went through the second set of doors that opened to the club. As soon as she stepped through, she was greeted by all the noises you'd expect to hear at a place like that. Cries of pleasure, screams of ecstasy, leather meeting flesh, and just about anything else your mind could think of.

She never lingered in the front part of the club. There was a dungeon area up there and the bar, but the Littles' area was toward the back. Her throat was feeling dry and scratchy for some reason, so instead of heading straight toward her intended destination, she went to the bar to order a cup of water to take with her. There were always pitchers of water in the Littles' area, but she wanted ice in her drink to soothe the scratchiness. She was sure it was just allergies. There had been so much pollen in the air lately and she'd been out of her allergy medication for weeks.

The bartender greeted her warmly. All the employees at The Playground were always so kind yet protective of their members. There had never been a time she'd felt unsafe there.

After she got her ice-cold cup of water, Aria turned to make her way toward the Littles' area when she bumped into a man, causing him to drop his drink. Shards of glass exploded the moment it hit the ground. She gasped and jumped back, spilling her own drink.

"I'm so sorry!" she cried out.

The man looked more alarmed than angry, but she couldn't figure out why. She wouldn't blame him if he were mad at her. She hadn't looked where she was going. Tears immediately started falling from her eyes. She couldn't afford to replace his drink or the glass, and she was surely going to get kicked out of the club and never be able to return. Why hadn't she just looked where she'd been going?

"You're bleeding. Don't move," he said quickly.

Before she realized what was happening, she was being carried through the club with blood dripping down her shin, staining her white socks. The searing pain of the cut started registering, making her cry more, though she was trying her hardest to keep silent so she didn't cause a big scene and embarrass herself even more. The man carrying her walked into a large office where two men, who she was pretty sure were the owners, stood from their desks.

"Chase, what the... Oh, fuck, she's bleeding," one of the men said, shooting up from his desk.

The man carrying her set her down on one of the large leather couches. “We bumped into each other and I dropped my glass. It broke and I think a shard went flying into her leg. She needs to go to the ER. It looks deep.”

Her eyes widened. She couldn’t afford the ER. No way. Not happening. She’d put a bandage over it and call it good. Maybe. She might need about a dozen bandages. Letting out a ragged breath, she wished more than anything she had her stuffed bear to hug.

“I don’t wanna go to the ER,” she whimpered.

Not that it mattered because suddenly she had three large men standing in front of her arguing about whether to take her to the ER or urgent care. She wasn’t going to either, so it didn’t matter.

Then one of the men snapped his fingers. “Tate is here tonight. He’s in the Littles’ area. I’ll go get him and have him take a look.”

She shook her head. “I can just go home and clean this up.”

When she tried to stand, she faltered when three sets of eyes stared at her sternly. Then one of the men disappeared from the room.

“No ER. I’ll be fine. It’s just a little cut,” she said through trembling lips.

It was a big cut. A big, bloody cut that hurt, and all she wanted to do was burst into big, ugly tears.

The man, Chase, who had carried her in shook his head. “That isn’t just a little cut. You need at least ten stitches plus there might still be glass in there. It’s my fault. I’ll pay for your ER visit. You’re going.”

She looked up at the broody-looking man. He was quite handsome and obviously kind, but he was also sort of terrifying. He definitely didn’t seem to have the sweet side of a Daddy she liked. The man was way too stern. Sniffling, she wiped her eyes. She was so embarrassed that she’d been crying in front of all these good-looking men.

Get it together, Aria. You can't be a baby right now. You have to be a big girl and deal with this.

When the third man returned a moment later, he looked slightly relieved. "Tate is coming. He just ran out to his car for his bag."

Within seconds, another man walked into the room and Aria could swear she stopped breathing. The man walking toward her was gorgeous with a capital G. All she could think in her head was what a silver fox he was. Holy wow.

He smiled at her and walked closer until he was only a few feet away and then knelt in front of her. "I'm Tate. I'm a doctor at Seattle Memorial. It looks like you got a pretty bad owwie."

Tate's gentle words and kind smile caused her to promptly burst into tears.

TATE

Good God.

He thought the day would never freaking end. What started out as a slow day in the emergency room quickly turned into casting up a broken arm, removing a fishing hook from a man's cheek, dealing with a screaming toddler while he fished out candy from the kid's nose, helping deliver a baby in the back of an ambulance because that baby didn't want to wait a second longer to join the world, stitching up a cut on a drunk guy's head because apparently skateboarding under the influence was *so rad, dude*. The drunk guy's words, not Tate's.

That was all before lunch. After lunch, it had been another six hours of ridiculous ER patients who most could have avoided their accidents if they'd just been more careful.

Yeah, he was feeling grumpy. Which was pretty out of character. Not that he was mister sunshine or anything, but he wasn't usually in this foul of a mood. After working as an ER doctor for as long as he had, it was starting to wear on him. That and he was so close to retirement he could taste it. Not that he actually wanted to retire. No, he actually loved being a doctor and helping people. But the thought of slowing down and maybe working part time sounded more appealing. He enjoyed the times he got to have patients who weren't quite so much work. Like his friends' Littles. He loved when he got to go take care of them. Then again, those Little girls were always sweet and playful and put him in a good mood just by being around them.

Was having a doctor's office just for Littles a thing? Hmm... Maybe he was on to something. He already had a medical room set up in his house for when his friends got into a pickle and needed emergency medical care without going to the hospital and dealing with paperwork. That was a whole explanation for another time as to why he did that, even though it was definitely against doctor code. His view on it was he was still saving people, even without a paperwork trail, and that was the most important thing.

After climbing into his SUV, Tate sighed. Even though work had been exhausting, going home to his big empty house held absolutely zero appeal. Maybe that was why he worked so much in the first place. To keep himself busy so he didn't have to be home alone.

Now that his daughter was in her twenties and living on her own with her boyfriend, she was busy with her own life and he didn't want to intrude. He was proud of her for overcoming the trauma she'd faced when she'd been kidnapped for ransom. After that had happened, Tate wasn't sure she'd ever trust another man besides him but then she'd met Gary, her now boyfriend, and Tate liked the guy. Gary seemed to truly care about Valerie and that's all he ever wanted for his daughter. Even if it meant he didn't see her as much.

Starting the engine, he drove through the busy Seattle traffic while lost in thought. Maybe he was just feeling lonely because it had been so long since he'd had sex. Two years was definitely a record for him. But his last relationship had ended, he'd lost all interest in dating. Being constantly used, manipulated, and gaslighted sort of did that to a person. Then again, the only woman in his life who had never seemed to care about his money was his daughter.

Lately, he'd been around his friends' Littles quite a bit because of various injuries and colds and he was pretty sure that's what was making him feel even more alone than usual. Being around Littles made him happy. He loved their innocence and their naughtiness. He loved how they soaked up the care they needed while being a little extra clingy. It was

sweet and it made him feel light inside. Being a Daddy was something that had been a part of him for as long as he could remember. Unfortunately, he couldn't even remember the last time he'd come across a Little to date who was interested in him for anything more than his bank account and social status.

Maybe he could make a trip to The Playground to at least surround himself with some Littles. Only a few people there knew who he was and what he did for a living. That was the wonderful thing about adult clubs. They kept people's private stuff private. Unless he told someone he was a wealthy doctor, no one would have a clue. And maybe, just maybe, he could Daddy someone for a night. It didn't even have to be sexual. One night stands were definitely not at the top of his list of things he enjoyed. He liked having more of a connection with someone. But helping a Little enjoy their time more in Little Space? Yeah, he could get behind that.

Mind made up, he drove home and went inside to shower and change. He always changed out of his scrubs before leaving the ER, but he preferred to shower at home.

After stripping out of his clothes, Tate looked in the mirror and winced. He certainly wasn't getting younger. If he got any more gray in his hair or beard, he really would start looking like Santa Clause. A much fitter version of course because lucky for him, he never really craved sugar, and working out was his own personal therapy. But still. Maybe he needed to start using some of that Just For Men stuff. But even if he did, the creases in his forehead and the crinkles at the corners of his eyes would give away his age. Not that he felt old. He didn't. Hell, he could run marathons around most people half his age. But that was the trouble with aging. While the mind felt young, the physical stuff changed whether you liked it or not. He wasn't liking it.

Tate spent a few minutes trimming his beard, making sure it was even on both sides. Everyone always thought men with beards were too lazy to shave but if they knew how much trimming, edging, and sculpting went into having a beard, they wouldn't have anything to say. Sometimes he considered shaving it all off, but he couldn't remember the last time he

didn't have a beard, and he was a little afraid to see what was underneath all that hair.

Finally giving up on trimming all the stray hairs he was seeing, he turned on the shower and waited until the water got hot before he stepped in. Not only had this day been a clusterfuck, but honestly, the whole week had been and he really just needed to blow off some steam. Of course, his version of blowing off steam was probably different than most guys. Most guys probably liked to have some beers or a hard fuck and while both sounded good, his way of blowing off steam was to assert his Daddy side. Maybe he should ask Jace or Zane, the owners of The Playground, if he could sign up to be a monitor in the Littles' room once a week or something. The monitors were there to not only protect all the Littles' but also help them regress and have the best possible time there. The men did a great job running the club which was probably why it was so successful.

By the time he walked into the club, it was already busy. He'd forgotten about Thursday being Ladies and Littles night. Maybe that would work out in his favor, though. Hopefully there'd be a bunch of unaccompanied Littles who were looking for a caregiver for the evening.

Skipping the dungeon and bar area, Tate went straight to the Littles' area. He didn't even need to go through the door before he could hear the squeals and giggles of Little boys and girls having a good time. One of the room monitors smiled and nodded at him when he walked in. Staying off to the side where a bunch of comfortable chairs were lined up for caregivers who wanted to keep an eye on their Little while they played, Tate went to sit down but some familiar faces caught his eye.

“Hey, guys.”

His friends, Knox, Wolf, Beau, and Ash looked up and nodded, greeting him back.

Knox reached out to shake his hand. “Tate. How's it going, man? Haven't seen you here in forever.”

Shrugging his shoulders, he turned his attention toward where the men were looking. All four of their Littles were sitting in a circle with several others playing some sort of game. "I just needed to be around some Littles."

Wolf grunted. The guy's name was a perfect fit for him. He was hairy, and growly, and he looked like he belonged in the wild. He was a good man, though. Tate liked him a lot.

He sat with the other men for over an hour just watching the room. There were several Littles who were obviously unattached but none of them really caught his eye. One was being a total brat and one of the room monitors had to send her to the corner. Tate didn't care for brats. Not that there weren't times to be naughty or playfully bratty, but the ones who were constantly being bad for attention just wasn't his thing. He could spank as well as the next Daddy, but he wasn't the type that wanted to constantly have to spank someone. Everyone was different in their likes and dislikes and he was old enough and wise enough now to know what he liked.

Suddenly, the door opened and Zane, one of the owners, walked in looking around the room frantically. When his eyes landed on Tate, he beelined for him. "Tate, I'm so glad you're here. One of the Littles got cut on her leg and I was hoping you could come look at it?"

Doctor mode kicked in and he was immediately on his feet following the younger man out of the room. "I need to grab my bag. Where is she?"

"In our office," Zane replied.

Tate hustled out to his SUV and grabbed the bag he kept supplied with just about anything he could need for a minor emergency and jogged back into the club. As soon as he walked into Zane and Jace's office, his breath was suddenly stuck in his lungs as he stared down at the saddest looking Little girl he'd ever seen.

Her chestnut brown hair was pulled up into pigtails and her pouty lips were trembling, but he could tell she was trying to put on a brave face in front of the three other men in the room. She was tiny. Too tiny. Definitely underweight.

Lowering his eyes, he saw the gash on her shin and winced. It was definitely a cut that needed to be looked at. She needed stitches for sure.

Taking a step forward, he smiled down at her and when he was close enough, he knelt down so he was at her level. Her baby blue eyes were wide and frightened and it pulled at his heartstrings. She was young. Very young. He knew the club was for people twenty-one and older, but he guessed she wasn't much older than that and he felt like a dick for being so attracted to her. She was probably younger than his daughter.

He also realized the third man in the room was probably her Daddy. Although, Tate wasn't really impressed that the guy was standing back with a stern expression on his face instead of sitting next to the Little girl and comforting her the way a Daddy should.

He found himself narrowing his eyes at the man but quickly caught himself and turned back to the Little one in front of him. Putting on his neutral doctor expression, he gave her a reassuring smile. "I'm Tate. I'm a doctor at Seattle Memorial. It looks like you got a pretty bad oowie."

That plump bottom lip of hers quivered and then she burst into tears before him. Resisting the urge to pull her into his arms, he looked at her Daddy and then back at her. "Do you want your Daddy to hold you while I look at your leg?"

Big wet tears rolled down her cheeks and she seemed to cry harder. "I don't have a Daddy."

Wait, what? Had he heard her right? And why was his blood pumping faster? Whatever the reason, this sweet baby girl needed comfort and he wasn't just going to ignore her obvious need. Moving over to the couch, he sat next to her and wrapped his arm around her shoulders, stroking her hair. The cut on her leg wasn't bleeding nearly as bad as it looked based on her blood-soaked sock, so she wasn't losing a bunch of blood. The clean-up and stitches could wait until she was calmed down.

"I got you, Little one. Shh. I'm sorry you have an oowie, but I'm going to fix it for you and then you can go back to

playing with your friends,” he softly crooned.

Zane brought out a box of tissues and handed it to Tate who pulled out several of them and instinctively started cleaning up her face.

Looking up at the men standing there looking completely helpless, Tate spoke, “I need two big bowls of warm water and an empty bowl. I also need some clean towels. And a sippy cup of water.”

All three of the men quickly nodded and left the office in search of the supplies he needed, leaving the two of them alone.

Her sobs had quieted but she was clinging to him, and it did things to his insides he couldn't even explain. He couldn't remember the last time someone had clung to him like he was their lifeline. Maybe not since his daughter had been a kid?

The thought of his daughter made him wince. This woman was close to the same age. Whatever feelings he was having about her, he needed to chill.

She took a deep breath in and slowly let it out, sniffing softly. He grabbed several more tissues and held them out for her. “There we go. Good girl. Are you okay?”

As she pulled away from his embrace, he felt an immediate sense of loss. One he didn't like. And she still looked so damn sad it made his heart ache.

“I'm sorry I cried on your shirt,” she mumbled.

Smiling down at her, he shook his head. “Don't be. It's just a shirt. How's your pain level?”

“My leg hurts.”

He nodded and got up from the couch, moving over to the front of her again and kneeling so he could look at her cut. “I'm sure it does. You got quite the cut. What happened?”

Sniffing, her bottom lip trembled. “I accidentally bumped into that man and knocked his drink out of his hand. It shattered on the ground and a piece of glass hit my shin.”

Listening to what she was saying, he opened his bag and put on a pair of magnifying glasses so he could check to see if there were any shards of glass still in the wound.

Zane and Jace reappeared carrying bowls and towels, setting them down near Tate. Grabbing the empty bowl, he set it under her leg, propping the heel of her foot on his thigh. He noticed how worn the soles of her shoes were but didn't say anything as he grabbed one of the clean white towels.

"I'm going to run water over your leg to wash the blood away so I can see inside the cut better. It shouldn't hurt too much. Can you be brave for me while I do it?"

He looked up at her where she was staring down at him with her wide blue eyes and noticed a pacifier hanging from the collar of her dress. Was she a baby girl? His blood pumped faster at the thought, but he quickly pushed it away. It didn't matter if she was or not. She was too damn young.

"Maybe suck on your pacifier for comfort? Do you have a stuffie you can hold?" he asked.

She shook her head but Zane stepped forward with a small stuffed toy. "Here, you can hold our Little girl's stuffie. She would be happy to share it with you."

Once she had thanked Zane and had the toy clutched in her arms, she looked down at him again and nodded. "I'll be brave."

Winking at her, he smiled. "Good girl."

ARIA

Despite her leg stinging like the dickens, that wasn't the sensation in her body that she was paying the most attention to. The spot between her legs was throbbing and she couldn't remember the last time she'd ever felt that way toward a man. But the guy in front of her was gorgeous. A total silver fox and he was so gentle and kind, making her feel special in a way she wasn't used to.

“What's your name, Little one?” he asked as he started washing away the blood.

She sniffled and stroked the stuffie's fur. “Aria.”

He didn't look up from what he was doing but she could see a soft smile spread over his face.

“That's a beautiful name,” he replied.

Chase came back with a sippy cup of water and handed it to her. Tate looked up as the cup was passed to her and his expression changed just briefly before he lowered his eyes to the bag sitting beside him. He reached in and pulled out a bottle of orange liquid.

“I'm going to give you some ibuprofen. Do you have any allergies?” Tate asked.

She shook her head, thankful he had liquid medicine. It didn't matter how old she was, swallowing pills was not something she'd ever learned to successfully do.

He used a brand-new syringe minus the needle to measure out the medicine and then looked at her like he was unsure.

“Do you want me to give it to you or do you want to do it?”

Wrinkling her nose, she reached for it. “I think I can do it.”

Medicine in general was not her favorite thing. But it also wasn't his job to do it for her so she took the syringe and held it up to her lips.

“It's orange flavored and other Littles have told me it's pretty good, but you can drink some of your water afterward to wash it down,” he told her.

The mention of other Littles taking his medicine made her tense slightly. Was she jealous that he'd helped other Littles? That couldn't be right, though. She didn't even know the man. For all she knew he had a Little of his own over in the playroom. That thought made her shoulders drop and she realized she was disappointed about that.

Squirting the orange liquid into her mouth, she drank it down and then took several pulls of water from her cup. The cold water was soothing on her scratchy throat.

“Good girl. Sit still for me while I look at your cut, okay? I'm going to shine a bright light into it so I can see if there is any glass in there before I stitch it closed.”

She nodded. She felt comforted by him. Even though all he was doing was his doctor stuff, she was at ease around him. The three looming, silent men in the background definitely did not make her feel relaxed, though.

He must have noticed her tense because he looked back at the men. “I don't need anything else at the moment. You guys don't have to stay. If you could just check in every so often?”

Thankfully, they must have gotten the point that they were being dismissed by the doctor because they all nodded. Chase stepped toward her and smiled. “I'm so sorry about this.”

Widening her eyes, she shook her head. “It was my fault. I wasn't paying attention to my surroundings. I'm really sorry.”

Chase smiled. “It was an accident. I hope you can still have fun tonight.”

She nodded. Tate looked up at Chase, giving him what looked to be a death stare and she wondered what all of that was about, but Chase quickly left the room, leaving the two of them alone again.

It stayed silent between them for several minutes while he used his glasses and a bright light to inspect her cut. He ran water over it several times and kept looking at it from different angles.

“Sorry to take you away from your Little.”

Tate glanced up and pulled off his glasses. “I don’t have a Little.”

Oh, shoot. Maybe he wasn’t even a Daddy. Not everyone who came to The Playground was a Daddy. He certainly gave her those kind vibes but that didn’t mean anything.

“Or sub?” she asked.

Smiling, he shook his head. “None of those things. I’m unattached. I just came tonight because I needed to be around some Littles. It always puts me in a better mood.”

Her skin warmed and she was pretty sure her cheeks turned pink. He was unattached. How was that even possible? Unattached, handsome, and kind. That didn’t seem right. Surely he had women lining up out the door for him. She’d certainly be in that line. Not that he’d ever choose her. He was much too sophisticated and definitely older by a lot. Didn’t mean she wouldn’t fantasize about him. The man was lickable.

“Were you in a bad mood? This probably isn’t helping,” she said, gesturing toward her leg.

He pulled out some gauze and a bottle of clear liquid and smiled at her. “Actually, it is helping. I wasn’t really in a bad mood. It’s just been a crazy week at work and being around Littles makes me feel happy. And helping fix Little girls’ owwies also makes me happy. Although, I don’t like when they get owwies in the first place.”

She smiled, her eyes moving from his down to her leg and then back up to him. Even though she hadn’t even made it back to the playroom, she was enjoying herself, too. Sort of.

Her leg stung and she had a feeling it was going to get worse when he had to sew her cut closed. She winced at the thought.

“I don’t see any glass in the wound so I’m going to clean it out really well and then I’m going to give you some shots to numb the area around it so you won’t feel it while I do the stitches. Can you be brave for me through all of that?”

The way he spoke to her made her want to be brave so she nodded. She wasn’t so sure about the shots to numb it. Needles were scary. But she also had a feeling Tate would try to make it as painless as possible.

One of the men who had been in the room earlier popped in to see if she or Tate needed anything but they both declined and the man left again. She liked being alone with the doctor. It felt intimate in a way. Which was completely ridiculous because he was way out of her league, but she also hadn’t been taken care of like this by a Daddy since she was nineteen so she was soaking up every second of it. Even at nineteen, the Daddy she’d had a long distance relationship with online hadn’t been this sweet and caring.

When Tate gave her the shots around the cut, she whimpered and he looked up at her with concern in his eyes. “I’m sorry, Little one. I wish I could take the pain away.”

Sniffling, she nodded. “It’s o’kay.”

Shoot. She was slipping deeper into Little Space. Injuries did that to her. And this man in front of her also seemed to do that to her. It felt like with him there she didn’t need to try to be a big girl because he was taking care of everything.

“Let’s play a game to take your mind off this,” he offered. “How about I ask you a question and you say the very first thing that pops into your head?”

“Kay.”

He nodded and continued to work. “What’s your favorite color?”

“Pink.”

“Favorite meal?”

“Cookies.”

He smiled and the corners of his eyes crinkled, making him look even more handsome. “Cookies aren’t a meal.”

Obviously, they weren’t a meal for him. He looked like he worked out regularly and probably only ate healthy foods.

“Depends who you ask,” she replied.

Chuckling, he nodded. “Obviously. Okay, favorite animal?”

“Pandas.”

“Favorite drink?”

“Chocolate milk.”

“Favorite movie?”

“Cinderella.”

He smiled. “Why Cinderella?”

“Because everyone was mean to her and treated her like she was invisible except Prince Charming. He saw her and knew she was perfect.”

Eyebrows drawn together, he looked up at her like he wanted to ask another question but then stopped himself and nodded. “All done.”

She looked down and sure enough, her cut was completely clean of blood and sewn shut. She hadn’t felt a thing as he’d stitched it. Weird. His game worked well.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

He nodded. “You’re very welcome. I’m going to tape some gauze over it for tonight so you can go in the playroom and play without getting anything on it but tonight when you get home, I want you to take the gauze off and let it air out. You can get it wet in the shower but no swimming in pools or open water and you should put some antibiotic ointment on it every time you get out of the shower. Okay?”

“Okay.”

She wasn't sure if she had antibiotic ointment at home and she really didn't have any extra money to buy any, but she wasn't going to tell him that. Her money issues weren't his problem.

"Why don't we take off your socks since this one has blood all over it?"

Nodding, she reached down to pull off her shoes but he stopped her. "I'll do it. You sit and relax. Do you have friends here tonight?"

"Sort of. There are some girls I play with sometimes. Addie and Lucy. They are always nice to me."

Tate smiled. "I know both of those girls."

Irritation coursed through her. Did he like those girls?

"I'm friends with their Daddies. They're here tonight. I saw them earlier," he added.

Sheesh. Overreact much?

Although hearing that the women had Daddies did make her feel better. It really didn't matter, though. This man was way older, way more sophisticated. He was a doctor for goodness sake. No way would he be interested in someone like her. Oh, well. It was probably for the best anyway.

"Okay, socks are off. Want to toss them?" he asked.

She really didn't want to because they were her only pair of ruffled socks, but getting blood out of white would probably be hard and he might think she was weird if she said she wanted to keep them. "Sure."

He tossed them in a wastebasket and put the supplies back in his bag before coming back to her. "If you give me a moment to clean up, I'll walk you over to the playroom."

"Oh, okay." She was trying to sound casual but she wasn't sure she pulled it off very well. The thought of him walking her into the playroom just made her feel excited. Like she was walking in with a Daddy of her own instead of by herself like she did every week. Not that he was her Daddy or would ever want to be, but it still made her feel warm and fuzzy.

Tate cleaned up quickly and left his bag on one of the desks before he came back to her and held out his hands. "Hold my hands as you stand. You should be able to walk just fine but I want to make sure you're steady on your feet first."

Eyeing his large hands, she bit her bottom lip and slowly lifted her arms. As she slid her hands into his, she felt a zing of electricity zip through her body, making her nipples bud into hard points and the pulse between her legs became more of a pounding.

Tate held her firmly and gently pulled her up to stand. When she was on her feet and steady, he released her and she felt sad about that. His touch had been so warm and strong. Even though she knew he would never find her attractive or worthy of him, he was still so kind and she didn't feel invisible around him. It felt good. It also felt scary because after tonight she would never see this man again, but she had a feeling he would stay in her mind for a very long time.

"Ready to go play?" he asked.

A slow smile spread across her lips as she nodded.

TATE

She was everything and more. Soft, sweet, submissive, adorable, and there was something else about her that pulled at him. He just couldn't put his finger on it. There was a hint of sadness in those wide eyes of hers. It made him want to know what she was sad about, and he wanted to make it all better. That's what he did. He fixed boo boos and made them better and for her, he wanted to kiss all her boo boos and make them better, inside and out.

When she'd told him why Cinderella was her favorite movie, there'd been something in the tone of her voice that made him wonder if she related to Cinderella somehow. Did she feel invisible? Because there was absolutely nothing invisible about her to him. She was pure beauty and it seemed like that beauty was on the inside just as it was the outside.

Motioning for her to go ahead of him, he followed her in silence as he tried to get his thoughts in order. Ever since he'd walked into Zane and Jace's office, his mind had been a jumbled mess. The only time he'd really been able to turn it off was when he was stitching her up. But that was just something he was able to do when he needed to because of his job. It was what made him a good doctor. He was able to remain focused no matter what was going on around him. She threw him off balance, though, and it was confusing.

The threadbare pink dress she wore swished as she walked toward the playroom and he wondered how young her Little was. Did she have a diaper or pull-up on under that dress or did she play a little older and wear panties? He preferred

Littles who were more dependent on him. A baby girl. But that didn't mean he couldn't compromise.

You don't need to compromise. She's too damn young for you and she wouldn't want an old man!

Letting out a sigh, he wanted to roll his eyes at his brain. It was being very irritating this evening. Thankfully, they approached the playroom door and he stepped forward to open it for her.

She gave him a sweet smile and stepped through the threshold. "Thanks for your help tonight, Tate."

Realizing this was it between them, he smiled and nodded even though that thought made it more difficult to breathe. "You're welcome, Aria. Have fun and be good."

Her smile widened and she walked toward the group of his friends' Littles. For some reason, he couldn't tear his eyes away from her and he was glad he hadn't because before she lowered herself to the ground with her friends, she turned back and looked at him, giving him a little wave.

He knew he should probably call it a night. He'd come to The Playground to be around Littles and he'd gotten the chance to be with the sweetest Little of them all. There was nothing left for him to do but leave. She was gone and the thought of talking to any other Little felt unappealing. But when he went to turn around, Knox, Wolf, Beau, and Ash were all staring at him with smirks on their faces.

"What?" he asked.

All four of them looked away at the same time, shrugging their shoulders and shaking their heads, a couple of them murmuring, "Nothing."

Going over to them, Tate sank down in the chair beside Wolf. He tried to tell himself he was staying to hang out with his friends, but the real reason was the small Little girl on the other side of the room who he just couldn't seem to take his eyes off of. He caught her glancing at him several times, but she'd quickly look away and he didn't know if she was checking to see if he was still there or not. Whatever it was, it

made him feel good that she was seeking him out in a room full of other Daddies. It didn't mean anything but it still felt good.

Beau leaned forward and smirked at him. "So, are you just going to stare at her all night or..."

Rolling his eyes, Tate shook his head. "Shut up. I'm just making sure she's being careful of her cut. She got sliced pretty good."

"Uh huh," Ash replied.

"Don't start. You guys are like a bunch of hens clucking around. Don't you have anything better to do than talk shit to me?" Tate asked.

The four men laughed.

Wolf spoke next. "It's obvious you're attracted to her. Did you at least get her phone number?"

"No. I stitched her up and that was it. She's got to be at least thirty years younger than I am. She's probably younger than my daughter for fucks sake. And there's no way a girl like her would want a washed up old man like me."

All four of his friends stared at him with bewildered expressions.

"First of all, you're as fit as any of us. Maybe not as bulky but you could definitely outrun me in a sprint," Wolf said. "Secondly, who cares if she's younger? Most of our Littles are substantially younger."

Narrowing his eyes at Wolf, he shook his head. "Your Littles are younger by what, ten to fifteen years? She's younger by at least thirty. How would that look if I dated someone close to my daughter's age? Fucking terrible," Tate replied.

Beau was watching the Little girls playing and when he turned to look at Tate again, he shrugged. "Maybe a girl like her needs a Daddy like you. She looks like maybe she's had a rough go. Someone like you might be exactly what she needs. She sure can't seem to stop looking at you."

Tate moved his gaze back to the girls and sure enough, Aria was looking at him. But as soon as their eyes met, she looked away as though she'd been caught with her hand in the candy bowl.

Letting out a sigh, he closed his eyes. "It would never work. Besides, I don't even know if she's looking for a Daddy."

Ash snorted. "That's why there's a thing called words and questions. Didn't you learn that shit in doctor school? Harvard doesn't teach that stuff?"

"I went to fucking Yale, asshole. And we won't see each other after tonight anyway so it doesn't matter. I fixed her cut, that was all. Jesus, you all are like a bunch of hens clucking about," Tate replied.

Just then, Addie came over and whispered something in Knox's ear, making him smile.

"We'll see about ice cream when we get home. Are you having fun with your friends over there?" Knox asked.

Addie nodded. "Yeah. I'm glad Aria came tonight. I didn't think she was going to because she's usually here earlier. Maybe she had to stay late at work."

Knox nodded. "Where did you say she works, Shortcake?"

Oh, hell. Tate wanted to choke Knox. He knew damn well the guy was just trying to pump information about Aria from Addie so Tate would hear it.

"She works at The Kitchen Corner. It's a diner. She said it sucks working there because her boss is kind of mean, though. And she said the food is icky and not to eat there," Addie answered.

"Well, we'll make sure to avoid it. Go finish your game and we'll get going in a bit," Knox said, patting Addie's bottom to get her moving.

As soon as the Little girl was gone, Tate narrowed his eyes at Knox who shrugged and gave him an innocent look.

"What?" Knox asked.

“You know what,” Tate replied.

Knox grinned, obviously pleased with himself. “Yeah, I do know what. But man, that poor Little girl is working in a shitty diner with a shitty boss. I can’t imagine the pay is very good there.”

Ash nodded. “I bet the tips are shit. I wonder if she lives by herself. Doesn’t she usually only come in on Thursday nights? I wonder if it’s because it’s free to get in and she can’t afford to come any other time.”

Tate felt his blood pressure rising. He hated every damn word his friends were saying. Mostly because they had a point. People usually didn’t work at shitty diners unless it was something they had to do. And between the threadbare dress and the worn shoes, he wondered if she was struggling for money.

Shaking his head, he pushed all those thoughts aside. It didn’t matter either way. The last thing he needed was another leach who just wanted him for his money. He couldn’t handle another fake relationship. Of course, he hadn’t realized they were fake in the beginning and then he’d gotten used and emotionally abused. He wasn’t going to let that happen again. Aria’s misfortunes weren’t his problem. He’d helped her with her cut and that was it. There would be nothing more.

“I’m taking off. See you guys,” Tate said, striding out of the room before any of them could say anything.

He didn’t even look in Aria’s direction before he left the room. It was better that way. The woman had gotten under his skin and he needed to move on from it and go back to living the cold, boring, lonely life he’d been living for the past several years. It was just better this way. It was definitely better. Absolutely.

Except the entire drive home, the only thing he could see was her heart-shaped face and those long, dark eyelashes framing those big, sad, innocent eyes.

By the time he got home, he was questioning himself one second and reminding himself it was for the best the next.

He'd only spent an hour with the woman so why was he so worked up about it? Surely by morning he'd forget about her. He just needed to go to bed and forget about everything.

Once he was in his bedroom, he stripped out of his clothes and turned down the covers on his side of the bed. The other side was left untouched as it had been for a long time. He wouldn't wonder what it would feel like to have a woman to climb into bed with each night. Someone to bathe and help brush their teeth and read a bedtime story. Deep down he knew he wanted that. He'd always wanted that. But he'd also been burned one too many times so the thought of attempting something again terrified him.

He climbed into bed and shut off the bedside lamp but even in the darkness he could picture Aria. She seemed so sweet in a way that was different from a lot of Littles he'd dated in the past. For one, her sweetness seemed so real and genuine. But he'd been fooled in the past. And besides, he was still too fucking old for her.

Forcing himself to push thoughts of her out of his mind, Tate tried to sleep. Only, he didn't sleep. Not one damn hour went by through the night that his eyes weren't staring up at the ceiling in the dark, mentally kicking himself for at least not talking to her a little more or asking if she wanted to have a caregiver while she was at the club or asking for her number. Shit. He was really a jackass. And he had just left without saying a word to her. She probably thought he was a dick.

It's better this way.

Yeah. He'd just keep telling himself that. Maybe eventually he'd actually believe it.

ARIA

She'd tried not to be disappointed when she'd turned around and Tate had been gone from the Littles' room. It was ridiculous to think he'd say goodbye or that he would ask for her number or something. He was a doctor and he'd simply done what doctors do. It was nothing more to him. But why did it feel like it was more to her?

When she left the club, she'd given Addie, Kylie, Emma, and Lucy all a hug. She really liked those girls. It was just a shame she didn't have the guts to ask them if they wanted to hang out outside the club sometime. But the four women were already really good friends and as always, Aria felt like the odd one out. Not that they did anything in particular to make her feel that way. They were always kind to her and made her feel welcome in their play group. She just couldn't get past the feeling of not belonging.

As a kid, she'd never felt like she belonged. She was socially awkward and it seemed like whenever she'd thought she'd made a friend, they stopped being her friend shortly afterward. She knew she was a bit strange, but it still hurt. After a while, she'd stopped trying to make friends and just became the invisible kid who other kids knew but didn't know at the same time. She would talk to other kids but never really made friendships. Everything was always kept on the surface.

It didn't help that she was basically invisible at home, too. Her parents hadn't wanted to have kids and she'd been an unfortunate accident. While they didn't exactly treat her badly, they really weren't present for her and eventually, she realized

it was just better to talk to her stuffed panda bear instead of trying to force relationships with anyone else.

Oreo, her stuffed panda, knew all her secrets, though, and even though he was missing an eye and one of his ears was torn, he was still her very best friend. Best friends didn't turn their backs on each other, even once they became a little ratty.

Her car sputtered and groaned as she started it in the parking lot and by the time she got home, she had tears rolling down her cheeks. It was so stupid. Why was she even crying? Despite having to get stitches, she'd had a good time at the club. For some reason, it kind of hurt her soul that Tate had just slipped out without saying anything. She knew it was ridiculous to think she meant anything to him, but they'd spent time together and he'd asked her questions and they'd sort of gotten to know a few things about each other.

He said he didn't have a Little or sub in the club. Maybe he was married and had a wife at home and just came to the club to hook up with people. Even as she was thinking it, she knew it wasn't true. Tate didn't seem like the type of man who would hurt a woman. He seemed kind and genuine and caring. All the things she wanted in a Daddy of her own.

It wasn't hard to tell they were from two different worlds, though. His clothes, even though they were casual, looked expensive. The watch he wore looked like it cost more than her car. He was a doctor, for goodness sake. Of course, he made good money. He'd been to college, medical school, and who knows what other schooling he had. She only had a high school diploma, and she was just a crummy waitress at a rundown diner, barely making ends meet. Yeah, two totally different worlds.

After she was changed out of her dress and into a long nightie with a cupcake on the front, she crawled into bed and pulled Oreo close, telling him all about her night. As always, Oreo listened to every single word, though she wasn't totally sure he could actually hear everything since one of his ears was ripped. Poor guy. Either way, she felt a little better after pouring her heart out to her best friend. After that, she lodged her pacifier between her lips, closed her eyes, and thought

about the silver fox of a man who'd made her boo boo feel all better. It took a while but eventually she drifted off to sleep, pretending her back was pressed up against Tate's warm body instead of the spare pillow she'd lodged behind her.

FIVE DAYS HAD PASSED and she thought she would have forgotten about the hot doctor who had stitched her up and made her feel all better. The same man who held her close when she cried and wiped her snot and tears without even blinking an eye. But noooo. The man was in her mind practically every waking hour. And sometimes in her dreams.

Work had been crap. She was really starting to think she was going to have to get a second job. Not that she really had time for that. She already worked full time at the diner and was often exhausted from running her butt off all day long, but for some reason she was just not making very good tips despite the extra wide smile she gave customers and the overly polite customer service she gave to everyone who entered.

Standing at the register, she was frowning at the money she had in her hand that she was putting into the cash drawer. Pulling out the change that was supposed to be her tip, she took in a deep breath. Three dollars. From a table of five people, she got three whole dollars. Tears threatened to fall. Rent was coming due and she was still short. If she didn't make some money this next week, she was going to be out on the streets.

The sound of the doorbell had her looking up and suddenly she couldn't breathe. Tate stood in the doorway looking around and when his eyes landed on hers, he smiled. She tried to smile back but she was frozen in place. The man stuck out like a sore thumb. He had on a white button-down shirt that was tucked into his dark jeans and a pair of nice shoes. Way too put together for a dive like The Kitchen Corner.

When he walked toward her, she forced herself to swallow as she closed the cash drawer.

“Hey, you,” he said.

She smiled, though it was a weak smile. “Uh... h-hi.”

Tate chuckled and looked around again. She wondered what he was doing there because she was pretty sure it wasn't the kind of place he would dine at on a regular basis. But it had to be purely coincidence because she'd never told him where she worked. So obviously, he was there to eat and not to see her. Realizing that, she walked around the counter.

“Let me get you a menu. You can sit anywhere,” she murmured as she walked past him.

Tate found a booth and sat down. There wasn't a booth in the place that didn't have rips in the seat, but he didn't seem bothered by it as he leaned back and watched her with those gorgeous gray eyes as she approached. Suddenly, she wished she hadn't been too tired to put on a little makeup or do something with her hair besides throwing it up on top of her head in a messy bun. Running a hand over her hair to smooth it, she smiled and set the menu in front of him.

“Can I get you something to drink?”

She hoped like hell he couldn't hear her voice shaking as she spoke. She was just so caught off guard and he looked so delicious she could hardly concentrate. Especially when she looked down and noticed his shirt sleeves rolled back to his elbows, exposing his muscular forearms. She had no idea how old he was, but the man was fit.

His eyes moved from the menu in front of him up to where she was standing and when he met her gaze, her knees wobbled slightly.

“Can I have an iced tea, please?” he asked.

Nodding, she scurried away, happy to get away from him so she could cool her jets for a moment. Whenever she was close to him it was almost as if she could feel his heat on her skin, and all she wanted to do was crawl onto his lap so he could hold her. Yeah, in her dreams. There was no way that would be happening.

She checked on a couple of tables on her way back to make his iced tea and even though her back was to him, she could feel his eyes on her body. It was a strange feeling. He was watching her, but why? Was he judging her for working in such a crappy place? The thought made her deflate a little. Of course, he was judging her. Not that she'd faked any sort of sophistication at the club, but this was just confirmation to him that she was nowhere near his level on the playing field.

Forcing her shoulders back, she held her head as high as she could when she dropped off his drink. "What can I get for you?"

Tate paused and looked up at her, looking as though he wanted to say something but then shook his head and looked at the menu again. "Can I have the club sandwich, please?"

Jotting it down on her notepad, she nodded. "Fries or salad?"

"Fries."

Her eyebrows shot up. She was a bit surprised by his choice. The man didn't look like he ate anything fried or greasy.

Tate chuckled. "It's been a hectic week at work. I've earned some carbs. How's your leg doing? Let me take a look at it."

A blush rose to her cheeks as she shook her head. Of course, she wanted him to take a look except her legs were hairy and she wasn't sure she could handle his hands on her again. "It's fine. No need... Thank you, though. I'll go put your order in."

And then she hurried away from the table before he could say anything else. She continued to avoid his table until his order came up. As soon as she took him his food and asked if he needed anything else, she left him to eat, pretending to be busy.

She didn't really know why she was avoiding him. Embarrassment, probably. Embarrassed that he knew where she worked now. And that she looked run down and tired. And

because she didn't know how to act around him and was probably making a fool of herself, it was better just to keep her distance.

As soon as he'd finished, she took him his bill and smiled. "Thanks for coming in."

His eyebrows furrowed for a second but he quickly relaxed them and smiled at her. "I'm glad I got to see you. Will you be at The Playground on Thursday?"

She could feel her eyes widen. "Oh, uh... yeah. I think so."

Nodding, he stood from the booth. "Good."

Good? Why was that good? Confused, she nodded. "Okay, well, have a good night." And then she hightailed it away from him.

A few minutes later when she heard the doorbell chime, she looked over and confirmed it was Tate who had left. She stood behind the counter, breathing deeply as she watched him get into his fancy SUV and drive out of the parking lot.

Finally, she grabbed a clean rag and went to his table to clean it. When she picked up the bill and cash he'd left, she gasped. He'd left her five hundred dollars. On a fifteen-dollar bill. What the hell? She swayed slightly and ended up sitting in the booth where he'd been sitting, his warmth still radiating from the cheap plastic booth covering.

Why would he leave her that much money?

Because he thinks you're poor and he feels sorry for you.

Well, she was poor. And the money he left would make it so she could cover her rent and buy a few groceries. But she couldn't accept that kind of money from him. He was a stranger. She stared at the crisp bills sitting on the table in front of her and tried to figure out what to do. It wasn't like she knew his phone number or where he lived. She couldn't just take the money back to him. She also really did need the money if she wanted to pay her rent.

From the corner of her eye, she saw someone at one of the tables raise his glass to her and shake it so the ice rattled, a

clear signal that he wanted a refill. Letting out a sigh, she grabbed the five one-hundred-dollar bills and put them in her apron. She'd figure out what to do later. If she was going to give this money back to him, she needed to keep trying to make better tips.

EVEN THOUGH IT was her favorite day of the week, she was debating whether to go to the club. For some reason, she was completely exhausted and her throat was still scratchy. She knew it was allergies and after paying her rent thanks to the money Tate had tipped her, she still had seventy-eight dollars left. She knew she should buy some allergy medicine with it, but knew she would probably regret splurging on something like that. Besides, she really needed to put gas in her car and get a few groceries, too. Allergy meds would have to wait. It's not like she would die from having a scratchy throat.

Letting out a sigh, she sat on her bed wrapped in a towel and looked around her small apartment. As much as she wanted to just crawl into bed and sleep, she also didn't have to miss going to the club. Since she could only go once a week, she knew if she skipped it this week she would regret it. Maybe she could just curl up in the reading corner and read some books instead of playing all night. Yeah, that sounded like a good plan.

Forcing herself up from the bed, she went and found a soft dress to wear and slid on the same shoes she'd worn the week before. She'd had to clean some blood off them, but they were the only shoes she had for her Little, so they had to do. Since Tate had thrown out her bloody socks, she wore the shoes without any. They still looked cute and she still felt Little, so that was all that mattered.

Standing in front of her bathroom mirror, Aria brushed her hair into a high ponytail and added a white bow to the base. Usually, she preferred pigtails but she was just too tired to mess with getting them straight. A regular ponytail would have to do tonight.

Once she was all ready, she grabbed her purse and went out to her car to make the drive to the club. Traffic was light for a Thursday, and she made it to The Playground in twenty minutes. As usual, the parking lot was pretty full. The receptionist smiled at her when she walked in and waved her through. Instead of stopping at the bar this time, she made her way straight back to the playroom.

Pulling the door open, she walked through the threshold, her eyes immediately landing on Tate who was sitting in one of the leather chairs situated along the wall. As soon as he saw her, his eyebrows furrowed and he stood. She nibbled on her bottom lip as he walked toward her with a look of concern on his face.

“Aria,” he said softly. “Are you okay, honey?”

He stopped just in front of her and reached out, pressing the back of his hand against her forehead.

Confused, she nodded. “I didn’t know you were gonna be here.”

“I came hoping to see you. Are you okay? You don’t look well.”

Well, that wasn’t very nice of him to say. Was he saying she looked like crap?

Before she could respond, he took hold of her hand. “Come with me.”

Without hesitation, she followed him through the playroom toward the doorway that led into another room for Littles. This room was meant for Littles who were more like babies, but it was much quieter and less crowded in there and the lighting was dim.

He led her over to one of the glider rockers and motioned for her to sit down while he knelt in front of her.

“Are you feeling okay? Have you been sleeping? You look exhausted, baby girl.”

Baby girl. Her breath caught in her throat at the nickname. She loved being called that. But she was pretty sure she’d only

like to be called that by him.

“I’m just tired,” she murmured.

Furrowing his eyebrows again, he tilted his head. “Does your throat feel okay? Your voice sounds strained.”

Shrugging her shoulders, she looked away from him. “It’s just allergies.”

When his large hand rose to her chin and forced her to look at him, she could see a sternness in his gaze that she hadn’t ever seen on him before. “Have you been tested for allergies? You have dark circles under your eyes. Allergies wouldn’t usually cause that. Have you not been getting enough sleep?”

She stared into his gray eyes and her bottom lip trembled. He seemed so concerned and she wasn’t used to this sort of attention. Silent tears rolled down her cheeks. Why did she always cry around this man?

Tate’s stern expression softened. He stood and lifted her up from the rocker then sat down in it, settling her on his lap and cradling her in his arms. “Shh. I got you, baby girl.”

“I’m just tired but I don’t know why. I slept all night last night.”

He nodded and started rocking her, bringing the back of his free hand up to her forehead again. “I wonder if you’re getting sick. Have you been working too much?”

Shrugging her shoulders, she ran her fingers over one of the buttons of his shirt. “I’ve been taking as many hours at the diner as I can get until I find a second job.”

His arms tightened around her but he didn’t say anything. Instead, he continued to rock her and after a few minutes, she couldn’t keep her eyes open any longer. Before she fell asleep, she felt the soft nipple of her pacifier pressing against her lips. Opening her mouth, she suckled on it and faded to sleep.

TATE

She was light. Too light. And she looked awful. Her skin was sheet white and the dark circles under her eyes were worrisome. The doctor side in him knew she needed to have tests done while the Daddy side of him was just plain worried.

Luckily, the nursery room at the club stayed mostly empty so she was able to sleep in peace. When midnight rolled around, he decided he should probably wake her up. It seemed like she would keep sleeping if he let her.

Stroking her cheek with the back of his index finger, he patiently waited until her eyes fluttered open. Then those eyes widened as she looked around.

“It’s okay, Aria. We’re at the club. You fell asleep. It’s past midnight.”

She wiggled and spit her pacifier out. Since it was attached to a lead that was clipped to her dress, it didn’t go flying onto the floor.

“I’m sorry I fell asleep,” she murmured, rubbing her eyes.

“Don’t be sorry. You needed it. Have you been to the doctor recently?”

Shaking her head, she yawned. “No, I don’t have health insurance.”

His heart tightened in his chest. Tate could tell she was hard up on cash. It was obvious from her worn clothes to the fact she said she was working as many hours as she could and

now having no health insurance. Seattle was an expensive city. One of the most expensive in the United States and rent alone on a one-bedroom apartment often cost over two thousand dollars a month. It was insane. He wondered where she lived and if it was safe and clean.

In his mind, he knew he was too old for her. He knew she could easily find someone closer to her age to Daddy her, but would he give a shit about her well-being like Tate would? Would he want to make sure she lived in a good home and had health insurance? Maybe, but also maybe not.

“Have you been feeling tired a lot lately?” he asked.

“Yeah. I guess so. But it’s probably just allergies.”

“Have you tried taking an allergy medication to see if it helps?”

“Yeah, but I’m all out and I can’t aff—” She stopped talking suddenly. “I’m all out.”

She was still so out of it from being asleep she almost told him she couldn’t afford her medication. Shit. How could he walk away from her? She needed someone to take care of her and he wanted to be that someone. He hadn’t stopped thinking about her since the moment he’d laid eyes on her.

“We’ll get you some more. I have some in my car I’ll give you.”

Her eyebrows pulled together in confusion. “You have allergy medicine in your car?”

Smiling down at her, he nodded. “I’m a doctor. Remember? I carry it in case I’m treating someone who’s having a reaction to something.”

“Oh. But I can’t swallow pills,” she said, her cheeks turning a light shade of pink.

Oh, this baby girl was so damn sweet.

“It’s liquid,” he reassured her.

Most of the Littles he treated despised pills, so he always carried pain reliever, allergy medicine, and cold medicine in

liquid form.

“I missed playing with my friends tonight,” she murmured.

Running his hand up and down her spine, he smiled. “Next week you can play with them.”

Nodding, she met his gaze, her fingers touching the buttons of his shirt. “I’m glad you were here tonight.”

“I’m glad I was, too. I would like to give you an exam and do a blood workup to see why you might be feeling so tired. No charge.”

Her eyes widened. “Why?”

Tilting his head, he brought his hand up to her chin. “Because I care about you and your well-being.”

The expression on her face nearly broke him. She looked completely bewildered that someone told her they cared about her. The thought of Cinderella being her favorite movie popped into his head. Did she feel uncared for?

“It’s late so could we do it tomorrow? I’ll follow you home tonight to make sure you make it safely and then I can give you my number and address and you can come by tomorrow afternoon?”

The pink hue returned to her cheeks. “Oh, you don’t have to follow me home.”

“I’d like to. It’s almost one in the morning. I don’t like the idea of you driving the streets alone. It would make me sleep better knowing I saw you home safely.”

Biting her bottom lip, she slowly nodded. “Kay.”

IT WAS ALMOST one-thirty by the time they left the club. Aria had needed to use the bathroom and there’d been a couple of friends still in the playroom she said hello to.

As they walked out toward the parking lot, Tate wanted to reach for her hand. The need to protect her and take care of her

was so strong. He kept telling himself he would feel this way about any Little who was struggling, but he wasn't so sure that was the honest truth. Of course, he would have compassion for anyone having money problems, but he was pretty sure he wouldn't be going out of his way like he was doing with Aria.

When she approached an older sedan that looked like it had seen better days twenty years ago or so, he inwardly winced. This was what she was driving? Did it even have airbags? Not wanting to embarrass her with those questions, he didn't say anything as she unlocked the driver's side door.

"Give me just a second to get in my car and I'll follow you," he told her.

She nodded and got into her car. He watched as she buckled her seatbelt and then closed the door. Just as he was about to head to his car, she turned the key in the ignition and nothing happened. Tilting his head, he watched as she tried to turn the key again. Dammit. Not only was she driving a death trap, it was also completely unreliable. She could have gotten stranded somewhere dangerous. Hell, the parking lot of the club could have been dangerous if he hadn't walked out with her.

Reaching out, he tapped on the window. She looked up at him with the saddest expression on her face. It killed him to see that. He pulled the door open. "Come on, baby girl. I'll give you a ride home."

Tears filled her eyes as she unbuckled and climbed out of the car. "I don't know why it's not starting."

Shaking his head, he led her to his SUV. "I don't know either. My friend, Hawk, has a garage. I'll see if he can come take a look at it tomorrow."

"You don't have to do that."

Opening the passenger door of his car, he smiled at her. "I know. I want to, though."

As soon as he started his car, he turned on her seat heater and pulled out his phone. "What's your address, baby girl?"

She told him her address and he frowned when he realized he knew the area. It wasn't one of the better areas of Seattle, but he didn't say anything as he started following the directions his phone gave him.

The drive was silent and he hated that. He tried to think of things to say but every time he opened his mouth to speak, he closed it again. But when they pulled up to her apartment, he couldn't stay silent any longer.

"This is where you live?"

Turning her head, she looked at him and nodded. He looked at the rundown apartments. It was a small complex with only twelve units or so. He could see a man sitting outside smoking a cigarette and something inside Tate told him the guy was bad news.

"I'll walk you inside," he said before he realized what he was saying.

"Oh, uh, you don't have to. I'm fine. Thank you for the ride home."

He shook his head. "It's not an option, Aria. I'm walking you in. Is that guy your neighbor?"

"Yeah. He's creepy."

What. The. Hell. That little piece of information didn't make Tate feel any better about leaving her. As he got out of the SUV, he took several breaths, trying to calm his irritation. He wasn't irritated at Aria. He was irritated for her. What had happened in her life that she'd ended up where she was? What could he do to make things better for her?

Nothing. He couldn't do a damn thing. He wasn't her Daddy and he was too damn old for her. Besides, she hadn't even expressed interest in him taking care of her. Tonight had happened because he was a doctor and he knew something was wrong. Right? Yeah, he'd keep telling himself that.

She dug in her purse for her house key as they walked up the broken sidewalk toward the door that was next to where the creep was sitting. Tate kept his eyes on the guy while staying close to Aria, trying to shield her from him. The guy

watched them the entire time, taking a drag off his cigarette every so often. Even though they were fifteen feet away from him, the guy reeked of alcohol.

As soon as her door was open, Tate put his hand on her lower back and pushed her inside, following along with her. She hadn't asked him in, but he wanted the neighbor creep to know someone was in there with her and hope the guy got the hint that she had a man. Not that he was her man, but Tate hoped the guy would think that.

Aria's eyes were pointed toward the floor and it only took Tate one once over of the apartment to know why. She was embarrassed. The place could hardly be defined as an apartment. It was more like a hotel room, though it was obvious she'd tried to make it as cozy as she could. The second thing he noticed was how chilly it was in there. Was she not using the heat because she was worried about the cost? Was she that hard-pressed for money? Which brought him to his third concern. Did she have food in her cupboards?

"Aria," he said.

She looked up at him, her baby blue eyes almost looking as though she was pleading with him.

"Why don't you find some pajamas and go get ready for bed. I don't want to leave until that creepy guy has gone inside."

"Oh. Okay. Thank you," she said softly.

He slid his hands into his front pockets as he watched her dig through a dresser and pull out a piece of clothing before she disappeared into the bathroom. Taking the opportunity to snoop, which he knew was wrong but he didn't give a fuck about right and wrong just then, he took two steps to the right into her small galley kitchen and opened one of the cupboards. Dishes. He opened a second cupboard. More dishes. The third cupboard he opened made his blood run cold. Nothing but a few packets of instant ramen and a can of beans.

Turning around, he opened her fridge and sighed. Nothing but some condiments, a jar of pickles, and a few eggs. He

closed the fridge and walked directly toward the bathroom door, knocking.

“Yes?” she called out.

“I want you to pack a bag and come stay at my house,” he said through the door.

It was silent for a moment before the door swung open and she looked up at him in confusion. “What?”

“I don’t know what’s going on in your life, Little girl, but this is not acceptable. This apartment isn’t acceptable, the groceries in your kitchen aren’t acceptable, none of this is okay. Pack some bags. Let’s go to my house.”

It should have been that easy, right?

Putting her hands on her hips, she glared at him. “You looked in my fridge?”

Shoot.

“Yes. I did. I was worried that you didn’t have groceries and I was right. Come on, baby girl. You’re not feeling well, your car isn’t running, you have some creep outside your apartment, and you have no groceries. Please come to my house so I can help you. I don’t want to leave you here. I have plenty of room at my place.”

She was still glaring at him, and he would have thought she was about to scream at him except her bottom lip trembled and he realized she was crumbling. Tears began to fall and he couldn’t stop himself from reaching out to pull her into a hug. He didn’t know what would come of all of this but if he could help her get on her feet so she could have a better future, it was something he wanted to do. Even if he ended up with a broken heart in the end. Because he had no doubt if he spent enough time with her, he would fall for her, and that was exactly what he didn’t want to do.

ARIA

She knew she'd heard him right, but she still couldn't quite believe her ears. He wanted to take her home? But he'd made it perfectly clear it was because he was worried about her and not because he wanted to be her Daddy or anything. There was a fat chance in hell he would ever want that.

The fact that he cared about her safety and well-being was touching, and even though she hadn't gotten the chance to play with her friends at The Playground earlier, she'd still had an amazing night. No one had ever held her like that. Like she was a precious baby girl. It was everything and more than she could have ever dreamed of.

But the only reason he was asking her to come to his house with him was because he was kind and a doctor, and she was pretty sure doctors had some kind of oath they had to do that said they would look out for people or something. She didn't really know but that made sense. At least she tried to tell herself it did because the thought of him actually wanting her in his home was something she couldn't believe. No one had ever really wanted her. Why would he? She needed to give him an out so he could go home and go to bed and forget all about her.

"Tate, I'm fine. I, uh, I was planning to go grocery shopping tomorrow."

That was a lie, but he didn't need to know that. But the look he gave her told her he knew she was lying through her

teeth.

“Little girl, pack some clothes. You’re coming home with me tonight. It’s two in the morning. It’s past your bedtime and I’m not arguing with you about this. Do you not feel safe with me? Because if you don’t feel safe then I’ll pay for a nice hotel for you to stay in until we figure out a plan.”

Tilting her head, she stared up at him. “I feel safer with you than I’ve ever felt with anyone.”

His gray eyes went from irritated to smoldering in the blink of an eye. She did trust him, though. That was the truth. He’d been nothing but kind and caring and he didn’t give her creepy vibes like he just wanted to have sex with her.

His warm hand stroked her cheek. “Come on, sweet girl. Let me take care of you.”

Her resolve disappeared into thin air and she sagged into his touch. All she’d ever wanted was someone to take care of her. Someone who wanted to take care of her. Not because they had to but because it made them happy. Finally, she nodded. “Okay. But only for tonight.”

He didn’t respond to that. Instead, he told her to go pack some clothes and anything else she needed.

“Do you need any help?” he asked.

“No. You can just sit. I’ll try to hurry.”

Tate sat down on the edge of her bed, dwarfing it. His broad shoulders and muscular arms were massive, and his legs looked just as impressive as well from what she could see through his jeans. The man was sexy as hell. Not that she should have been thinking about that since he was simply taking her to his house because he felt sorry for her, not because he wanted her in any other way.

She grabbed a backpack and shoved some clothes into it before heading into her bathroom and grabbing her toothbrush, hair brush, and other hygiene essentials to last her a day or so. Once she put those in her backpack, she stood awkwardly, looking around the room.

“I think I’m ready,” she murmured before she realized she hadn’t packed Oreos. She quickly went to the bed and grabbed the scraggly bear. Tate just smiled but didn’t say anything. Instead, he stood and grabbed her backpack before leading her out of her apartment.

She’d be lying if she said she wasn’t excited about seeing Tate’s home. Obviously, it would be much nicer than her place, but she mostly wanted to see what he was like in his own surroundings. Was he messy or clean? Did he have any décor on the walls? Did his entire house smell just like him? So many questions swirled in her mind.

When they stepped out of the apartment, she was glad to see her creepy neighbor had gone inside. The way Tate had gotten so protective over her because of him was so sweet and had made a fire ignite low in her belly. Why was it so hot when men got all protective and alpha like that? Whatever the reason, it made her panties wet.

Tate held the car door open for her and waited until she had buckled herself in before he closed it. She almost thought he was going to reach in and buckle her himself, but he’d paused and waited so she ended up doing it.

When he climbed into the driver’s side, she looked over at him as he expertly started driving through the city.

“Do you live by yourself?” she finally asked.

His eyes looked sad as he glanced over at her. “Yes. I have a daughter, but she’s grown up and living with her boyfriend.”

She nibbled on her bottom lip. “How old is she?”

“Twenty-three. How old are you?”

Aria wasn’t so sure she wanted to answer that. Especially since she was only a year older than his daughter. “Don’t you know you’re not supposed to ask a woman her age?”

He looked over at her as they sat at a stop light, one of his eyebrows raised. Gosh, he really could give a stern look when he wanted to. Dropping her shoulders, she sighed. “I’m twenty-four.”

The light turned green and he didn't say anything as he started driving again.

"How old are you?" she finally asked.

"Too old," he murmured.

A moment of silence passed before he spoke again. "I'm fifty-eight."

Wow. She would have never guessed that. The man looked to be in his forties at most. The only thing really giving away the fact he was older was his salt and peppered hair and beard and the tiny lines around his eyes when he smiled. Other than that, he looked like he could be in his thirties.

It was quiet for the rest of the drive and when he turned down a road marked as private, her eyes widened as lighting illuminated the house before them. He reached up to the visor and pressed a button making a metal gate open to let him through as he drove into the large round driveway with a fountain in the middle. To say it was a mansion was putting it lightly. The place could practically be a castle. Okay, not really, but to her it felt like it.

"You live here?" she croaked.

He nodded. "This home has been in my family for several generations. When my parents retired and decided to move somewhere warmer, they passed it down to me."

She knew Tate was probably comfortable financially. He would have to be in order to leave her a five-hundred-dollar tip, but she hadn't expected this. It didn't change her opinion of him, it just sort of surprised her. He didn't act like a rich, stuffy, old man she'd pictured in her head living in a house like this.

When the passenger door opened, she realized she'd been so busy staring she hadn't even seen him round the car to let her out. He held out his hand and waited for her to slide hers into his palm before stepping back so she could climb out of her seat.

After he grabbed her backpack from the back seat, he led her inside what she was pretty sure was a side door of some

sort and from there it was a blur. So many rooms and doors and yet despite the place being so large, it felt so incredibly cozy and warm.

She followed him through a large foyer and then up a grand staircase that Y'd off to both ends of the second story landing.

“This place is so big. Don't you get lonely here?”

The words were out before she'd even thought about what she was saying and when he looked back at her, his eyes were sad as he gave her a slight nod. “I work a lot,” was all he said.

When he stopped outside a door, he turned to her and paused. “I have a Little room. I've had it for years, designed it a long time ago when I thought I'd found my Little, but things ended before she ever used it. It's yours to use if you'd feel more comfortable or I have a regular guest room as well.”

Two things piqued her interest. The first was the Little room. She'd never seen one other than at the club. And the second thing was what his previous Little was like and why it had ended. She also felt a little spike of jealousy over him being with someone else. It was totally ridiculous to feel jealous but for some reason she did. She didn't like the idea of another woman touching Tate.

He opened the door and stepped aside, letting her pass him, and when she took a look around the room, she let out a soft gasp. It was stunning. The most perfect Little room anyone could ever imagine. Not only was it huge, it was inviting and the color scheme was soft and delicate shades of creams and pinks.

Looking up at him, she smiled. “Think you'd mind sleeping in here? Or would you like me to show you the—”

“I love it. I wanna sleep in here,” she said, cutting him off.

Tate chuckled and nodded, stepping into the room. He walked over to the crib and lowered the side rail so it looked like a daybed. “Then I want you to make yourself at home in here. There's a bathroom through there. Go potty and change into your pajamas. I'll wait out here.”

She nodded and took her backpack out of his hands, taking it into the bathroom with her. The first thing she noticed when she looked around was how adorable all the decorations were. The entire bathroom had a rubber duck theme and she loved it. It made her want to get into the enormous tub and play with the family of rubber duckies that were set around the ledge of it. Whoever the woman was that he'd designed this room for was a lucky woman and Aria wondered why they hadn't worked out.

Realizing she was supposed to be changing and Tate was probably exhausted considering it was nearly three in the morning, she hustled to change into her long night shirt and put on a fresh pair of dry panties. Removing the bow from her hair, she tugged it free from the ponytail and leaned over the sink to brush her teeth.

Padding out of the bathroom, she found Tate sitting in the oversized rocking chair in the corner of the room. As soon as he saw her, he smiled and stood and she suddenly felt shy.

“Crawl into bed, Little one. Would you like me to tuck you in?”

Uh, yeah. She wanted that more than anything, so she nodded.

She was also a little scared. Because if he tucked her in, she would like it and then she would want it all the time and he wouldn't want that. And that would hurt. She was already worried that once Tate was no longer in her life it would hurt, and she barely even knew the man.

She walked over to the crib and climbed up. It was higher than she'd expected but she was still able to do it by herself. He'd already pulled the blankets back for her and Oreo was perched near the pillow.

“What's your friend's name?” he asked, motioning toward her panda.

“Oreo,” she answered in a tiny voice.

Even though she'd been going in and out of Little Space all night long, she was definitely deeply submerged in that

head space right then. Exhaustion did that to her.

Tate pulled the blankets up to her chest and tucked them in on each side of her. “That’s a perfect name for her. She’s well loved.”

She smiled and nodded. “She’s been my best friend for as long as I can remember.”

Something flashed in his eyes but was gone in an instant and he just nodded. “Do you work tomorrow?”

“No. Tomorrow’s my only day off.”

“Good. I’m off, too. I want you to sleep in as long as you can. You need to rest.”

She rubbed the soft blanket between her fingers. “Thank you. For everything. For the tip. I’ll repay you. I’m not sure when but I will.”

His finger came to her lips, quieting her as he stared down at her with his gentle gaze. “I don’t want you to repay me. I just hope it helped. I like you, Aria. I like you a lot. I want to help you.”

Searching his face, she saw nothing but genuineness on his features. “I like you, too. I haven’t stopped thinking about you.”

A smile spread across his lips. “Ditto. I wish things were different. I wish...”

Furrowing her eyebrows, she reached out and tugged on his shirt until he looked down at her again. “What do you wish was different?”

“I wish I was about thirty years younger.”

Why would he want to be younger? She quite liked him how he was. His age didn’t bother her. If anything, it drew her to him more. He was a man who knew what he wanted. He was responsible and settled and she liked that a lot. Did he think he was too old for her?

“I don’t. I like you how you are,” she said softly.

Tate let out a soft sigh. “I like you how you are, too.”

Hearing those words did something to her. Her heart beat faster and she felt her breathing go shallow. No one had ever liked her for her.

“You deserve someone who can give you a lifetime of happiness. Someone who can keep up with you and not hold you back,” he added.

Shaking her head, she felt her heart drop. “I don’t think age should be a factor for dating. It’s okay if you’re not interested, though. I understand. You don’t have to use your age as an excuse.”

Turning toward her, he reached out and cupped her chin, holding it firmly in his hand. “Little girl, I’m more interested in you than I can ever remember being interested in anyone else. But it’s my job as a Daddy, as a Dom, to make sure I put your best interest first, and dating someone my age isn’t in your best interest.”

“Isn’t what’s in my best interest something that would make me happy?”

He stared at her for a long moment before he sighed. “You deserve to be happy.”

“You make me happy,” she whispered.

He released her chin and ran a hand over his hair. “You make me happy, too, Aria. I’ve wanted to Daddy you since the moment I saw you.”

Okay, now she couldn’t even breathe. He wanted to Daddy her? For real? That was... shocking. She hadn’t expected him to want anything to do with her. They were so different. She was less worried about their age gap and more worried about the fact that he was educated and successful. She was neither of those things.

“I’ve wanted that, too. I still want that.”

His gray eyes studied her for a long moment but when she yawned, he stood. “We both need to get some sleep. Do you need anything? Water? Your pacifier?”

Shoot. She'd forgotten her pacifier in the bathroom. "My paci is still attached to my dress."

He disappeared into the bathroom and came out with her clothes in one hand and her pacifier in the other. "I'll wash these. If you need anything, I'm just in the next room. I'll leave my door open so I'll hear you if you call out to me, okay?"

"Okay."

He held the pacifier up to her lips and as soon as she opened her mouth and accepted it, he smiled, then paused briefly before he leaned down and kissed her forehead. "Goodnight, Aria," he whispered.

She watched as he made his way out of the room, turning off the overhead light on his way out, and leaving the room dimly illuminated by twinkle lights. As much as she loved this room, she wished she was able to crawl into bed with Tate, but since she couldn't, she closed her eyes and thought of him until she dozed off to sleep.

TATE

Even though he'd been exhausted by the time he went to bed, he still hadn't slept very well. He was worried about Aria waking up in the night and needing him, which was ridiculous because he wasn't even her Daddy. But he couldn't help it. He wanted to Daddy her. Around five in the morning, he'd finally gotten out of bed and went and peeked in on her, happy to see she seemed to be sleeping peacefully with her pacifier in her mouth and her panda stuffie clutched to her chest.

He went back to his bedroom, then into the adjoining bathroom to take a shower. Their conversation about him being older replayed in his head. Did age matter? They were both consenting adults. But even though she was in her mid-twenties, he was still older and wiser and he didn't want to take advantage of her. Not that he would ever do that purposely. But he'd already had a child and been married and lived his life. She was just starting her life.

What would his daughter think of him dating someone close to her age? Would she be embarrassed of him? What would she think of Aria? So many questions swirled in his mind.

Other questions included wanting to know where her family was, why she was in such a financial hardship, and why she didn't already have a Daddy taking care of her? She was beautiful. The type of woman that stopped a man in his tracks when he looked at her, and she had a sweet innocence about her that just added to that beauty. How could an old man like

him even possibly measure up to the men her age? He might have money and nice things, but he couldn't give her children or some of the experiences someone her age deserved.

Letting the shower pound on his flesh, Tate washed his body and contemplated so many different things. One thing he knew for sure was he liked having her in his home. He liked knowing she was tucked in just in the next room and she was safe and taken care of. Would it be selfish of him to ask her to stay with him for a while? He could help her get on her feet and get her set up for a better future, and maybe they could have a temporary arrangement where he would be her Daddy. People had temporary dynamics all the time. It wasn't unusual in the BDSM world.

By the time the water started cooling, he still didn't have an answer to any of the questions that were lingering. Stepping out of the shower, he wrapped a towel low on his waist and walked out to his bedroom, stopping in his tracks when he found Aria standing in the doorway with her bear dangling from her hand as she nervously looked into the room.

“Hey, Little one. Did I wake you?” he asked quietly.

Her eyes roamed up and down his body, making his cock instantly thicken. Unsure of what to do, he stood patiently, letting her get her fill of him. Did she like what she saw? Her sparkling eyes seemed like they were enjoying the view.

“Aria,” he murmured.

Moving her eyes up to his face, she nibbled on her bottom lip and it took everything in him not to walk over to her and tug that plump lip free from her teeth.

“I had to go potty and I thought I heard you moving in here,” she said quietly.

He nodded. “I'm an early riser. Why don't you crawl back into bed? Want me to come tuck you in?”

Her eyes roamed his body again and then flicked toward his bed.

“Do you want to crawl into my bed and watch cartoons while I get dressed?” he offered.

A smile spread across her lips and she nodded. Fuck. He was so screwed, but he just smiled back and motioned for her to climb into his bed. He caught a glimpse of her cotton panties as she crawled on all fours across the mattress to the side he'd slept on. Seeing her there, in his spot, cute as a button, pulled so hard at his heart while also making his cock painfully hard. He needed to get changed before it popped right out of the towel.

He grabbed the remote and quickly found a cartoon channel before disappearing into his walk-in closet. Silently scolding his cock, Tate got dressed and took a few extra seconds to take several deep breaths before he walked back out to his bedroom where Aria had already fallen back asleep. Her thumb was lodged in her mouth and her bear was tucked under her arm. She looked so peaceful.

Wanting her to get as much sleep as possible, he went into the nursery and grabbed the baby monitor set that had never been used and took it back into his bedroom. Setting one end up on the nightstand next to where she was sleeping, he turned it on and took the other end with him as he went downstairs to make some coffee.

Once he was settled on the couch with a cup of coffee in hand, he pulled out his phone and stared at his daughter's name. It was nearly seven in the morning, and he knew she was probably on her way to work. Pressing the call button, he brought his phone up to his ear.

“Hey, dad.”

He smiled to himself. “Hey, honey.”

“Are you on your way to the hospital?” she asked.

Tate could hear the traffic in the background of the call. “No. I'm off today. I was just calling to check on you.”

Ever since his daughter had been kidnapped and rescued, he'd worried about her mental health. She'd gone through extensive therapy once she'd been rescued and her boyfriend had been really good for her but as her father, he still worried.

She knew it and thankfully never got annoyed with him when he called just to check on her.

“I’m good. Gary is taking me out of town this weekend. He said he has a surprise for me.”

Yeah. He knew about that. Gary had approached Tate a few weeks prior to ask Tate’s permission to marry Valerie. Of course, he’d said yes, and Tate knew Gary’s plans to propose.

“That sounds fun. Any idea what it might be?” he asked.

She giggled. “Who knows with Gary? He’s always doing sweet things to surprise me and make me smile. You know how he is.”

Tate did. He’d always thought there would never be a man that would be good enough for his daughter but then Gary came along and while Tate hated that he had to let go a little, he was glad that Valerie was in such good hands. Gary had been one of the doctors that had treated her when she’d been transported to a hospital after being rescued. He had to treat several lacerations on her body among other things. Tate would forever be grateful for the man.

“Dad? Are you okay? You’re quiet.”

Blinking several times, he nodded even though she couldn’t see him. “Yeah. I’m fine. Just been thinking about you.”

“You really need a social life, dad,” she said playfully.

“I know. I, uh, I’m working on it.”

This time Valerie was silent for a moment before she spoke. “You met someone.”

“Maybe. I’m not sure. I don’t know if we’d be compatible.”

“Does she make you happy?”

“Yes, but it’s still new. I don’t know her very well.”

Valerie had seen him be used by a couple of women, so she knew his reservations about dating.

“You’ll never know unless you take a chance. If she makes you happy and you have a good feeling, see where it goes. You never know.”

He chuckled. “When did you become so wise?”

Valerie giggled. “I was raised by a brilliant doctor who always taught me to believe in my gut and always told me that if I wanted something, I’d never know how it would turn out unless I tried.”

Taking in a deep breath, he nodded. “Yeah. I knew my words would bite me in the ass one day.”

“Dad, you’re a good man. You have the best heart of anyone I’ve ever known. You deserve someone who loves you for you and wants you instead of your bank account, but you’ll never know if she’s that person if you don’t try.”

“I don’t know, Val. We’re... different. Very different.”

“Different isn’t always a bad thing. Gary and I are very different, too, but when we’re together, it’s the best thing ever. If you meet someone who is too much like you, it would be boring. If you like this woman, and you have a good feeling about her, take a chance and see where it leads. Please?”

He stared down into his cup of coffee, mulling over her words. What was the problem with taking a chance with Aria? What was the worst that could happen? She could break his heart. But she could also be everything he wanted and needed in his life. Would she only want him until she was comfortable, though, and then move on? He barely knew her and yet he knew he could easily fall for her. Was the risk worth a possible broken heart?

“Promise me you’ll give it a chance, dad?”

Letting out a sigh, he nodded. “I promise. I love you, Val. Have fun this weekend.”

“I love you, too. Now, go have fun and live your life. You deserve happiness.”

IT WAS NEARLY ten by the time he heard movement through the baby monitor. He waited a few minutes before he made his way upstairs to his bedroom. As he walked in, Aria was walking out of the bathroom. Her eyes lit up as soon as she saw him and that's when he realized no matter what thoughts were going through his mind about their differences, he wanted her. He wanted to Daddy her, he wanted to fuck her, and he wanted to make her life better because he had a feeling she would also make his life better.

“Hey, sleepyhead.”

She smiled, a pink hue coming to her cheeks. “I slept in late.”

He chuckled. “You went to bed late.”

Resisting the urge to walk over to her and pick her up, he held out his hand. “Let's go down so I can take some blood samples before I feed you breakfast.”

When she slid her smaller hand into his, he felt the electricity between them and his cock started to rise again. Forcing himself to ignore it, he led her downstairs toward the area of the house that he had a medical room set up. It looked just like an exam room but with more supplies.

He turned and lifted her onto the exam table. “Do I need to strap you on here or are you going to be a good girl and stay still while I get things prepped?”

A shiver ran through her and he wondered if the idea of being strapped down turned her on. Lots of Littles enjoyed medical play. Well, some of them had a love/hate relationship with it, but deep down they loved it. He'd have to ask her about that another time. If it was something Aria thought she might like, he'd love to play doctor with her.

“I'll sit still,” she said, fidgeting with the hem of her nightgown.

Nodding, he turned around and started collecting what he needed to take some samples.

“When’s the last time you had a pap smear?”

“Uh. Never.”

Turning around, he furrowed his eyebrows. “You’ve never had a pap smear? How old were you when you first became sexually active?”

He worried about how little care she’d had in her life. At her age, unless she’d never been sexually active, she should have had several cervical exams by now.

“Uh... I’ve never... done anything.”

Tate felt the blood drain from his face. Fuck. What the fuck. She was a virgin? What the hell was he doing? How the hell was she still a virgin? Surely men had been lining up out the door to try to date her since she’d become an adult. Shit.

“You’ve never had sex?” he asked.

He needed clarification. To be absolutely sure he understood. Because if she was a virgin...

“No.” Her cheeks were bright red now and he felt bad for embarrassing her.

Needing a moment to gather himself, he turned back around and continued grabbing supplies, forcing himself to take several breaths. Not only was this woman over thirty years younger than he was, but she had also never been with a man. It would make him a terrible person to pursue her, right? He felt a surge of protectiveness run through him at the thought of any other man even looking at her. She was his. Right or wrong, he knew he wasn’t going to be able to let her go unless she wanted to go. And he was pretty sure he was a total asshole for feeling that way.

ARIA

She felt like she wanted the ground to open up so she could slide down into the hole and disappear. The color had drained from Tate's face and he just kind of stood there staring at her like a second head had popped out of her shoulder.

"I've just never met anyone I wanted to... you know... I've really only dated guys online. I'm sorry. Is this weird? This is weird, isn't it? I should go. Let me just get—"

"Aria."

"I'll just go get my stuff and—"

"Aria."

"I'll get out of your hair after I change. I'm sor—"

"Aria, sit down right now," he said so sternly she planted her bottom right back on the exam bed.

"Sorry," she murmured.

Tate walked over to her and put his hands on either side of her hips, leaning down so his forehead was resting against hers. "Don't be sorry. It's not a bad thing, Little one. I was just surprised and caught off guard. I feel like an asshole for wanting you that way. It just proves I'm too old for you."

What? She didn't like that. He certainly wasn't too old for her. She liked how old he was. He made her feel safe. And he looked at her in a way that made her feel like she mattered.

She reached out and twisted her hands in his shirt. “You’re not too old for me. I like that you’re older. I feel safe with you and I... I like you. I’ve never felt the things I feel when I’m around you. Please don’t let our ages be a factor. If you’re not interested in me, I can understand that, but don’t let it be because of our ages.”

He laughed, only it wasn’t a funny laugh. It was a laugh like he couldn’t believe what she’d just said. He took a step back and put both his hands on her face, cradling her cheeks. “Little girl, I’ve never been more interested in someone than I am with you. You intrigue me and the Daddy in me wants to take care of you, but the man in me wants to spread you out and fuck you until you can’t walk straight. And right now, I feel like an asshole for thinking about that.”

Her lips pulled back into a smile. He wanted her. He wanted to do sexual things to her, and he also wanted to Daddy her. No one had ever said that to her.

“I want that, too. Both of those things,” she whispered.

They stared into each other’s eyes for several minutes in silence, the air seeming to crackle with electricity around them. His touch alone made her nipples ache, and her breasts feel heavy against her nightie, not to mention her panties were soaked through.

“Please,” she murmured.

His lips suddenly crashed onto hers, his fingers threading in her hair as he stepped forward so his hips were between her thighs. At first, she froze, surprised by it, but then she started kissing him back while her hands roamed his solid chest. The man was built like a brick wall. And the bulge that was pressing against the inside of her thigh was just as hard as the wall.

She moaned into his mouth, seeming to spur him on even more as he deepened the kiss, controlling her with his mouth and hands, and she loved every second of it. When he pulled back, they were both panting for air as they stared at each other. He only let her catch her breath for a few seconds before

he was on her again, kissing her, biting her lips, exploring her entire mouth with his tongue.

This time when he released her mouth, he rested his forehead on hers and they stayed like that for several minutes.

When he finally stepped back, his eyes were smoldering. “You’re a beautiful woman, Aria, and an adorable Little girl.”

She practically melted at those words. When was the last time someone had said anything like that to her? The guys she’d talked to online had called her hot and sexy but never beautiful, and she definitely couldn’t remember anyone ever calling her adorable.

“Do... do you think you’d want to be my Daddy?” she asked.

Brushing his thumb over her cheek, Tate smiled. “You have no idea how badly I want to be your Daddy, Aria. I worry about you. I don’t know what has happened in your life, but I want to make it all better for you. I want to make your life easier and happier and I want to take care of you. I just... I don’t want to stop you from finding the person you’re meant to be with forever. Surely you don’t want to get stuck with an old man. I can’t give you the things you might want in life.”

Furrowing her eyebrows, she tilted her head. “What is it you think I want in life?”

He shrugged. “Kids, maybe? Someone who can experience a bunch of firsts with you. Someone who can grow old with you, not before you. Someone who will live as long as you do.”

“First of all, I don’t want kids. I’ve never wanted kids. I’m basically a baby myself. I don’t want to be responsible for another human. Secondly, you act like you are ninety. You are more fit than I am and look like you could run circles around me. And I’m sure there are lots of things you haven’t experienced yet that we could experience together for the first time. What other silly excuses do you have so I can give you an answer to those, too?”

Tate smirked at her and shook his head. “Brat.”

She giggled and nodded. “I can be. Not usually. But if pushed to it, I can brat like a champ.”

Letting out a deep breath, he stared at her for a long moment. “We go slow. Take our time. And if at any time, you change your mind, you tell me immediately. I don’t want you to feel stuck with me. No matter what happens, I want to help you have a better life. Understand?”

Bringing her hand up to her forehead, she saluted him. “Sir, yes, sir.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Do you need a spanking before I draw your blood?”

A shiver coursed through her. The thought of his large palms spanking her bottom made her squirm. “No, thank you.”

“Then behave.”

“Does this mean you’re my Daddy?”

“This means we will try out the dynamic and see how it goes. See if it’s what you really want. After breakfast, we’ll sit down and go over rules and boundaries and we’ll talk about what you need from me. We’ll also talk about why you’re all alone and struggling with money so I can figure out how to help you.”

Crumb. She didn’t want to have that conversation. Not one tiny little bit. Maybe the rules and boundaries but she really didn’t want to talk to him about her finances and explain why she was so poor. And what did he mean by figuring out how to help her? Did he mean money?

“I don’t want money from you, Tate.”

He looked up from the supplies he was organizing on a small tray. “Yeah, well, I don’t want you to struggle. I can tell you work too hard, you don’t eat enough, and you’re not taking care of yourself. All of which are unacceptable if you’re mine. I might seem chill, but when it comes to being Daddy, chill goes out the window. I’m a strict Daddy, especially when it comes to your safety and well-being. Understand?”

Wow. She hadn't exactly expected that from him. He was right, he did seem chill, but she also didn't hate the thought of him being a bit strict.

"Aria, I asked you a question."

Holy crap. He wasn't messing around.

She squeezed her thighs together at the same time as she nodded. "I understand."

"Good girl. Spread your knees. I'm a doctor, I know you're trying to get friction on your little pussy but that's not allowed. From here on out, while I'm your Daddy, you don't touch or play with your pussy without my permission."

Spreading her knees, she realized she was practically panting. Her clit felt swollen and tingly and her nipples were hard points pressing against her nightie. How was it possible to be this turned on before breakfast? One thing she knew for sure, Tate was definitely the Daddy she wanted and needed. She just hoped he wouldn't decide she was too much trouble or not classy enough for him because even though she barely knew him, she was falling for him at a fast speed.

"Let me check your stitches first," he said as he gently lifted her leg to inspect it. "How are they feeling?"

Scrunching up her face, she reached down to scratch them. "They're itchy. I don't like them."

Before she was able to scratch the stitches, he gently grabbed her wrist and smiled up at her. "No scratching. They're ready to come out, that's why they itch. I'll take them out and then I'll get your blood drawn so we can go have breakfast."

She nodded and after he got the stitches removed, he moved on to taking her blood. She was surprised how gentle he was and she only winced a tiny bit when he stuck the needle in her arm.

"Good girl. You're so brave. I'm so proud of you," he told her softly as he filled several vials of blood.

As soon as he was done, he placed a pink Trolls band-aid on her arm, making her smile as she inspected it.

“I like Trolls,” she murmured.

Tate smiled and nodded. “We’ll watch it later today after your nap.”

Nap? She didn’t take naps. Although, when she looked up at him to tell him and saw the stern look on his face, she had a feeling naps would be in her future whether she liked them or not.

AFTER TATE HAD FINISHED DRAWING blood, he’d listened to her heart and lungs and looked in the back of her throat with a bright light. He said it looked a little red, but allergies could cause that. He gave her some liquid allergy medicine and checked her ears and glands.

Not that she’d been to the doctor a lot in her lifetime, but she’d always dreaded going. With Tate, it was different. Of course, it helped that he was ridiculously hot and during the entire exam, the only thing she seemed to be able to focus on was her pulsing clit. Keeping her knees parted had been difficult and he’d had to remind her a couple of times. The man didn’t miss anything, that was for sure.

“Any breakfast foods you don’t like?” he asked.

She shook her head. “The only food I don’t like is vegetables and I’m allergic to shellfish.”

He raised an eyebrow at her. “You will eat vegetables, but we’ll try to figure out some you don’t absolutely hate.”

“I hate them all,” she muttered.

Tate chuckled. “We’ll see. This Daddy knows how to work magic in the kitchen.”

She wasn’t so sure about that. She pretty much had a sixth sense about any kind of vegetable hidden in food. Yuck. No, thank you.

As he pulled food out from the fridge, she sat perched on one of the high stools beside the enormous island. She looked around the kitchen, which looked very intimidating with all its appliances and fancy stuff on the counters. Just like the rest of the house, it was huge and beautiful and tastefully decorated. She wondered who had done the décor.

“Your house is so big. It’s like a castle.”

He smiled as he turned on the stove. “It’s too big. I’ve considered selling it, but it’s been in the family for so long I haven’t had the heart to do it. My daughter doesn’t want it, though, and other than her, there is no one else to pass it on to.”

Studying her hands, she wondered about his daughter. “Are you and your daughter close?”

“I would say so. She has a boyfriend and a job, though, so she has her own life to live. We usually have dinner together once a month or so and we talk on the phone frequently.”

“What does she do for work?”

“She’s a nurse.”

She lowered her gaze again. How pathetic was it that his daughter, who was a year younger than her, was a nurse and all Aria was qualified to do was wait tables at a crappy diner. What would the woman think of Aria? It was obvious Tate had money. Would she think Aria was a gold digger? That thought made her tummy ache.

“Hey, Little one.”

Raising her eyes to his, she forced a smile. “Yeah?”

He walked over to where she was sitting and cupped her chin. “I don’t know what was just going on inside your head, but I don’t think I would like it if you told me.”

She shook her head. “It was nothing.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Lying will get you in trouble so unless you want to write some lines or have breakfast while sitting on a hot bottom, I suggest you tell me the truth.”

Yeah, he was much too observant.

“I was just thinking how pathetic it is that I’m the same age as her and I’ve done nothing with my life yet.”

Tate frowned, his eyebrows drawing together. “It’s not pathetic, Aria. I have a strong feeling that your circumstances were different from hers. And I don’t like you thinking that sort of stuff about yourself.”

Whether he liked it or not, she couldn’t exactly stop those thoughts. Circumstances might have been different, but society didn’t care about circumstances. They cared about things like social status and wealth and education. None of which she had. And she was pretty sure it wouldn’t take long before Tate realized she wasn’t good enough for him.

TATE

The look on her face when he told her Valerie was a nurse had made his heart ache. He knew without even having to ask her that she was doubting herself and he hated that. It would be one of the things he would work on with her.

“Tell me about your family. Do you have siblings? Where do your parents live?” he asked as he went back to prepping their breakfast.

She shifted on the stool and nibbled on her lower lip. “I’m an only child. I was an accident. My parents didn’t want kids.”

He froze and looked up from what he was doing. “They told you that?”

“Yeah. My mom told me they’d considered putting me up for adoption, but they didn’t want people to think badly of them. So instead, they had me, but I was pretty much invisible to them.”

“What in the actual fuck?” he snapped.

Aria jumped at his sharp tone and he shook his head. “I’m sorry, baby. I’m not upset at you. I just can’t believe that. Who would treat their child like that? That’s horrible. You deserved better.”

She shrugged. “I didn’t have a horrible life. Just lonely and different from the other kids who had siblings and loving parents.”

“Where are your parents now?”

“I’m not sure. I left their house when I was eighteen and haven’t heard from them since. I gave them my phone number when I left and it’s still the same, but they’ve never called. The few times I’ve called, it went to voicemail and when I’ve emailed them, they haven’t responded. I stopped trying a few years ago.”

It felt like there was a lump the size of a golf ball in his throat as he tried to swallow. It took him several tries before he could even speak. “You’ve been on your own since you were eighteen?”

She nodded and the lost look in her eyes killed him. How could anyone turn their back on their child? And someone as sweet as her? He had to force himself to loosen his grip on the knife in his hand.

No wonder she was struggling. She’d been out on her own, trying to survive, since the day she became a legal adult. Getting ahead when you’re just fighting to survive in a world that was way too expensive to begin with was practically impossible. He was so damn proud of her for fighting her way through it.

“I’m so proud of you, Aria.”

Her eyes widened and her head jerked back. “Why?”

“Because you’re strong and brave and a fighter. You’ve worked your ass off to survive and it takes guts.”

A flush rose to her cheeks and she looked as though she wasn’t sure what to say. Based on what she told him about her parents, he was pretty sure she hadn’t had much praise in her life, so she didn’t really know how to take it.

“You’re not going to struggle anymore,” he added.

“Tate... I don’t want you to take care of me like that. I just want you as my Daddy.”

He tossed the vegetables into the pan and set down the cutting board before he walked over to her and cupped her chin again. “I’m going to be your Daddy. I’m also going to take care of you any way I see fit. I appreciate that you don’t

care about my money, but I have plenty of it and I want to help you.”

Her bottom lip trembled and she lowered her eyes from his. “I’m not a charity case.”

Squeezing her chin a little tighter, he nodded. “You’re exactly right. You’re not a charity case. You’re my Little girl and in this relationship, I’m in charge. Understood?”

When she didn’t answer him right away, he was sure she was going to argue with him again but then she nodded and whispered, “Yes.”

“Yes, Daddy, would be better,” he prompted.

Her eyes flashed with surprise. “Yes, Daddy.”

That word coming off her lips sent a surge of arousal to his cock. At his age, he wasn’t used to being constantly hard but around her, it seemed as though his cock was still a teenager.

“Good girl.”

This time, he saw arousal flash in her eyes. This Little girl liked praise. Well, that was just fine because he liked to give it and she deserved it in heaping amounts.

“I need to finish cooking breakfast and after we eat, we’ll talk about rules and boundaries.” He kissed the tip of her nose before he got back to making their omelets, hers with no vegetables. Though after they set the rules of their dynamic, vegetables would be added to all her meals, even if he had to puree it into baby food and feed it to her himself. Which, he would kind of prefer anyway.

BY THE TIME they finished their breakfast, Aria already looked exhausted again. It worried him. He put their dishes in the sink and plucked her up from the stool before walking out to the living room and sitting down with her on his lap. She didn’t fight him or try to wiggle out of his arms. Instead, she snuggled into his chest and sighed.

He had a courier coming to pick up her blood samples and he would ask the lab he worked with to put a rush on it so he could get some answers. Normally, he was the one telling his patients to be patient but when it came to the Little girl in his arms, he couldn't be. She was already too precious to him.

Adjusting her so she was cradled like a baby, he looked down at her big eyes and smiled. "Tell me what you need from a Daddy."

Those big eyes widened and she looked unsure. "I don't really know. I've never had a real Daddy. I always thought they would make the decisions as to what I needed."

He furrowed his eyebrows and shook his head. Thank God he was going to be her first Daddy because some other asshole would take advantage of her naivety, and the very thought pissed him off.

"That's not how it works, baby. In this kind of relationship, you tell me your wants and needs and boundaries and I stay within those boundaries while fulfilling what you want and need."

A smirk appeared on her face. "So, if I say I don't want vegetables, you have to respect that?"

"Nice try. Eating vegetables is part of keeping you healthy and while you will set the boundaries of how I can enforce the things to keep you healthy, I won't give you much wiggle room with that stuff. As a responsible Daddy, it's my job to make sure you are safe, healthy, and happy."

Her bottom lip popped out in a pout and it was so damn adorable, he couldn't help but smile.

He ran his thumb over that lip, his cock thickening. "When I ask what you want and need from a Daddy, I mean do you want a Daddy who takes complete care of you? Or do you want a Daddy who just helps you with following rules while still maintaining some independence?"

"I don't like being independent," she murmured.

That was understandable. She'd been on her own for so long, struggling and trying to make it, and for a Little, that

could be exhausting both mentally and emotionally. She needed someone who could free her from all the adult burdens so she could let go and just be herself.

“You want a Daddy who takes complete care of you.”

She nodded. “Yes. Is that bad?”

Smiling, he shook his head. “Not bad at all, Little one. I’m the type of Daddy who likes to be in complete control. I like giving my Little girl baths, dressing her, helping her brush her teeth, feeding her, making sure she eats her vegetables and gets enough sleep, taking her to doctor appointments, and anything else that I can do for her.”

Her mouth dropped open into the shape of an O as though the idea of someone doing all those things for her was unfathomable. This poor Little girl had never been taken care of the way she deserved, but that was all about to change starting now.

“Do you think you would like all of that, Aria?”

Keeping her eyes on his, she nodded. “Yes.”

“Will you let me take care of you? Help you get on your feet and all of that?”

The hesitation on her face was obvious and he was afraid she was going to say no. Unlike most of the women he’d had relationships with in the past, Aria was proud and he loved that about her. She had been doing it on her own for so long that he knew it would be strange for her to experience a different kind of life, but he wanted to be the one to give her the life she deserved.

Even though he worried about her being too young for him, he just didn’t care because she needed him and maybe he needed her, too. They were different. From two different worlds, but it felt like their souls connected in a way he’d never felt before. He felt alive for the first time in years. And it had been way too long since he’d been able to be the Daddy he was meant to be.

The doorbell rang and he moved her off his lap, sitting her onto the couch next to where he was and grabbing a throw

blanket that was slung over the back. “That’s the courier to take your blood samples to the lab. I’ll be right back.”

She nodded and before he even left the room, he noticed her slide her thumb into her mouth as her eyes drifted shut. His poor sweet girl needed his care and as soon as he got her tucked in for a nap, he was going online shopping for every possible thing she might want or need. Maybe spoiling her right out of the gate wasn’t a good idea but he didn’t care. It was obvious no one had ever spoiled this woman before so it would be his pleasure to be the first.

ARIA

“I ’m the type of Daddy who likes to be in complete control. I like giving my Little girl baths, dressing her, helping her brush her teeth, feeding her, making sure she eats her vegetables and gets enough sleep, taking her to doctor appointments, and anything else that I can do for her.”

His words played over in her head as she snuggled into the blanket. Those things he’d said were things she’d dreamed of for years. Every time she’d read an age play book, she’d longed for the type of Daddy that was in those books, but she never thought someone like that actually existed. Then she’d started going to The Playground and seen the interactions between some of the Littles with their Daddies and she’d started to believe relationships like that were actually real. But she knew there was no way a good Daddy like that would ever want her. Not until Tate came along.

She didn’t want him to take care of her because he felt sorry for her. He seemed like the type of man who would help everyone who he thought needed it and while that was super sweet of him, she didn’t want to be a charity case. Especially because the feelings she was having toward him were real and she didn’t want to get her hopes up only to be disappointed and heartbroken. She’d finally gotten used to going through life alone and was afraid if she got used to having someone like Tate around, once he was gone she would be lost. It was scary as heck.

Suddenly, she felt two strong arms scooping her up from the couch and when she opened her eyes to see the handsome

silver fox carrying her through the house, she knew that despite her fears, she wasn't going to pass on the chance to have this man as her Daddy. Even if it was just temporary.

“Where are we going?” she murmured sleepily.

“Daddy is going to tuck you into bed for a nap. You're exhausted and you need to rest.”

Her bottom lip popped out. “But I thought we were gonna talk about stuff.”

A smile spread across his lips as he glanced down at her while at the same time, he climbed the stairs. “We will, baby. But first I want you to sleep for a bit. You're tired. While you nap, I'm going to make a list of rules for us to go over together and we will decide which rules to keep when you wake up.”

Resting her head against his shoulder, she sighed contentedly. “I like when you carry me.”

A deep chuckle rumbled up from his chest. “Yeah, baby girl. I really like carrying you, too. A lot.”

Instead of taking her into his bedroom, he carried her into the nursery and even though she'd already been in there, it still stole her breath as she took it all in. It was the most beautiful room she'd ever seen. She loved it even more than the gigantic playroom at the club. It felt so peaceful and happy in this room.

“Since we don't have the boundaries of our dynamic in place yet, you get the choice between going potty before I put you down or wearing a diaper for naptime. Which one would you prefer?”

She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth as she peeked over at the changing table where a stack of fluffy diapers were sitting. His gaze followed hers and before she said anything, he was carrying her over there.

When he set her down on the table with her legs dangling over the edge, he kept his hands on her hips and leaned down so his face was level with hers, his gray eyes pinned on hers. “I'm going to put you in a diaper because I think that's what you really want but might be too afraid to say. If you want me

to stop at any time, you say red and I stop immediately. Understand?”

Golly gosh, it was like this man could read her mind. If he put her in a diaper, though, he was going to see her bare pussy and that was both scary and a turn on. Thankfully she was freshly shaved, but no one had ever seen her down there before. What if he didn't like it? Or if it didn't look like others that he'd seen? She was pretty sure it looked how it was supposed to, but the worry still swirled in her mind. The excitement and intrigue outweighed the worry, though, so she nodded and murmured, “Yes.”

Tate gave her an approving smile. “That's my girl. Lie back for me.”

He held her hand while she lowered her back to the soft mat and when she was flat with her legs still dangling, he shifted her up more so there was room for her thighs to rest on the table. When he took hold of both her ankles and set her feet flat on the surface with her knees parted, she sucked in a breath. Even though she had panties on, she knew they were soaked through and he was about to discover that.

The air in the room felt so thick with electricity between them. She rolled her head to the side because if she kept watching him work, she knew her pussy would gush even more.

When his fingers slid up her thighs, pushing her nightie up and exposing her panties to him, she waited for him to shame her for her wetness. But to her surprise, he said nothing as he tugged the panties down her legs and dropped them in a hamper right next to the table. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Tate staring down at her pussy, his tongue wetting his lips.

“You have the prettiest pussy I've ever seen. I can't wait to taste it and make you scream out my name while I tongue fuck you through your orgasm.”

A shudder ran through her entire body and her nipples hardened against the material of her nightie. Never in her life had she wanted something so much. Even if she had no idea

what an orgasm actually felt like, she was pretty sure with Tate it would be glorious.

Heat crept up to her cheeks at his compliment and since she really wasn't sure how to respond, she just smiled shyly. "Thank you," she whispered.

He winked at her and continued his task and before she knew it, she was wrapped up in a thick white diaper. As soon as he finished, he pulled down her nightie, lifted her off the table, and carried her to the crib. He took a moment to cover her with blankets and handed her Oreo before he pulled the railing up, locking it into place so she was surrounded by the safety of the rails.

"I want you to stay in here while you nap. I'm going to be downstairs in my office. I'll take the baby monitor so if you need anything, just call out for me, but no climbing out of the crib. It's not safe and you'll be in trouble if you do. Understand?"

"Yes."

He held her pacifier up to her mouth until she accepted it and then brought his large hand to her hair, brushing it away from her face as he smiled down at her with sparkling eyes. "Sleep, Aria."

She wasn't so sure she would be able to but within seconds of him walking out of the room with the baby monitor in hand, her eyes became heavy and she quickly drifted to sleep.

WHEN HER EYES FLUTTERED OPEN, Aria looked around the room, having to remind herself of where she was. She was at Tate's house. The man who she hadn't stopped dreaming about since the very first night she'd met him. It was still hard for her to understand why he would want her. Nobody had ever really wanted her. She'd always been in the way. She was certain that if her parents would've been super rich, they would have sent her off to boarding school so they wouldn't have had to deal with her. Unfortunately, they preferred to spend their

money on vacations that didn't include her so they'd had to deal with her living in their home for eighteen years.

Sadness filled her. Why hadn't she ever been good enough for them? Growing up in a home where affection wasn't something that happened and then being on her own for so long, it was such a strange feeling having all the attention and affection that Tate was giving her, but she couldn't help but soak it all up.

Sitting up on the mattress, she sighed happily as she took in the room again. She'd never get tired of being in here. She couldn't even imagine having a room like this for real. Whoever Tate ended up with forever was going to be one very lucky woman.

That thought made her chest feel tight and she forced herself not to think about things like that. She was going to enjoy every second she could with him.

He must have heard her shifting over the baby monitor because he appeared in the doorway and smiled at her. The pacifier he'd slid between her lips was still in her mouth and she had Oreos clutched under her arm. She also realized her diaper was wet. Had she wet herself during her nap? That had never happened before. Then again, she couldn't ever remember a time when she'd been so relaxed before.

"Hey, baby girl. You seemed to sleep well," he said softly as he walked toward her.

She smiled and nodded, letting the pacifier pop out of her mouth. "I think I did. How long did I sleep?"

"About three hours. It's almost dinner time. Let's get you changed and then Daddy will make you something to eat."

Sucking her bottom lip between her teeth, she lifted her arms when he reached into the crib to pull her out. She loved when he referred to himself as Daddy. It felt reassuring. It was also a turn on. This man was the sexiest Daddy she could have ever imagined. And the fact that he was kind only made him better.

Once he'd gotten her laid out on the changing table, she avoided his eyes as he peeled the wet diaper away from her skin. He'd never said if she was supposed to use it or not and she hoped he wouldn't be upset or think she was weird. But when she snuck a glance in his direction, he was smiling as he pulled the thick material out from under her bottom.

"I'm going to put you in another diaper unless you tell me not to."

Her pussy pulsed and she loved that he was taking control while still giving her the option to say no. It made her feel even safer with him and also turned her on that he was making the decisions.

"Knees apart, Little one."

Slowly, she parted her knees and hoped he didn't notice the wetness there as her nipples pebbled under her nightie. Peering at him from behind her lashes, she watched as he licked his lips, his eyes smoldering as he took her in.

"You're beautiful, Aria. I can hardly wait to touch you and make you cry out."

A shiver ran through her. "Please," was all she could say.

His gray eyes rose to hers and he raised one eyebrow. "Please what, Aria?"

Did he want her to say the words out loud? Didn't he know she wanted him to touch her? She'd never been touched there by anyone, but she wanted his fingers on her more than she'd ever wanted anything.

"If you want something, I need you to tell me, Little one. I don't want to cross a line."

Golly gosh. This man.

Her cheeks were on fire but the pulse between her legs was so urgent that she took a deep breath and closed her eyes so she wouldn't have to look at him when she spoke. "Please touch me."

The words came out of her mouth softly and she wasn't sure he'd heard her because he still wasn't touching her. When

she opened her eyes to see what he was doing, she found him watching her face.

“You want Daddy to touch your pussy? Is that what you’re asking? You want Daddy to play with your clit and put my fingers into your tight little hole and make you come all over my hand? Is that what you want, Aria?”

She closed her eyes again.

“Eyes open and on me when you answer me, Little one,” he demanded in a low but firm voice.

Popping her eyes open, she met his gaze and nodded. “Yes. Please. I need...”

The words got lost on her tongue because she’d never said anything dirty before and she was afraid she would combust into a ball of flames if she admitted how badly she wanted his touch. Thankfully, her gaze on his seemed to be enough of a confirmation for him because suddenly he had a hand on the inside of one of her thighs, pushing it wider, while his other hand came to her pussy.

Almost instantly, he found her clit and stroked it, causing her to practically levitate off the table. Even though she’d tried to touch herself plenty of times over the years, never had it felt like this. Eventually she’d just given up because it had never felt as good as it seemed to be in the books she’d read. But this... this felt like the stars and moon were colliding and an explosion was about to occur.

“You’re so beautiful, Aria. Your precious face, your gorgeous body, and this perfect pink pussy. Just seeing my fingers on you makes me feel so damn possessive of you, it’s not even funny.”

The only response she gave him was a whimper as he flicked her clit again, causing her thighs to tremble.

“You’re so damn close, baby. Has it been a long time since you’ve come? You need this, don’t you?”

His dirty words only spurred her arousal more and every second that passed, her body became more tense.

While keeping his thumb on her clit, she felt his other hand slide up her thigh until the tip of his finger was at her opening, moving up and down the seam of her lips, spreading her wetness around. It all felt so naughty and hot at the same time.

As his finger slid into her pussy, it burned, but the mix of pain and pleasure from him rubbing her clit was overwhelming. Her hands gripped the sides of the table as she cried out, his finger pumping in and out of her, the sounds of her wetness filling the room.

When he curled his finger inside her and started circling her clit faster, the moon and stars finally collided and she exploded, screaming out as her pussy pulsed around him.

“That’s a good girl. Come for Daddy. Fuck, you look so beautiful when you come.”

Her orgasm lasted longer than she expected but he played with her through the entire thing.

“So damn beautiful,” he murmured when it had passed and she was practically a pile of goo on the table.

Tate gently pulled his finger from her and when she opened her eyes and peered at him from under her lashes, she was shocked as he brought his hand up to his mouth and licked it clean. Holy wow, that was really hot, especially the deep groan he let out as he did it.

Was she supposed to do something for him now? She had no idea how all of this worked. Well, she had an idea. She had watched porn before. But she had no actual experience with it.

“Should I... um... do you want me to... I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

He shook his head. “No, Little one. I didn’t do that because I wanted something. I did that because I wanted to and you needed it. When the time comes for more, I’ll tell you exactly what to do.”

Relief washed over her. Not because he didn’t want her to do anything. No, she’d love to do something for him, but because he wouldn’t leave her floundering. Tate was a take-charge man and he would tell her what he wanted.

“Let Daddy get you cleaned up and changed into an outfit and then we’ll go down and eat,” he said with a heart-racing half smile spread on his lips.

So she did what he said and let him take care of her and it felt like everything she’d ever wanted.

TATE

He needed a cold shower. No, a cold shower wouldn't do it. He needed a fucking ice bath. In an igloo. Located in Antarctica. And he wasn't even sure if that would take care of the painful situation between his legs. Tate was pretty sure he was walking funny the rest of the afternoon. Thankfully, if Aria noticed, she hadn't said anything.

She'd let him feed her bites of chicken, rice, and sweet potato for dinner and afterward they'd settled on the couch to watch an animated movie. He wanted to talk more about their dynamic, but he also wanted her to have some time in Little Space while also resting a bit, even if that meant vegging out on the couch snuggling.

When he'd had her in front of him on the changing table, her bare pussy on display for him as she came apart with his hands on her, he'd nearly exploded in his jeans. The soft pink hue that had spread over her cheeks as she cried out, her chest arching in the air while her pussy walls clenched around his finger, had been one of the hottest experiences he'd ever had. And he had a feeling it had a lot to do with the woman and not necessarily the act itself. She was so sweet and perfect in every way.

As they sat on the couch watching the movie, she automatically snuggled up against his ribcage and sighed contentedly before she lodged her thumb into her mouth and focused on the TV. He couldn't focus on anything other than her but in his opinion, she was much more interesting than a movie. She also fit perfectly right up against him. It almost felt

like if he could keep her there forever, he could protect her from the world.

Forever. You're thinking about forever? Are you crazy?

Maybe he was a little crazy for having thoughts like that but there was just something about her that had him thinking about his life and what he wanted his future to look like. In everything he envisioned, Aria's face was there, smiling at him, looking up to him like he hung the moon for her. It made his heart feel whole.

The vibration of his phone pulled him out of his thoughts, and he opened up the email that had come through marked *urgent test results*. He read all the results that had come in from Aria's bloodwork and while it would take more time for some of the results, the ones he had now were a start and also a huge relief in a way.

"Baby girl," he said softly. "Has a doctor ever diagnosed you with low iron in your blood?"

She looked up at him with her eyebrows pulled together in confusion as she shook her head. "No. What does that mean?"

He showed her the screen that had her red blood cell count. "Your red blood cells are low which means your blood isn't producing enough iron. Have you ever had your kidney functions checked?"

Somehow, he already knew the answer to that was no but the doctor in him couldn't help but ask. She had already told him she hadn't visited many doctors in her lifetime.

"No, I don't think so. Is that really bad?" she asked, gesturing toward his phone.

"Hopefully it's just a simple fix of getting you on an iron supplement and having you eat some foods with more iron, but the rest of your bloodwork will tell me more."

She stared up at him, a frightened look on her face, and it felt like his heart was about to crack down the center. Lifting her onto his lap, he held her against his chest and stroked her hair. "Daddy's got you. It's going to be okay."

When she nodded, he was relieved she believed him. He didn't want her worrying. He wasn't panicking about her results. It wasn't uncommon for someone to be anemic, especially if they weren't getting the nutrition their body needed.

“Why don't we talk about what rules I want to give you and you can tell me if they are okay?” he asked.

He hoped a change in subject would distract her from worrying.

“Okay.”

Tate pulled out the piece of paper that he had put in his back pocket when she'd been napping. He'd written down all the rules he wanted to have for her. Once he had the paper unfolded, he held it in front of them both to read.

1. Health and safety – This means wearing a seatbelt, eating healthy foods including vegetables, no texting and driving, no climbing on counters, going to the doctor when needed, taking vitamins, and anything else Daddy deems a health or safety rule.
2. No lying – Always tell the truth and if something is bothering Aria, tell Daddy right away since he can't read Aria's mind.
3. Diapers – Daddy wants Aria to wear diapers at naptime and bedtime at minimum and as much as Aria wants to wear them other times.
4. Bedtime – Aria will be in bed by nine o'clock, and naptime is one o'clock.
5. Nutrition – Aria will eat three meals a day, at least two snacks, plus a nutritional shake.
6. No swearing – Aria is too sweet of a Little girl for ugly words to come out of her mouth.
7. Safeword – Aria must always use her safeword anytime she wants or needs to without any hesitation.
8. Daddy is in charge – Daddy gets final say in everything unless Aria uses her safeword.
9. Communicating needs – If Aria needs something, she is to go to her Daddy first no matter what it is.

10. Respect – Both Daddy and Aria will always be respectful to each other and never be purposely mean or hurtful to each other.
11. Self-Respect – Aria must not think or talk badly about herself.
12. Playing – Aria won't play or touch her pussy for pleasure without Daddy's permission.

HE WAITED as she read and when she looked up at him, he smiled. "What do you think?"

She nodded. "I think it's good. Except I don't like the vegetables part or the not thinking badly about myself part because I can't help it. The thoughts just pop up in my head."

He set the paper beside him and reached down to capture her chin so she was forced to keep her gaze on his. "I understand it may be hard not to think negative things sometimes, but I want you to at least try. If and when you have a negative thought about yourself, I want you to try to push it away and think of three good things about yourself to replace that negative thought. You think you can try that?"

The way she looked at him made his cock harden and his heart soften. She looked at him like he was her world and fuck, he wanted to be her world. He would give anything to be the one who made her happy day in and day out.

"Yes. I'll try," she murmured.

"Good. Any rules you want to add?"

A look of mischief crossed her face. "Can we add that I only have to eat vegetables if it's in cake?"

He snorted and shook his head. "Nice try, Little one. That rule is non-negotiable."

She let out a dramatic sigh and dropped her shoulders. "Yeah. I had a feeling."

"Since I know you haven't had a Daddy before, I think we need to talk about what discipline would be acceptable for you

in the beginning.”

Her eyes widened and she squirmed on his lap, making him wonder if it was a squirm of arousal or a squirm of nerves. It’s possible it was both. Most Littles had a love/hate relationship with punishments.

“Like what?” she whispered.

“Well, like I need to know if you have any hard limits around being spanked? Or having to stand in the corner? Or writing lines? Or having your bottom cleaned out with an enema?”

The way her eyes widened even more nearly made him laugh. The topic of enemas always seemed to do that to a Little. It was adorable and funny, but he forced himself to keep a straight face.

“You would clean out my bottom?”

Her voice was breathy and full of disbelief but he just nodded. “Yes, baby girl. Sometimes, when Little girls are naughty, it could be because they are bloated or not feeling so great and they need their bowels emptied. It’s not something that would be done all the time, but it is one of the many types of discipline I might give.”

Keeping her blue eyes on his gaze, she was quiet for a long moment and he could see the wheels turning in her mind.

“Does it hurt?” she whispered.

He shook his head. “No. It’s a little uncomfortable but usually, Little girls feel much better afterward. It’s probably more embarrassing than anything but that’s all part of having a Daddy. Sometimes you’ll have to do things that might be embarrassing, but I would never do anything to humiliate you or emotionally or physically harm you.”

Another several seconds passed while she seemed to soak in his words before she nodded. “I trust you. Can I always make it a limit if I decide I don’t like it?”

“Of course. Anything can become a hard limit at any time. You’re in control in this dynamic. I might be the Daddy and I

might be the boss most of the time, but the real power is in your hands. Okay?”

A slow smile spread across her pouty lips, and he couldn't resist leaning his head down to kiss her. When she automatically looped her arms around his neck and started kissing him back, he groaned and had to shift a bit so his cock wasn't pressing into her ass.

When they released each other's mouths, she was giggling.

“What's so funny about our kiss?” he asked.

She giggled louder. “I just like that your...thing...likes me.”

It took him a second to realize she was referring to his cock as a thing. But yes, she was right about that. It did like her. He liked her and he had a feeling once he got inside her, he was never going to want to leave.

“Yes. But don't mind it. I can't really help how he reacts.”

Aria's giggles quieted and she pulled her bottom lip between her teeth as her eyes went from amused to aroused. “Can I touch it? I've never touched one and I might be bad at it, but I want to try.”

Jesus mother of roses. This woman was going to kill him. It didn't matter if she was bad at it. Knowing she'd never touched one before was enough to make him feel like a possessive animal. Would he even be able to keep himself in check if she wrapped her tiny little hands around it? Unlikely, but he also wasn't about to turn her down.

“You sure you want to touch it? You don't owe me anything, baby. I can take care of it later.”

Her eyes widened like he'd insulted her and then she spoke again. Once more, she surprised the hell out of him. “I think it would be much more fun if I took care of it for you.”

Yeah, much, *much* more fun indeed.

ARIA

She wasn't sure where she'd gotten the nerve to ask to touch his cock. All she knew was when it was pressing into her bottom, she couldn't stop squirming and thinking about it inside her. If it felt anything like his fingers had, she'd be a very happy girl.

Looking up at him, she offered an innocent smile. "Can you tell me what to do so I do it right?"

Tate let out a low growl without even opening his mouth and she could feel his heart beating hard in his chest. It made her feel powerful to know she was causing him to have this kind of reaction. No one had ever made her feel as beautiful or as seen as Tate did and she liked the way it caused her body to react. Her pussy was absolutely soaked.

"What's your safeword, Aria?"

"Red," she said firmly.

His expression was pure pride as he nodded. "Good girl. Climb down onto your knees in front of me."

She scrambled as quickly as she could to the floor and realized she probably looked a little crazy with the speed she was moving, but she was excited. She'd seen cocks before but never in real life and, based on what was poking her bottom earlier, the one Tate was sporting wasn't a small one.

His thighs were wide as she sat perched on her knees in front of him, the whimsical music from the movie playing in the background. Her fingertips were cold with anticipation so

she slid them under her legs to warm them before she touched him. Surely cold fingers wouldn't be a turn on for him.

His gray eyes were pinned to hers making her feel a mixture of excitement and nerves. What if she didn't do it right? What if she giggled when she saw it? Oh, god, she might giggle. Maybe she should have asked to turn out the lights. Shit, it was daylight and even with the lights out, she'd be able to see it. Oh, crap. What if she threw up on him because she was so nervous?

“Aria.” His deep rumbling voice cut through her thoughts.

She lifted her eyes to meet his.

“Whatever you're worrying about in that beautiful head of yours, stop. I know you're not experienced, and we will take this slowly. Understand? Take a deep breath for Daddy.”

Pulling in a deep inhale, she slowly let it out and as she did, her body relaxed. He told her to do it again and with each deep breath she took, both her body and mind felt better.

“Good girl. You don't have to do this right now.”

She felt her eyes widen. “But, I want to.”

“Okay. Do you want to pull it out or do you want me to pull it out for you?”

Pulling her bottom lip between her teeth, she reached for his belt. “Can I do it?”

He nodded and shifted so it was easier for her to undo his pants. Her hands trembled but he didn't say anything, he just let her go at her pace. When he reached out and started stroking her hair, she melted into his hand and felt a boost of confidence as if it was radiating right from his palm into her body.

It felt like it took forever before she got his belt undone then the button of his jeans. When she reached to pull the zipper down, she raised her eyes to his as she did it. Moving her eyes back down to his crotch, she tugged at his jeans and Tate lifted his hips just slightly. He had on a pair of tight,

black, boxer-briefs and she could see the thick outline of his cock through the material.

Without his instruction, she reached up and ran the tip of her finger over his length, making him groan and lay his head on the back of the couch.

“Fuck, baby. You kill me. You absolutely kill me,” he murmured.

She couldn't help but smile at his words and as his hand continued to stroke her hair, she continued to stroke his cock.

“Pull it out of my underwear.”

Even though her hands shook, she did as he said and tucked her fingers into the waistband of his underwear, pulling them down and letting his cock spring free. And holy hell, that thing was huge. Bigger than she expected, even after seeing the outline. And it was beautiful. Pink and smooth with the perfect mushroom head and veins running down it. He was also neatly trimmed, which she liked more than she'd expected.

“Look at me, Aria,” he commanded softly.

Tearing her eyes away from his cock, she raised her gaze to his and swallowed. His gorgeous eyes were smoldering and piercing right through her. She could feel herself panting and her nipples were painfully hard against her shirt.

They stared at each other for a long time before he nodded. “Good girl. Wrap your hand around it and get familiar with it. Don't pull too hard or scratch it but other than that, you won't hurt it.”

She nodded and looked back at his dick before she wrapped one hand around the thickness. The tips of her fingers didn't touch no matter how hard she squeezed. Gliding her hand up and down the velvety skin, she traced the lines of veins, circled the abrupt edge of the crown, and slid her thumb over the tip that was leaking his juices.

When she gathered some of his pre-come onto her thumb, she let go of his penis and brought the digit up to her mouth, sliding it inside to taste it, moaning quietly at the flavor.

Tate groaned and dropped his head back. “Fuck, Aria. You don’t even try to be sexy and yet you’re the sexiest woman I’ve ever laid eyes on.”

Her lips pulled back into a grin as she pulled her thumb from her lips with a loud pop. “Can I taste more?”

He sucked air between his teeth and nodded. “Only if you really want to. You don’t have to do this, Little one.”

Sticking her bottom lip out in a pout, she narrowed her eyes at him. “But I want to.”

A deep chuckle rumbled from his chest. “No pouting, Little girl, unless you want me to really give you something to pout about.”

Somehow that threat didn’t do anything other than make her pussy clench and weep into her diaper even more. Leaving her pouty lip right where it was, she lowered her face to the head of his cock and kissed it gently before she pulled back and looked up at him. “I don’t know what I’m doing.”

“Just don’t use your teeth and you’ll be fine, baby girl. Do what you feel is comfortable.”

Taking a deep breath, she nodded and lowered her mouth again, pressing another kiss to the head before opening her lips and lowering her mouth onto him. She hummed quietly as she swirled her tongue around him, closing her eyes as the flavor and scent of him filled her senses, causing her to seek friction between her legs.

His hand tightened in her hair. “Spread your knees. You know the rule about playing with your little pussy. Only Daddy gets to do that.”

She let out a light noise of protest and his hand tightened even more. The slight pain only seemed to cause her arousal to climb even higher and when she spread her knees, she practically whimpered in frustration.

Sheesh. It was like now that she’d had an orgasm, she was some sort of needy hussy. The thought thrilled her and she wanted to beg Tate to touch her, but at the same time, she wanted to give him the pleasure he’d given her earlier.

“Fuck, Aria. Shit. Baby, don’t take more than you can handle.”

His cock bumped the back of her throat causing her to gag slightly but, instead of pulling back, she went deep again and moaned as she gagged a second time. The noises he made, the curse words, the soft words of praise, all just spurred her on until she was sucking his cock like she’d seen pornstars do in the videos. Only she was actually enjoying it, and the noises of pleasure she was making were real.

“Baby, fuck, fuck! I’m going to come, Aria. Pull your head back,” he growled.

Instead of obeying, she tightened her hold on the base of his cock and sucked harder. When his hips started moving, thrusting his cock into her mouth, she knew he was right there. Using her free hand, she cupped his balls and played gently with them until she felt them tighten before hot shots of his come hit the back of her throat while he grunted through his orgasm.

His breathing was rapid as she pulled her mouth away from him, using the back of her hand to wipe her lips. She was grinning and when he opened his eyes to peer down at her, he chuckled and leaned forward, pulling her up from the floor onto his lap.

“Jesus Christ, Aria,” he murmured. “That was...fuck.”

She giggled and nuzzled her head against his chest. “Did I do okay?”

He let out an exasperated noise. “Baby, that was more than okay. That was the hottest blow job I’ve ever received and completely unexpected. You did amazing.”

“I liked doing it,” she admitted.

“It seemed so. I bet if I reach down the front of your diaper, your pussy is going to be soaked, isn’t it?”

She was thankful her head was tucked under his chin because her cheeks suddenly turned warm, and she was afraid she might be sporting the color of tomatoes on them.

When she didn't reply after a few seconds, Tate repositioned her so her back was resting against his front. "Spread your legs and place them on the outside of mine."

One of his arms was wrapped around her front, holding her securely against him. When she did as he said, leaving her legs wide open and making her feel exposed even though she was wearing leggings and diaper, he kissed the side of her throat.

"Good girl."

That simple praise made her clit pulse and when his free hand started stroking her neck, wrapping his hand around the sides and squeezing slightly, she moaned and rolled her head back onto his chest.

Tate brought his mouth down to the shell of her ear. "You're so beautiful, Aria."

His hand moved down the center of her chest and when he reached her breasts, he stroked each nipple through her shirt before giving each one a gentle pinch and moving his hand down to the waistband of her leggings.

She had her hands resting on the arm that was wrapped around her tummy. She felt so secure and safe with him that it was easy to let go and enjoy all the sensations of his touch. He tucked his fingers inside her pants and diaper and cupped her pussy, his middle finger slipping between her soaked lips.

"So wet. Are you wet for Daddy?"

The only thing she could do was bob her head up and down because her mind was too clouded to make words come out. He moved his finger over her swollen clit, making her legs tremble as he started toying with her.

"So wet," he murmured in her ear as he made lazy circles around her swollen pearl.

"Uh-huh." That was the only thing she could get out before a moan escaped and she widened her legs a little more for him.

His fingers played her like an instrument while his free arm held her tightly against him, making her feel secure while at the same time, he made her come apart. Her entire body

trembled as she moaned and cried out, grinding her hips against his fingers at the same time.

“Such a greedy Little girl. You need Daddy to make you come?”

Oh, god. This man. Those dirty words.

As if he knew what they did to her, he chuckled and dipped a finger inside her pussy, curling it in while he moved his other hand into her diaper and started flicking her clit. “Come for me, Aria. Come all over Daddy’s hand so I can lick up your delicious juices.”

Within a second, she flew right over the edge, thrashing her arms behind her to grab hold of him any way she could as he made her brain short circuit and her body melt into a relaxed pile of goo.

“Holy fuck,” she murmured when she finally came down from her high.

Tate chuckled and tweaked her nipple. “No cursing.”

She knew he was just being playful but she loved that no matter what, his Daddy side was always there. The man was everything and more than she could ever imagine and they hadn’t even had sex. She just hoped her heart would survive once he decided she wasn’t the right Little for him.

TATE

He was falling quickly for this woman. There was a pull between them and even though he didn't know her very well, he already knew he didn't ever want her to leave his house. He would move her belongings in the next day if she were willing. Not that she would be but damn, he was already thinking about forever.

After they messed around with each other, Tate had cradled her in his arms and they'd cuddled in silence for over an hour until he had to get started on dinner. Holding her felt even more intimate than the orgasms they'd given each other. The way she clung to him made him feel like a king.

"I think you should take a week off work until we get your iron levels back up," he told her as they sat next to each other at his kitchen table eating dinner.

He'd made her spaghetti with homemade meatballs. Of course, he'd cut up her noodles and meatballs and given her a thick plastic spoon to eat her dinner with. She hadn't even hesitated when she took the spoon from him. Her Littleness was something that seemed to always be right at the surface.

Aria paused mid-bite and brought her blue eyes up to meet his, a look of embarrassment on her face. "I can't."

He knew without even having to ask that her reasoning had to do with money, and he hated that she felt she couldn't even take time off while she was under the weather. She'd been working herself much too hard lately and that needed to stop.

“You can. I can write you a doctor’s note excusing you from work.”

She was avoiding eye contact and he hated that because he knew she was too proud and too embarrassed to tell him she needed the money. He was smart enough to put two and two together, though, and he wanted to ease her fears.

He set his fork down and reached out to take her hand in his, kissing the back of her knuckles. “I will cover your expenses while you’re off work, Aria. It’s more important that you get healthy. If you don’t take the time now, it could just make things worse.”

The way her eyes turned wide made it obvious she didn’t expect him to pay her way. She’d already told him that more than once and while he respected the fact she didn’t want him for his money, he wanted to shower her with money and gifts and all the things she’d missed out on in her life.

“I don’t want you to take care of me like that. I like you for you and I don’t want you to ever feel like I’m using you.”

Tate reached out and plucked her up from her seat and brought her to his lap so she was straddling him, their eyes locked together. “Baby girl, I know you don’t want me for my money and that means the world to me. I want to take care of you, though. And by taking care of you, that means financially along with all the other stuff. I’ll never take away your independence and if you want to continue working, I won’t stand in the way of that once you’re better. For right now, though, please let Daddy take care of you?”

Her resolve was disappearing, He could see it on her face and was thankful. He’d meant what he said about never standing in her way if she wanted to work. However, she’d never have to work a day in her life if she didn’t want to as long as they were together.

“Only while I’m off work,” she finally said.

“Okay, baby. Only while you’re off work. Call your boss after dinner and let them know.”

She let out a deep sigh and nodded. Keeping her on his lap, he reached over for her plate and slid it in front of them so he could feed her the rest of her dinner. Little did she know there was chopped up spinach, pureed carrots, and acorn squash mixed in with the sauce. Her hums of approval as she ate made him smile.

OVER THE NEXT couple of days, Tate took time off from work so he could look after Aria. He kept her on a schedule and made sure she had a nap each day. Even though they had agreed to having a dynamic, he was still moving slow with her. If he went full speed ahead, he was worried he would scare her away. His need for control and taking care of her was so strong, he worried she would feel suffocated. Some Littles liked that feeling but a lot of them didn't. They still wanted some independence and to be able to do things on their own.

The only times he diapered her were during bedtime and naptime. She never asked to wear them more than that, so he didn't push it. He also hadn't bottle fed her yet even though he wanted to. Instead, he gave her all her drinks in cute water bottles. She was drinking down her nutritional shakes without complaint and already seemed to have a bit more energy. All her other blood work had come back normal so he was pleased about that.

Aria spent a good amount of time in the nursery, playing with all the toys, looking at the picture books, coloring, and exploring all the things in there. Sometimes he would just stand in the doorway and watch her as she played. She was so innocent and sweet. While he loved it, he also felt the beast inside of him that wanted to pin her down and fuck her until the only word she could remember was his name.

They hadn't fooled around since the last time on the couch, and he knew it was probably better that way. He didn't want to take her virginity until they both knew for sure that this relationship would be long term. Having something long-term with her was something he wanted more than anything, but he

had no idea where she stood on that. He was just waiting until she decided he was too old for her, or too boring, or too something. The one thing he felt confident about was that Aria didn't want him for his money and while that was a good feeling, he wondered if he had anything else to offer her besides that to make her want to stay. The women in his past had made it seem like money was the only thing they saw in him.

“Stupid fucking puzzle.”

Snapped out of his thoughts, Tate narrowed his eyes at Aria as she struggled to get a 3D puzzle together. He could see the frustration etched on her face as she tried to force a piece to fit where it didn't belong.

“Excuse me, Little one? What did you just say?”

She whirled around, obviously unaware he'd come to stand in the doorway, her eyes wide. “It's not working.”

Her bottom lip was sticking out in a pout, but he wasn't going to let that distract him. No matter how damn cute it was.

“I can see it's not working but is that kind of language allowed?”

When she didn't respond, he stepped into the room and walked over to her, squatting down. “Answer Daddy.”

Annoyance filled her expression and her eyebrows pulled together. “No. But it is stupid. It's not working.”

He reached out and cupped her chin firmly. “It might be stupid and it's okay to be frustrated but using swear words is against the rules, isn't it?”

This was the first time since they'd set the rules that she'd broken one and part of him was questioning if he should discipline her over it, but the more he thought about it, the more he realized he needed to enforce the rules they'd set. Otherwise, she might think he didn't care enough to punish her or, she might think she could get away with whatever she wanted, and that wouldn't fly in the long run.

“Aria, when Daddy asks you a question, I expect an answer. Is swearing against the rules?”

“Yes,” she murmured, lowering her gaze from his.

“Yes, what?” he prompted.

She sighed softly. “Yes, Daddy.”

He rose and held out his hand for her. “Stand up.”

She slid her hand in his and got to her feet, the tulle skirt she had on swaying as she moved.

“Go stand in the corner over there, nose pointing in. Ten minutes.”

Letting out a gasp, she glared up at him. “Ten minutes! That’s ridiculous.”

Both of his eyebrows shot up. He wasn’t used to Aria being quite so sassy and she’d never back-talked him before. Was she testing him? Was ten minutes ridiculous? No, it wasn’t.

“I’m going to count to three, and if your nose isn’t in that corner by the time I get to three, I’ll add a spanking to your punishment. One.”

Her glare only intensified as she put her hands on her hips with no indication of moving. She wanted to square off? Well, two could play that game.

“Two.”

Aria let out a huff but didn’t move. “Ten minutes is ridiculous. I only said fucking!”

Okay, that was it. His Little girl wanted to test the waters, she was gonna get wet.

“Three.”

He reached out and plucked her up from her spot. She kicked and squealed as he carried her over to the rocking chair.

“Daddy! You’re being mean!”

Once he sat down, he set her on her feet, keeping hold of her hips so she couldn’t get away. “Daddy isn’t being mean.

Aria is being naughty and naughty Little girls get punished. You could have just stood in the corner for ten minutes but instead you wanted to test me, which is fine. But testing Daddy won't go in your favor, Little one."

Before she could argue, he tucked his thumbs inside the waistband of her skirt and panties and pulled them down, leaving her bare pussy on display right in front of him. His cock thickened at the sight, but he ignored his arousal and continued what he was doing.

She tried to reach down and pull her clothes back up but he swatted her hands away.

"I'm sorry, Daddy. I'll go to the corner. Even though ten minutes is stupid."

It was a struggle to keep himself from chuckling. His girl didn't sound very sorry but he'd make sure her tune was different before the spanking was over.

"You had the chance to go to the corner, but you refused so now you get to have your cute little bottom spanked before you go stand in the corner."

He pulled her down over his lap and even though she tried to struggle against his hold, she was no match for him.

"You have a safeword, Aria. What is it?"

Letting out a huff, she glared at him. "It's red."

"Good girl. You may use your safeword if you feel you need to but unless you do, Daddy is going to spank your bottom until you're a very sorry Little girl. Understand?"

"But, Daddy—"

He cut her off with a swat to her bottom making her yelp. "I asked if you understood."

"Yes," she murmured.

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, Daddy."

It was hard not to sit and admire the position she was in over his lap. Her pussy was glistening between her legs and the spot he'd just swatted was already turning red. She was making small little sounds of protest even though she'd stopped physically struggling against him.

He rubbed his palm over the soft flesh of her bottom and when she let out a soft moan, he knew he needed to stop. It wouldn't take much for him to turn this punishment into something more pleasurable for both of them. His Little girl had a lesson to learn and that was to not test her Daddy.

Lifting his hand, he brought it down with a sharp smack on one cheek and then again on the other, making her let out a yelp. He started in a steady rhythm, wanting her to get used to the feel of being spanked. Since it was her first spanking, he wouldn't make it a harsh one.

When her yelps subsided and she stopped squirming, he picked up the pace and started spanking her in random spots, covering her entire bottom and causing her to start protesting again as her feet kicked the floor.

“Naughty Little girls who disobey their Daddies end up with red hot bottoms. When Daddy gives you a command, I expect obedience, otherwise you'll end up right here each and every time,” he scolded as he spanked.

Aria whimpered and sniffed but he knew she hadn't reached the point of tears yet.

“I'm sorry, Daddy. I don't know why I didn't listen.”

He gave each of her tender sit spots a sharp swat before he paused. “You didn't listen because you were testing Daddy. You wanted to see what would happen and now you're learning that lesson, aren't you, Little girl?”

She sniffed again. “Yes, Daddy.”

The spanking continued for several more minutes until he heard her let out a soft sob as her body went limp over his lap, accepting the punishment without a fight.

Almost immediately, he pulled her up to sit on his lap, wrapping her up in his arms as he started rocking her. “That's

it, baby girl. Let it out. That's my girl. My good girl. Daddy's got you. I'm not going anywhere, baby. I got you."

And he meant every word of it.

ARIA

The spanking hadn't even been all that horrible. She really didn't even know why she was crying. Maybe it was all the years of having to figure things out on her own, or always feeling lonely, or always feeling like a nobody to people and now she suddenly felt like this man saw her as something special. She wasn't sure but whatever it was, the tears felt good and his arms felt even better around her.

Honestly, she didn't know what she'd been thinking being disobedient like that. She'd never considered herself to be a brat or the type of Little who would intentionally be defiant. Maybe her Daddy had been right. Maybe she'd been testing him.

Things had been going so smoothly and even though she had a feeling Tate wanted to be more involved in her caretaking, he hadn't pushed anything. He hadn't even bathed her, though he always told her to keep the bathroom door open and made her take a baby monitor into the bathroom with her. It felt like he'd been holding back so she wondered if she'd been testing him to see if he would actually discipline her. And oh, he had. Her bottom was on fire, but she also felt closer to him and more secure for some reason.

He held her for several minutes until her tears subsided then he set her on her feet facing him. "Ten minutes in the corner. After that, we'll snuggle and talk, okay?"

She sniffled and nodded. When she reached down to pull her pants and panties back up, he stopped her and shook his

head. “Naughty Little girls stand in the corner with their red bottoms on display. Put your hands on my shoulders and step out of your pants and panties.”

Her cheeks felt like they were on fire as he leaned down and lowered her clothes to the floor, waiting for her to step out of them. Putting her hands on his shoulders, she lifted one foot, then the other, leaving her completely naked from the waist down. A shiver ran through her as his eyes roamed over her pussy and she knew she was wet. She could feel it. That spanking had awakened something else inside her body besides emotions.

He cleared his throat and pointed toward the corner. “Go on. Ten minutes.”

The walk from the rocking chair to the corner felt like the length of a football field and knowing he was watching her the entire way only made it worse. She was dying to look at her bottom in a mirror to see what it looked like. Without a doubt, it was flaming red, but she found that kind of hot. His mark was on her, even if it was just temporary. Although, she was feeling like he’d have a mark on her heart forever.

WHEN HER TEN minutes were finally up, Tate walked up behind her and wrapped his arms around her front, pulling her into him. Closing her eyes, she sighed and put her arms over his.

“Come on, baby girl. Let’s go cuddle and talk.”

Her tummy twisted in a knot. That was the second time he’d said they would talk and she was starting to worry it might not be a good talk. Was he ready to get rid of her? Did he decide he didn’t want her anymore because she’d been naughty?

Dread filled her as he took her hand and led her back over to the rocking chair. When he sat down, he reached out and pulled her onto his lap, his arms wrapped around her firmly.

“Tell Daddy how that spanking felt.”

She shifted, her hot bottom scratching against his jeans. “It hurted. But it wasn’t horrible. I didn’t feel like I needed to say my safeword.”

“Good. And in the future, when Daddy tells you to do something, are you going to argue?”

Biting her bottom lip, she raised her gaze to his. “Lying is against the rules.”

His eyebrows pulled together for a brief second before he started chuckling. “Ah. So what you’re saying is you’ll probably be in this same predicament in the future.”

This made her smile. “Maybe. I’ll try to listen in the future. I don’t know what came over me.”

The warmth in his expression made her feel a bit better. He didn’t seem angry with her.

“Oh, baby girl. You have no idea how much I adore you. I don’t expect you to be a perfect angel all the time. Little girls are naughty sometimes and that’s just how the dynamic works. I’m glad you’re honest.”

Lowering her eyes from his, she ran her fingers along the front of his shirt. “Are you mad at me?”

His eyes widened and he cocked his head to the side. “What? No. Why would you think that? Baby girl, I’ll never be angry with you for being naughty. The only time I would be angry is if you do something purposely dangerous.”

She let out a deep breath. Thank goodness. She would have been crushed if he’d been mad at her or if he wanted to get rid of her. “Okay.”

“Now, would you like Daddy to help you with your puzzle?”

Her entire body warmed. He was willing to play with her? “Yes, please.”

Once he set her on her feet, he got up and followed her over to where the puzzle was still on the carpeted floor, and

she watched as he lowered himself to the ground like it was no big deal.

She was falling in love with this man. Hard and fast.

Tate spent the next hour playing on the floor with her and once the puzzle was put together, she grinned at him and couldn't stop herself from leaning over to kiss him.

“Thank you.”

His hand came to the back of her head as he kissed her back deeply, taking control almost immediately. A moan escaped her mouth as she took everything he gave her, her nipples budding into firm points. Wiggling closer to him, she winced as the carpet rubbed against her naked bottom, but she didn't care. She needed to touch him.

Their hands started roaming each other's bodies and when she slid her hand down his front, she was pleased to feel his big erection pressing against the front of his pants. Her pussy clenched in response and she knew she was probably soaking the floor.

“Daddy,” she murmured into his mouth.

He pulled away just slightly so he could look at her. “Yeah, baby?”

“Please take me into your room and fuck me.”

The way his eyes widened almost made her giggle. He was surprised by her forwardness but based on the smile forming on his lips, he liked it.

“Baby, you're—”

Pressing her hand against his mouth to stop him from talking, she shook her head. “Don't use me being a virgin as an excuse. I want to fuck you. I want to lose my virginity to you. I'm old enough to make that choice. Please don't make me beg, because I will.”

The concern in his eyes quickly vanished, replaced by pure heat as he got to his feet and pulled her up from the floor. “My bedroom, strip, now.”

He swatted her bottom, making her yelp then giggle as she quickly made her way out to the hall. She had reached his bedroom and stood in the center of the room, unsure of what to do next when his hand landed on her shoulder. She turned her head to look at him questioningly when he sat and quickly pulled her down over his lap.

“I told you to strip, didn’t I,” he growled. “Hold still.”

“But...” her voice was muffled in the duvet as he swatted her backside in a steady rhythm. “But...”

“No buts, unless it’s this adorable one I’m touching.” His hand slowed a bit. “Understand?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“Good girl.” He patted her bottom then pulled her up again, his hands going to the hem of her shirt. He pulled it up over her head then dropped it to the floor beside him, his eyes roaming her body.

“Lie down on the bed,” he said, taking his own jeans off.

A moment later, she was lying on her back in the middle of the bed, staring at his hard body as he stripped off his shirt, leaving him in all his glorious nakedness. The man was ripped. He stood at the edge of the bed in front of her, looking down at her in an almost predatory way that made her shudder in anticipation.

“You’re mine,” was all he said, looking into her eyes as he spread her legs.

“Yes.” Her heart skipped a beat. “My first time is yours.”

He didn’t reply, just dipped his head down and put his mouth on her, licking and sucking her clit softly, then harder, pumping her with one, then two fingers, stretching her. The twinge of pain mixed with the pleasure of his tongue only seemed to turn her on more. He continued fucking her with his fingers until her back arched up off the bed and she let out a scream, gripping the bedding at her sides. She tasted blood on her lip where she had bitten it when she’d come. Her heart pounded in her chest and the next thing she knew, he was

above her, pressing kisses to her face, her neck, and her breasts in such a gentle way she felt herself choke up.

“Open your eyes and concentrate on me and what you’re feeling,” he whispered and kissed her again, his tongue sliding into her mouth, slow and sensual.

She loved that he gave her instructions. It gave her the chance to let go and just obey. Bringing her fingers up to his bare chest, she gently ran her nails down his front until her hands found his hard cock. She stroked him, her hands moving along his shaft, feeling the way he twitched against the palm of her hand. She heard him hiss, and she wanted more.

He moved back so he was sitting up on his knees.

“Come here and take me in your mouth,” he said in a thick voice.

She moved quickly, excited to get to taste him and as soon as she wrapped her lips around his cock, she moaned as the flavor of his pre-come touched her tongue.

“Now suck me,” he told her.

She took him deeper, sucking harder.

“You have a beautiful mouth, Aria. Everything about you is so goddamn beautiful. Light, soft, hot. Suck me harder, baby.”

She did and he groaned. She liked knowing she made him lose control. Feeling his hands in her hair, she pressed a palm to the base of his cock, then took him back in her mouth again. She moved her head back and forth, making him groan again. She continued to move her hand while her mouth did the same, up and down, sucking him and licking him.

He shuddered and quickly pulled away. She let out a noise of protest that had him raising his eyebrows.

“Lie back,” he told her as he reached over to the bedside table and pulled a condom out of the drawer.

She obeyed without hesitation, and he looked at her with a dark, smoldering look, causing a shiver to run through her. He

put the condom on and moved over her, nudging her legs wider with his knees.

“You’re sure you’re ready for this? It’s not too late to stop.”

Narrowing her eyes, she frowned. “Yes, I want this and I’m so ready. Do you want this?”

She hated that nip of self-doubt she felt about him wanting her.

“Baby girl, I want you more than I’ve ever wanted anything in my life.”

His words made that doubt disappear into thin air, making her smile up at him. “Please fuck me.”

He kept his eyes on her as she felt the head of his cock nudge her pussy. “I’m going to go slow at first but it still might hurt a little.”

Sucking her bottom lip between her teeth, she nodded. “I trust you.”

The look in his eyes when she said those three little words became almost feral, but he didn’t speed up. Instead, he started inching into her at a snail-like speed.

“Faster, please,” she whimpered as she tried to relax enough to adjust to his size.

As if he knew she was uncomfortable, he dipped his head down and started sucking on her nipple, making her cry out.

“Fuck. I’m not going to last long. I’ve been imagining doing this to you since the first time I saw you,” he growled.

“Please. Please fuck me, Daddy. I need you. I need it all. Take me,” she said desperately.

He hesitated briefly before he pushed the rest of the way into her, taking her breath right out of her lungs. Her eyes widened and her entire body tensed as pain seared through her. It only lasted for a few seconds until he started kissing her neck, making her relax against the mattress. She felt so incredibly full and despite the pain, it felt so perfect.

When he finally started moving, he went slowly at first. His thrusts were gentle but deliberate. The pain quickly morphed into pleasure and holy hell, it was the most exquisite pleasure she'd ever felt. He reached down and pinched her nipple as he started thrusting into her. Her body started to tense and she felt her climax building, her nails digging into his back as he started fucking her hard, fast, and deep. Her orgasm was so close, but she wasn't ready for this moment to be over.

She was so wet and they were moving together so perfectly. His mouth covered hers as he fucked her so perfectly. It was intimate but hot at the same time.

He reached down and pinched her clit, making her cry out as her climax started to explode, her body practically levitating off the bed. At the same time, his thrusts became erratic as his own orgasm exploded. After several seconds, he slowed his thrusts and she could feel his cock throbbing in her, swollen and thick. Everything including her heart felt so damn full.

TATE

He lowered himself and a nearly sleeping Aria into his oversized bathtub. She made a soft humming noise as the steaming water surrounded their bodies but other than that, neither of them spoke for a long while. The gift she'd just given him felt so special, his heart restricted at just the thought of it. He was in love with this woman. She'd stolen his heart and he was afraid she might not want to keep it.

Ignoring those thoughts, he sighed and rolled his head back against the edge of the tub, his fingers stroking up and down her back. He had to return to work the next day and he was dreading it. The thought of retiring from the hospital and starting his own practice sounded so much better. Especially if it were a practice designed specifically for Littles. He wondered if Aria would be interested in being his secretary. That way they wouldn't ever have to be away from each other.

Yeah, he was being possessive, but he'd never had anyone he'd truly felt possessive over until her and the need to take care of her and protect her from the world was so damn strong.

"Can we do that again?" she finally asked.

A soft chuckle rolled out of his chest. "Maybe tomorrow night, baby. You need time to heal. You're going to be sore tonight."

She let out a sigh. "Yeah. I was afraid you'd say that."

They went quiet again and when the water started to cool, he turned on the faucet to add some hot water into the bath.

“I’d like you to continue to stay here when I return to work. You can play all day and I’ll be able to call and check on you and make sure you’re being a good girl and taking a nap,” he finally told her.

Her body tensed. “But I don’t live here.”

“No, but I like you being here and I’d feel better knowing you’re here while I’m working. Especially while you’re still getting better.”

That was his excuse at least. He wasn’t about to tell her he wanted to move all her stuff into his house permanently.

“Oh. Okay.”

“Thank you. We’d better get out of the tub before we turn into raisins. Besides, it’s dinner time and I need to feed my girl.”

She smiled and nodded. “Okay, Daddy. No vegetables, though.”

He couldn’t help but throw his head back and laugh. That was his girl. Always trying to get out of eating her vegetables. Little did she know he’d hidden them in every single one of her meals he’d made, and she still hadn’t realized it.

THE NEXT TWO days at work were grueling. Several trauma emergencies came in and the ER was short on doctors, so Tate ended up working twelve-hour shifts. He hated not being home to look after Aria, but his housekeeper was there the second day and updated him on how she was doing. Glenda had been his housekeeper for years and knew he was a Daddy. She didn’t seem to judge his lifestyle and he was thankful for that.

Aria had seemed distant when he’d gotten home both nights and he wasn’t sure why. Whenever he’d asked her if something was bothering her, she’d told him she was fine. He wanted to push her, but he was also so damn exhausted by the time he got off work that he was happy to be able to eat a

quick dinner and snuggle up on the couch with her to watch a movie.

As the hours went by at the hospital, Tate realized he truly was ready to step away from his position there and find something more fulfilling and less time consuming. He had someone in his life now and he wanted to spend his time with her. She deserved his attention and affection.

She was in the bathtub, surrounded by foamy bubbles, while he sat on the lip of the tub watching her.

“So, I’m thinking about retiring from the hospital. Maybe starting my own part-time practice.”

He wasn’t really sure why he was bringing it up, but he felt it was important to communicate his life plans with her since he planned to have her in his life forever. It was no longer just himself he needed to worry about. They were a unit now and he wanted her to be part of big decisions like this.

She looked up from the toy she had in her hand and scrunched her face. “Why?”

“Because I’m exhausted. I don’t want to work twelve-hour days anymore. I don’t want to deal with traumas every day. I want to be home more so I can spend time with you.”

Her eyes lowered from his and she nibbled on her lip. It seemed as though she had something on her mind but then she shrugged. “I mean, you can, but I have a full-time job.”

“You don’t need to work full-time, baby. You don’t have to work at all if you don’t want to. If you want to go to school or just stay home, I want you to do that.”

ARIA

She heard what he was saying but her mind was warring with her. While he'd been working the past couple of days, she'd been hanging out around his house questioning if he even had feelings for her. She'd pretty much convinced herself that he didn't and he only wanted her around because he felt some sort of obligation.

"I need to keep working. I like my job."

That was a lie and the look in his eye told her he knew it was a lie. But quitting her job would be irresponsible. When the time came that he decided she wasn't sophisticated enough or she was too much work and he kicked her to the curb, she couldn't be jobless. No, she had to keep working. She'd been homeless once and she couldn't do it again. Even though her apartment wasn't in the best area of town, it was hers and it was a solid roof over her head each night.

The look on Tate's face made her squirm. She really didn't want to have a conversation about this because it just made her feel sad. Looking down at the squirty toy in her hand, she got an idea and dunked it under the bubbles, filling it with water.

Bringing her hand up quickly, she caused the water to slosh, making Tate jump back slightly but not before she got him square in the chest with water from her toy. She burst out giggling as he looked down at his wet shirt then back at her, a devilish look on his face.

"That was naughty, Aria."

She shrugged and smiled as innocently as she could. “Oopsie.”

When he pulled off his shirt, her smile fell and she was pretty sure she was drooling as she looked at his muscular chest. He was so hot. It was hard to believe this man was in his fifties.

The next thing she knew, he'd pulled the plug on the drain and was lifting her out of the tub, wrapping a towel around her.

“You're in trouble, Little girl.”

His words were threatening but his tone was playful, and she knew she wasn't really in trouble. She had lightened the mood and was happy about that.

Tate led her into the bedroom with his hand on her lower back. Once they got to the bed, he pressed between her shoulder blades until her top half was resting on the mattress.

“Why did you splash Daddy?”

Wiggling her bottom as he lifted the towel, she made a noise of protest. “I didn't mean to, Daddy.”

A sharp smack to her bottom made her yelp but as the sting of his palm registered in her mind, it also caused her arousal to spread.

“I don't believe you, princess. You know what happens to Little girls who squirt their Daddies and then fib about it being a mistake?”

She whimpered as he swatted her other cheek. “No.”

“They get their naughty bottoms spanked and they don't get to come.”

His fingers slid through her wet folds and pinched her clit, making her start panting as her fingers gripped the bedding. She moaned as he found a rhythm on her clit and as she felt herself getting close to orgasm, he pulled away and started spanking her bottom with fast and hard smacks.

“Ouchie! I’m sorry!” she cried out. It didn’t really hurt that bad. It stung, but that only seemed to spur her arousal even more. Each smack made her pussy throb and her nipples ache with need. Maybe squirting him had been a bad idea because she was pretty sure if he didn’t let her come, she was going to die.

Suddenly, he stopped spanking her and returned his fingers to her pussy, playing with her like an instrument. As soon as her orgasm started to build again, he pulled away and started the spanking again.

This went on for what felt like forever and each time he touched her pussy again, she got closer and closer to the edge.

“Please, Daddy. I’ll never be naughty again.”

He dipped a finger into her pussy as a chuckle rumbled up from his chest. “I don’t believe that for a second.”

Crap.

“What do you want, Aria?”

Biting her lip, she glanced back at him. She could see he was just as aroused as she was. “Please let me come. Please. I’ll be such a good girl.”

A satisfied smile spread across his face and a second later he curled his finger inside of her while using his other hand to play with her clit until she was screaming out her release. Her legs went weak and he had to grab hold of her to keep her from sliding down onto the carpet.

He picked her up and gently tossed her onto the bed. “Get on all fours and lower your chest to the mattress so your bottom is up in the air.”

Her eyes widened but when he started removing his pants and underwear, she realized what he wanted. She scrambled to get into the position so fast he laughed as he rolled on a condom.

“This is going to be hard and fast, baby. You ready?”

Fuck, was she ever. Despite her orgasm, she felt as though she was already riding the edge of another one.

“Yes, Daddy. Please, fuck me. Hard.”

He let out a growl before he gripped her hips and pulled her pussy back toward him. Suddenly, he thrust into her in one swift, hard move. She cried out, her pussy stinging as it adjusted to his size, but when he started moving inside her, the sting morphed into pleasure. It only took a few seconds before he was fucking her hard and fast like he'd promised and both of them exploded together.

They collapsed onto the bed, panting for air for several minutes and when he moved to get up, she let out a sound of protest as his semi-hard cock slid out of her pussy.

“I'll be right back, baby,” he said, stroking her hair away from her face.

When he returned a moment later, he used a warm wet washcloth to clean her up before tossing it to the side and crawling into bed with her, pulling her against his hard body.

“I'll get you in a diaper and pajamas in a few minutes,” he murmured against her neck.

After a bit, he got up to get her ready for bed but since she was already half asleep, he had to do most of the work. When she was wrapped up tight in a diaper and had a nightie on, he crawled back into bed with her and pulled the blankets up over them before sliding her pacifier between her lips. It didn't take long before both of them drifted to sleep, wrapped up into each other's arms.

IT HAD BEEN another long day alone while Tate had to work extra hours at the hospital again. Deep down, she knew he was truly just working, but the uncertain side of her was thinking up all kinds of troublesome thoughts. Maybe he was trying to avoid her, or maybe he was actually with someone else. There were so many what ifs and maybes in her mind and it was making her anxious.

She was planning to return to work in two days and was dreading it. She could never go in that diner again and be perfectly happy about it, but there was no other choice. No respectable job would hire her. The only certification she had was her high school diploma and her grades in school hadn't been all that spectacular. Much to her parent's disapproval.

When her phone started ringing around six, she grabbed it off the couch next to her and saw it was Tate. He called her often throughout the day to check on her. Every time she saw his name on the caller ID, she couldn't help but smile.

"Hi," she answered.

"Hi, baby girl. How are you doing?"

Not wanting to worry him, she gave him the answer she knew he would prefer. "I'm good. Just watching a movie."

"Good girl. I'm almost out of here but I was thinking maybe we could go out to dinner tonight? Daddy is tired and doesn't feel like cooking and I know you're probably feeling antsy to get out of the house."

Excitement ran through her. He wanted to take her out to dinner? Like a date?

"Yes! I'd love that."

He chuckled softly. "Good. Think about what kind of food you want and I'll be home in a bit to pick you up. Put on the yellow baby doll dress I got for you and a pair of white panties underneath."

She looked down at her outfit, which was a pair of soft pajama pants and a tank top, and quietly giggled. "Okay, Daddy."

As soon as they ended the call, she leaped from the couch and bolted upstairs to get ready. Since she'd been staying with Tate, she'd pretty much been living in pajamas, but he'd been ordering her all kinds of cute dresses and she was so excited to wear the yellow dress. When he'd shown it to her, she'd squealed so loudly he'd laughed.

After stripping out of her pajamas, she pulled a thin bra over her head. It was more like a sports bra, but the material was thin. Tate had told her it was a bra that was perfect for Little girls because, while it didn't give much support, it helped keep her nipples from rubbing against the fabric of her clothes. It was also a soft pink color which she loved.

The white panties came up past her belly button and were full cut, but they made her feel Little. Knowing they were the ones he'd instructed her to wear made her feel even smaller. It was a funny thing how easily this man could get her into a younger headspace. It came so naturally to him and she loved it because he didn't leave her guessing.

Once she had the dress on, she went into the bathroom and brushed her teeth then brushed out her hair before deciding to braid it into two messy braids at the base of her neck. It took a bit to get the "messy" part perfected but once she did, she beamed at herself in the mirror. She looked healthier than she could ever remember being. Her skin was practically glowing.

The sound of steps approaching had her turning toward the bathroom door, a grin stretching over her face when her Daddy appeared in the doorway.

"Hey, beautiful," he murmured.

His deep voice caused a shiver to run through her. "Hi, Daddy."

He walked over and pressed a kiss to her temple. "Give me ten minutes to change and then I'll be ready to go. Did you decide what you want to eat?"

"Pasta?"

"Sounds great, baby."

Within fifteen minutes they were in his SUV, heading to an Italian restaurant that he said was his favorite. He reached across the center console and held her hand, pulling it to his lips a couple of times to kiss the backs of her knuckles.

It felt comfortable, yet there was an obvious sexual tension between them that had Aria squirming in her seat. He looked at her knowingly. "Knees apart, Little one."

Letting out a soft sigh, she parted her knees, silently whimpering as the pressure she'd been seeking disappeared.

The restaurant was fancier than she'd expected, and she felt out of place in her baby doll dress. It wasn't that the dress wasn't nice because it was, it was perfect, but the women in the restaurant were definitely dressed more sophisticated and she worried she might embarrass Tate by how she looked.

It didn't seem to faze him in the slightest as he took her hand and followed the host to their table. He pulled out her chair for her and then pushed it in before he sat in the chair to her right instead of across from her.

She focused on the menu, trying not to look around at all the other people in the restaurant and compare herself to them. The prices practically made her eyes bug out of her head and she instantly started looking for the cheapest option on the menu which, in her opinion, was still expensive.

"Baby girl, would you be okay if I ordered a few different things and we can share? There are several things here that I think you'll enjoy and I want you to taste."

His taking control like that made her relax a little. She knew he wouldn't allow her to pay for herself even if she offered, but it still felt weird to have a man spend so much money on her.

"Okay," she replied quietly.

Tate looked at her with concern but the waiter approached them and took their orders. Once he had disappeared, Tate's gaze went back to her.

"You look beautiful, Aria. I love that dress on you."

Those words melted her. Every time he said something kind to her, it was like he was chipping away at her insecurities little by little.

"Dad?"

A beautiful woman stopped at their table, her eyebrows drawn together, a tall man standing behind her. Tate looked up

and immediately stood, wrapping the woman into his arms before shaking the man's hand.

“Hi, honey. Hey, Gary.”

The woman smiled widely at him before glancing down at Aria with an uncertain expression. Tate must have noticed because he smiled down at Aria.

“This is my friend, Aria. Aria, this is my daughter, Valerie, and her fiancé, Gary.”

Valerie looked unsure as she reached out to shake her hand. “Nice to meet you, Aria.”

She realized she was staring at the two people in complete shock as Tate's words replayed in her mind.

This is my friend.

Swallowing the lump in her throat, she forced a smile and shook Valerie's hand. “Nice to meet you,” she croaked.

Tate sat back down and motioned to the other two chairs. “Would you guys like to join us?”

Aria tensed, unsure that she could sit through dinner with this couple without breaking down into tears. She was just his friend. That's all. He only thought of her as a friend. It made her heart feel like it was breaking into a million little pieces right inside her chest.

Gary shook his head as Valerie kept her gaze on Aria.

“We already ate. We were just leaving,” Gary answered.

Tate nodded and smiled at them.

Valerie nodded. “I'll give you a call tomorrow, dad. It was nice meeting you, Aria.”

The couple left after Tate hugged her again and just as he sat back down, the waiter brought over their food. He placed scoops of several different pasta dishes onto a plate and set it in front of her.

“The mushroom ravioli is my favorite,” he told her.

She nodded but didn't pick up her fork. When Tate reached out and touched her chin, she startled and looked up at him.

“Baby girl, what's wrong?”

Not wanting to start crying and cause a scene, she shook her head and forced a smile. “Nothing. I'm fine. Just hungry, I think.”

He gave her a funny look but smiled back at her. “Eat up, baby girl.”

She picked up her fork and took a bite of the mushroom ravioli and moaned as the flavors hit her tongue. This seemed to satisfy Tate because he started eating his dinner.

It took everything in her not to break down right at their table but the last thing she wanted to do was cause a scene and embarrass Tate, so she ate as much as she could stand then pushed her food around the plate in an attempt to make it look like she'd eaten more than she had.

She knew Tate was exhausted because he was normally much more aware of how much she ate, but he didn't seem to notice. When she looked up at his face, she could see the tiredness under his eyes and knew she needed to swallow whatever she was feeling and not add to the stress he was already carrying around on his shoulders. Working in an ER had to be tough and being a drama queen wasn't something that would help.

When they finished, Tate paid then took her by the hand and led her out to his car. He was acting as though everything was normal, but she felt anything but normal. She felt herself breaking and knew she needed to put space between them before she got any more invested than she already was.

The ride back to Tate's was quiet but he held her hand the entire time while she was lost in her thoughts. His daughter hadn't been rude to her, but it also seemed like she wasn't thrilled to see her dad with a much younger, not sophisticated woman. It was obvious his daughter was everything Aria was not. Smart, beautiful, sophisticated, rich. Of course, the

woman wouldn't approve of them dating. Not that they were because Tate had made it clear they were just friends.

She felt so stupid thinking they were more than that. She needed to go home and get away from him. Clear her head and lick her wounds in private.

As soon as they got back to his house, she followed him inside, trying to figure out how she could get home. Her car wasn't running and she had no idea where it even was. Tate had told her he'd had it towed to a mechanic. Just one more thing she'd need to pay him back for.

"I'm going to take a shower," he told her, kissing her forehead.

Swallowing thickly, she nodded. "Okay."

This would be her chance to get out of his house without causing a big scene. As soon as he closed the bathroom door, she pulled up the Uber app on her phone and ordered a car, then quickly grabbed Oreo and whatever she could find that she'd brought with her. She left everything he'd bought for her except the dress she was still wearing.

Tears were already falling as she wrote a quick note, leaving it on the bed for him before she made her way downstairs and out of the house just as the car she'd ordered pulled into the driveway.

TATE

He was exhausted. Work had been a nightmare and he hadn't wanted to burden Aria with his emotions, which is why he'd suggested going to dinner. He had wanted to take her out for an actual date, and had also wanted to get his mind off the teenage kids that had been hit by a drunk driver and died in his ER earlier in the day.

Aria had seemed quiet at dinner but then again, he had been, too. When they'd run into Valerie and Gary, he'd been surprised and then unsure of how to introduce her. He wasn't sure if Aria would have wanted him to introduce her as his girlfriend even though in his eyes, she was so much more than that. Hell, he would make her his wife tomorrow if she let him. He needed to tell her how he felt. He also wanted to ask her to move in with him permanently. It didn't matter if he seemed to be moving too fast, he knew what he felt for her and he was pretty sure she might feel the same.

Turning off the shower, he stood silently for a moment to see if he could hear his Little girl playing or watching a movie but when he didn't hear anything, he grabbed his towel and wrapped it around his waist. When he stepped out of the shower, he reached out and opened the bathroom door.

“What are you doing, baby girl?”

When there was no response, he furrowed his eyebrows. Even if she was in the nursery, she'd be able to hear him. He quickly dried himself off and then wrapped the towel around his waist again before going to search for her. As soon as he

stepped into the bedroom, a piece of paper on the bed caught his eye. He walked over and picked it up.

I can't just be your friend. I'm sorry. I'll pay you back for everything. -Aria

What the fuck?

The paper fell from his fingers as he strode from the room in search of her. What did she mean just his friend? She wasn't just his fucking friend, she was his everything.

“Aria?”

He looked in every room upstairs and as he made his way down the stairs, his gut twisted with worry. Had she left? A quick sweep of the first floor confirmed his suspicions and he felt as though he was going to be sick. Taking the stairs two at a time, he hurried back into his bedroom and grabbed his phone from the bathroom vanity. As soon as he found her name in his phone, he hit the call button, but it just continued to ring until her voicemail picked up.

“Aria, baby, call me back as soon as you get this.”

It took less than two minutes for him to throw some clothes on and grab his keys and phone. He only knew of one place she would go, and hoped to God she hadn't tried to walk there. Before he left his house, he went to his office and pulled up the security system feed to see if she'd gotten into a car or walked. As soon as he saw a car pull up and watched her get in, he sighed with relief, but the thought of her being in a car alone with a stranger made him want to punch something.

The drive to her apartment felt like it took forever and every single horrible thought of what could happen to her ran through his mind. How had he failed so badly? Obviously, he hadn't made it clear to her how he felt about her. Even though he hadn't told her he loved her yet, he'd thought he'd been showing it through his actions. Had she been questioning their relationship this whole time?

When he thought about it, he realized she'd been a little quieter the past few nights when he'd gotten home from the hospital. He'd been so tired he hadn't put much thought into it.

The times he'd asked if she was okay, she'd always said yes and he'd believed her. It was obvious he hadn't been paying close enough attention, which was a failure on his part.

Just as he was pulling up to her apartment, he saw her. More than that, he saw red because her neighbor had his hands on her and was backing her up against the outside of the building as she tried to fight him off.

Throwing the car in park, he jumped out and ran toward them.

"Leave me alone! Get away from me," she screamed.

His heart cracked down the center at the fear in her voice and it only made his rage grow even stronger.

The guy heard Tate's feet pounding on the ground as he approached and turned to look behind him just as Tate reached them. He grabbed the guy by his throat and yanked him away from Aria.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" Tate shouted.

Before the asshole could even respond, Tate started punching him in the face over and over again until the guy fell to the ground with blood dripping out of his nose.

He stood over him, ready to keep striking when the sound of Aria's cries broke through his anger. Rushing over to her, he picked her up and held her tightly in his arms.

"Fuck, baby, are you okay? Shit, you're bleeding."

"It's not my blood. It's from your hands," she cried.

Sure enough, he looked at his knuckles and saw blood.

"Come on, baby girl. Let's go inside and call the police."

Her hands shook horribly as she searched for her key in her backpack and as soon as she pulled it out, he set her on her feet and took it from her. As soon as he got her inside, he shut and locked the door before pulling his phone from his pocket.

The call to the police was quick and they were sending an officer right away. With that part behind them, Tate rushed over to where Aria was sitting on her bed crying. He didn't

care that his knuckles were bloodied, he needed to hold her and make sure she was okay.

“Baby,” he said as he scooped her up into his arms.

She sobbed against his chest. “I was just trying to get inside and he started talking to me and making gross comments about my body and when I ignored him, he got up and came over to me and started grabbing me.”

The rage he’d felt earlier was coming back to the surface and he considered going back over to the guy and kicking his ass again, but he wasn’t going to leave Aria. She was scared out of her mind.

“I’m so sorry, baby. I’m so fucking sorry,” he murmured against her head as he held her tightly against him.

He held her for a long time, even after her sobs quieted, and when there was a knock at the door, she let out a whimper.

“It’s probably just the police. Stay right here,” he told her as he set her down on her bed.

After checking that it was truly the police through the peephole, Tate answered the door and greeted the two officers then invited them inside.

It only took about fifteen minutes of questions from them before they closed their notebooks and nodded.

“Lance wants to press charges against you for assault,” one of the officers told him.

Tate shrugged. “Do what you have to do. I was protecting my girl and I’d do it all over again.”

The two officers looked at each other, then at Tate and shrugged.

“As far as we saw, he tripped and fell which is how he broke his nose,” the second officer said.

Slowly, Tate nodded and smiled. “I appreciate it.”

Her neighbor was already in handcuffs in the back of the squad car. Apparently, the guy had warrants out for his arrest

for sexually assaulting another woman, so things weren't looking good for him. Thank fuck for that.

After showing the men out, Tate turned back to Aria who was holding Oreo in her arms as she sat on the edge of her bed.

He went to her and knelt. "Baby girl, I fucked up. I'm so sorry. I don't want to just be your friend. You're not just my friend. You're my everything. I'm in love with you, Aria."

Tears dripped down her cheeks as she stared at him. "But you told your daughter I was your friend."

"I know. I only did that because you and I hadn't talked about what you would want me to call you and honestly, I just wasn't thinking clearly. Today was really shitty at work and it's not an acceptable excuse, but I was just caught off guard and didn't say the right thing. Unfortunately, Daddy is going to mess up sometimes. I need you to know I would never intentionally hurt you. You mean so much to me, Aria. I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

She sniffed. "You do?"

"Yes, baby girl. I do. You've made me feel things I didn't think I'd ever feel for someone. You're so smart and kind and loving. I love you, baby."

"I love you, too."

"You're mine, Aria. Not just my friend. You're my girlfriend, my baby girl, my love, and I hope one day you'll agree to be my wife."

More tears fell down her face. He reached out and gently wiped them away. "I want you to move in with me permanently. I'm going to retire from the hospital and start my own practice at home specifically for Littles. I want you to be my secretary."

Her eyes widened. "But I never went to college."

He couldn't help but smile. "College doesn't always make a person more qualified for a job, baby. I know you're qualified. I've seen the way you arrange the books in the

nursery in alphabetical order and the way you always put your toys back. You have the skills and maybe it's selfish of me, but I don't want to be away from you unless it's absolutely necessary."

She was quiet for a moment, rubbing her stuffies torn up ear through her fingers. "I'm not sophisticated like your daughter or the other people you're used to. I don't fit in."

His eyebrows pulled together. "Baby, those things aren't important to me. What's important to me is what's in here," he told her as he pointed toward her heart. "I fell in love with you for you. I don't give a shit about sophistication or status or money."

"Really?"

Rising up from where he was kneeling, he sat next to her and pulled her onto his lap. "Really. Besides, once you meet some of my friends, you'll see they are basically wild animals living in society. I can't help how I grew up, but it doesn't make me any better than anyone and I prefer the company of people who are genuine rather than people who are fake."

He was pleased when she snuggled into his chest and sighed. "Okay, Daddy. Can we go home?"

"I would like nothing more. We'll come back and start packing up stuff tomorrow."

She nodded and clung to him as he carried her and her stuffie out of the apartment to his SUV.

HE TOOK the next day off from the hospital and put in his notice that he would be retiring. It was amazing how light he felt after that. Almost like there had been a weight on his shoulders that he hadn't really known had been there until it was lifted.

Aria called the diner and gave them two weeks notice but the owner told her she didn't have to finish out her two weeks

if she didn't want to. She was officially done working there and that took another weight off his shoulders.

The only other thing he needed to do was call Valerie and clarify to her that Aria wasn't just a friend, so as soon as he put Aria down for a nap, he went down to his office and called her.

“Hey, Dad!”

“Hey. Did I catch you at a bad time?”

Valerie giggled. “No. I was actually just about to call you.”

Tate swallowed and looked down at the picture of him and Valerie that sat on his desk. He wasn't sure why he was so nervous. His daughter was a wonderful woman, but she was the only woman who had been a steady piece of his life up until Aria. He wanted the two of them to get along and he hoped there wouldn't be any awkwardness.

“I was just calling—” he started to say.

“I wanted to call—” Valerie said at the same time.

They both paused and laughed.

“Go ahead,” he prompted.

“I was calling because I wanted to tell you I thought Aria seemed very sweet and I'm so happy you've found someone who makes you so obviously happy.”

Wait. What?

“What?” he finally asked.

Valerie giggled. “Dad, it's obvious you two are in love. I mean, the friend crap is just that. Crap. You love her. I can't wait to get to know her more.”

Was he in an alternate universe? Was it really going to be just that easy?

“Really?”

She laughed again. “Why do you seem so surprised? You're the smartest man I know. If you chose her then I know

she's perfect for you, and the way she was looking at you when we walked up, it was obvious she adores you."

He cleared his throat several times before he felt as though he could speak. "Thank you, Val. That means a lot to me."

"I want to tell you something, Dad. I've wanted to tell you for a long time, but I've just been too nervous and it's weird because you're my dad."

Whatever it was, he didn't care. He loved his daughter unconditionally so whatever she had to tell him would never change that. "You can tell me anything."

There was a pause before she finally spoke. "I'm a Little."

Okay, he definitely hadn't been expecting that.

"I knew you and mom were in some sort of dynamic and one day I asked her about it and she told me. I was only a kid at the time but when I got a little older, I started reading books about it and it just was so comforting and I realized I wanted to be like those women in the books," she added.

He never knew his ex-wife had told Valerie about their dynamic.

"Honey, I love you, and I'm happy you found something that resonates with you. It's a special kind of relationship for sure. Does that mean Gary is..."

As much as he wanted to know, he couldn't get the word out.

"My Daddy. Yes. He is. I hope you're okay with that."

"Val, of course I'm okay with it. I'd be a hypocrite if I weren't. Besides, now that I think of it, I can see it now. It might take me a bit to digest, but I'm really happy you told me and I think Gary makes a wonderful...Daddy for you."

She giggled. "I love you, Dad. We never have to speak of this again if it makes you feel weird, but I just wanted you to know. I'd love to maybe even have a playdate with Aria sometime. I don't have any Little friends. I also need to find out where she got that adorable yellow dress because I need one for myself."

The awkwardness he was feeling dissipated into thin air at the mention of Valerie wanting to be friends with Aria. That was something his Little girl needed in her life. Friends and people who loved her.

“I think she’d really love that. Let’s plan a dinner one night so you two can get acquainted.”

“Okay. I love you, Dad. I’m really happy for you.”

“I love you, too, Val. Thank you for being such a wonderful daughter.”

“Well, I was raised by you. Kinda hard not to be wonderful.”

As they hung up, his heart swelled. It had taken his whole life to find the one, but he’d been blessed with an amazing daughter who had fulfilled his life before that. Life was good and he had a feeling it was going to get even better.

EPILOGUE

ARIA

“Are you sure I look okay?”

“Baby, you look amazing. Go potty and then bring me your hairbrush.”

Aria skipped away into the bathroom, forgetting to close the door behind her. It had been three weeks since she'd quit her job and moved in with Tate. She was getting so used to him taking care of her in such intimate ways that she forgot to close the bathroom door most of the time. Not that he cared. Half the time, he would just walk in when she was using the toilet then wait until she was done so he could clean her up because he said it was his job. Once she got past the embarrassment of it, she didn't mind. He was a doctor after all. He didn't get grossed out by stuff like that.

Tate was taking her to a BBQ at his friend's house and there were going to be other Littles there. To say she was nervous was putting it lightly, but he'd assured her that the Littles were all very kind and their Daddies would be nice, too. She believed him but she was still nervous. It sounded like all these Littles were sister-in-laws so she would be the outsider in the group.

Even though she was nervous, she was also excited. It would be her first time playing with other Littles outside the club.

After using the bathroom and brushing her teeth, she found the pink hairbrush her Daddy had bought for her and skipped out to the bedroom where he was sitting on the edge of the bed waiting for her. The smile he gave her when she handed him the brush melted her inside. She wasn't sure she'd ever get used to a man looking at her the way he did, but she would also never get tired of it. He looked at her like she was the most beautiful creature on earth. Then again, she was pretty sure she looked at him the same way.

“How about pigtails?”

She perched between his thighs as he brushed out her hair. “Okay, Daddy. Can I have ribbons, too?”

“Of course, you can. Can't have pigtails without ribbons.”

In no time, her hair was up in high pigtails with pink ribbons that matched her dress. She had a whole new wardrobe of dresses, shoes, bows, ribbons, socks, and panties. She'd tried to tell him he didn't need to buy her all that stuff but he'd insisted and told her it pleased him to do it. She'd relented because she always wanted to make her Daddy happy.

Tate got her situated in the car and buckled her seatbelt for her and they were on their way to his friend's house. The neighborhood he pulled into was beautiful. The houses were large. Not as huge as Tate's but still just as beautiful.

When he pulled into a driveway, she looked at him nervously. He must have sensed her anxiety because he looked over and smiled at her.

“It's going to be fun. But if at any point you want to leave, just whisper in my ear and I'll make an excuse for us to bail. Okay?”

“Okay.”

Before they even made it up to the front door, several women bounded out of the house toward them with a large hulking tattooed man yelling at them to stop running. The man didn't look like someone she would expect Tate to be friends with but then again, Tate was constantly surprising her with

how down to earth he was. It was definitely a lesson not to judge a book by its cover.

One of the women slowed down just briefly before calling out. "Aria!"

Raising her gaze to the woman, she realized it was Addie from the club. Her eyes widened and she took off running toward her, both of them throwing their arms around each other in a hug.

"I didn't know Tate was your Daddy! I'm so glad you're here. I've been meaning to ask you for a play date when we've been at the club, but I always get distracted," Addie told her.

Addie had wanted a play date with her? Huh. And all this time she wasn't sure if the women just played with her to be nice or if they really liked her.

"Lucy and Kylie are here, too. And I think you might have met some of the others. They're going to be so excited to see you," Addie babbled.

Tate chuckled. "Let's go inside, girls."

Aria took the hand he held out for her and let him lead her into the house.

The large hulking man smiled at her as she passed through the door. "Hi, Aria. I'm Wolf."

She waved up at him and smiled. "Hi."

Thankfully, he seemed satisfied with her simple greeting as he motioned for them to go down the hall.

The next ten minutes were spent being introduced to more hulking tattooed men. The men treated Tate just like one of them and welcomed her warmly into the group. She was surprised when she saw the man who she'd bumped into at the club, Chase. He didn't have a Little with him and he wasn't nearly as tattooed as the rest of the men. He was friendly and asked how her leg was, but Aria would be lying if she said she wasn't intimidated by him. He seemed smart as a whip and she learned that Ava worked for him as his legal assistant, which meant he was some kind of lawyer. Apparently, he was part of

the family, too, in some way or another. Although she was pretty sure most of them weren't actually related, they seemed closer than any family she'd seen.

She had met all the women there at some point or another when she'd been at the club and they were all thrilled to see her again. It made her feel so much better and before she could even get a word in, Addie, Kylie, and Emma were planning a slumber party for all of them, including Aria. She couldn't ever remember having a slumber party before. She felt so excited about that and when she looked at her Daddy for approval, he nodded and told her they could schedule something soon.

When they sat down for dinner, it was entertaining watching all the Daddies hovering over their Littles, getting them drinks, serving their food, cutting up their chicken. Maddox put a bib on Brynn and no one blinked an eye while Nora sat on Angel's lap for the whole meal with him feeding her and then himself between her bites.

"I have an announcement," Tate said.

Everyone looked his way and waited for what he was about to say.

"I retired from the hospital and I'm starting my own practice that will be for people in our community. I have an exam room already set up at my house and I'm having a second one set up for emergency procedures."

Knox grinned. "That's awesome. I love that idea. We've needed a place to take our Little girls for checkups. They need them more often."

All the women groaned at once, several of them glaring at Knox who smirked back at them.

"It's true. You girls need to have your temperature taken more regularly and maybe even have your bottoms cleaned out every few months," Wolf added.

Lucy's cheeks turned bright red before she turned and hid her face against Wolf's side.

Tate chuckled. “I definitely agree. Now that my baby girl is feeling better, I plan to give her weekly checkups to make sure she stays in good health.”

This made Aria’s eyes widen and she felt heat coming to her cheeks. The last time Tate had done an exam had been when she had first come to his place, but that had been a very clinical exam. The way he made it sound, these weekly exams wouldn’t be quite so clinical and for some reason, that made her squirm in her seat as she felt her panties dampen.

“I think this is great. If you need help converting anything, just let me know and I’m happy to help,” Wolf offered.

Tate nodded. “Thanks.”

Leo raised his beer bottle. “I think this calls for a toast. To family, friends, health, and love. Now we just need to find someone to tie Chase down.”

Ava coughed and brought her hand up to her mouth, but not before Aria noticed a smile spread across her face.

Chase rolled his eyes. “There isn’t a Little out there that would be able to deal with me so let’s not get our hopes up.”

Everyone laughed and raised their glasses.

“Cheers!”

TWO WEEKS LATER

TATE

“ARIA!”

Tate had just finished with his last Little patient for the day and set out to find Aria. Usually, she was in her nursery playing whenever he was working but after checking there and coming up empty, he’d started going from room to room. Sometimes she liked to play hide and seek with him, which she found hilarious, and usually gave away her location with her giggles but he wasn’t hearing any giggles this time.

Panic coursed through him as he found the entire second floor to be empty. She'd promised she'd never leave the house again without telling him first, but the fear he'd felt when it happened the last time still lingered. She'd become such a part of his life and heart that he'd be devastated if she ever decided to leave him. He knew he was probably worrying for no reason. After all, they'd made things official between them and they loved each other deeply. Things had never been better in his life. He could hardly wait to put a ring on her finger and make it forever.

"Aria," he called out again as he made his way downstairs.

After checking the kitchen and living room again, he headed to his office and checked there, then the library, but came up with nothing. He started wondering if she'd gone outside to play but going outside without permission was against the rules and it was rare she purposely broke any rules.

Just as he started walking back down the hall to go check outside, something pink caught his eye as he passed the laundry room. Stopping in his tracks, he looked into the room and found Aria sitting on the floor in front of the dryer with her legs crossed. At first he was confused but then realized what she was doing.

When she had been working earlier in the day, he'd snuck up to her nursery and grabbed Oreo so he could wash him. He'd been slowly working to re-stuff the bear and sew up the torn stitching whenever she'd been occupied with other toys, and he'd finally finished his patch work the night before. The last thing he needed to do was give the poor bear a good wash.

Now, as it was tumbling on low heat in the dryer, Aria sat and watched it through the clear door.

Smiling to himself, he leaned against the doorframe as she held another one of her stuffies close to her body.

"Don't worry, Tater Tot, Daddy just gave Oreo a bath because she was stinky," she said to the stuffed animal before holding it up to her ear for a few seconds. "No, Tater Tot, you're not stinky. Daddy isn't gonna give you a bath."

His heart swelled at her sweet innocence. She always talked to her stuffies like they were her very best friends. He was so damn glad she'd hit it off with his friends' Littles. He knew Aria had been added to a group chat with the girls. Hopefully, they would all become the best of friends and his Little girl would finally get to experience the feeling of belonging and acceptance that she'd never had before.

He'd also found out that Valerie had reached out to Aria and they'd been chatting on and off, planning a playdate for some time in the future. His baby girl seemed excited about it, and he loved his daughter even more for reaching out and soothing Aria's worries about not being accepted by Valerie.

"Hey, baby girl," he said softly, not wanting to scare her.

She twisted around and smiled up at him. "Hi, Daddy. I missed Oreos so I came down to keep her company."

Damn. This girl had his heart.

"I bet she's glad you're here. She's probably dry by now."

He walked into the room and opened the dryer. Before he could reach in, Aria beat him to it and grabbed Oreos, immediately pulling the stufie to her chest.

"She smells so pretty, Daddy. And she's fluffier."

"Good. Hopefully she's good and healthy now."

"Yep. She likes living here, too. She told me so."

A lump formed in his throat. "Do you like living here too, baby girl?"

Aria nodded and got to her feet. "I love it more than anything, Daddy. You make me feel so loved."

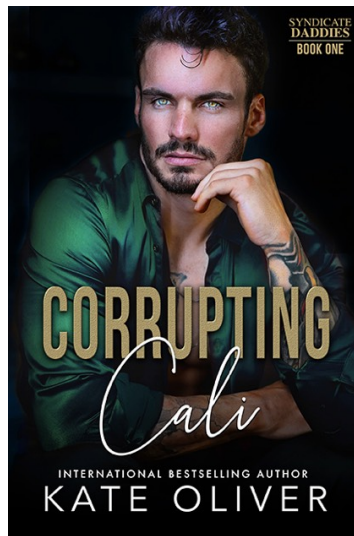
He couldn't resist picking her up. "That's because you are loved, Aria. More than you'll ever know."

"You're loved, too, Daddy. More than you'll ever know."

The lump doubled in size and he couldn't respond other than nodding at her. He felt more loved than he ever had. It was real and genuine and all he could have ever hoped for.

Life was good. He had family, friends, a job he now loved,
and best of all, he had his Little girl.

DECLAN'S COMING!



Coming September 19th, 2023

[Pre-Order Now!](#)

NEW SERIES ANNOUNCEMENT!



Coming November 14th, 2023

[Pre-Order Now!](#)

Small town, blue collar Daddies!

ALSO BY KATE OLIVER

West Coast Daddies Series

Ally's Christmas Daddy

Haylee's Hero Daddy

Maddie's Daddy Crush

Safe With Daddy

Trusting Her Daddy

Ruby's Forever Daddies

Daddies of the Shadows Series

Knox

Ash

Beau

Wolf

Leo

Maddox

Colt

Hawk

Angel

Tate

Shadowridge Guardians

(A multi-author series)

Kade

Syndicate Kings

Corrupting Cali: Declan's Story

Daddies of Pine Hollow

Jaxon

PLEASE LEAVE A REVIEW!

It would mean so much to me if you would take a brief moment to leave a rating and/or a review on this book. It helps other readers find me. Thank you for your support!

-Kate

KEEP UP WITH KATE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

[Facebook](#)

[BookBub](#)

[GoodReads](#)

[Instagram](#)

[TikTok](#)

[Sign up](#) for my newsletter to get teasers, cover reveals and updates!!!