

## The Padded Palace Act I: Chapter 6

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“Dis is Tumby. He’s a ele....ele-font.” Riri said, holding up a purple stuffed elephant. She handed it off to Connor, who graciously accepted her offering. He set the plushie in his lap, along with the dozens of others that Riri had brought over to him.

“Thank you, Riri. I’ll be sure to keep Tumby safe,” said Connor, smiling warmly. The last hour had been quite something for the first-time caregiver. After changing both Skye and Ellie, Connor found himself pulled into a carefree utopia that these girls had made for themselves.

At first, Connor assumed he would be able to sit on the sidelines and keep an eye on the girls from a distance. However, it became painfully obvious that playtime would not only need to be facilitated but engaged with.

It started simple. Stacy was the first, approaching Connor with her favorite dolly, Princess Lala, along with several outfits and accessories. She played with the doll for a bit, trying the different ensembles and poses. Each was shown off to Connor, for which he would need to give detailed critiques. And no, “It looks nice” was not an acceptable answer.

After she got bored and crawled off to color with Skye, Ellie joined Connor in the rocking chair, her arms lifted up towards him. “Can I wock wit choo?”

Connor didn’t have the heart to refuse and gently lifted the grown woman into his lap. She was surprisingly heavy for someone who was so short. Still, after repositioning a few times, Connor found the best way to hold her so she didn’t cut off all blood flow to his legs.

The two rocked together for a bit, with Ellie nestling herself into Connor’s shoulder, closing her eyes for a mini cat nap.

Connor hated to admit it, but sitting there with Ellie in his lap as they rocked together was really relaxing. He petted her hair with his free hand, causing her to burble happily in her light slumber.

Eventually, Ellie heard the sounds of Skye starting up a sing-along nursery rhyme toy, which brought her out of her blissful rest. She climbed off of Connor’s lap with as much grace as...well...a baby, and ran over to play.

Standing up from the chair, Connor stretched out his legs. He couldn’t have been standing more than 20 seconds before he felt a hand tugging at the bottom of his pant leg. Looking down, he came face to face with Riri, who had two stuffed animals in her hand, and another in her mouth. She raised her hand, offering one to Connor.

Connor knelt next to Riri as she introduced him to the first stuffed animal, a dapper tuxedo penguin.

“Dats Quackers. He bites, so keeb an eye on him,” warned Riri, as she situated the other two friends she’d brought with her. Taking a seat on the floor, Connor leaned Quackers against

his leg. He didn't have it in him to tell Riri that penguins don't quack like ducks, but the thought still made him chuckle.

The introductions continued, with Riri showing off Cuddles, the clownfish, and Cherry, the pink teddy bear. Both of them found their way into Connor's arms thanks to a very insistent little girl.

The process of Riri ferrying over stuffed animals for a meet and greet took off from there, as she brought Connor playmate after playmate until his lower half was practically buried in plushies.

Despite the fact that Connor was keeping himself composed, internally, he was laughing his ass off at how adorable and ridiculous this entire situation was. He wasn't really aware of it, but he was smiling a mile wide with each new plushie that Riri brought over.

At some point, however, Riri's attention was pulled away by the block tower that Stacy and Ellie were busy building, leaving Connor to his mountain of fluffy plushies. He knew he didn't need to stay seated, yet for some reason, he didn't really want to stand up just yet.

When Connor was growing up, his stuffed animals were ripped away from him at the age of around eight or nine. His dad was really strict, always pushing Connor towards physical and masculine activities. And even when he did have stuffies, they were nowhere near as soft or cuddly as the ones he was surrounded by now.

Their softness was almost comforting to an uncomfortable degree. On one hand, Connor was certainly enjoying himself, but on the other, he felt deeply embarrassed for enjoying something so childish. Still, he couldn't shake the part of himself that just wanted nothing more than to wrap his arms around the whole pile and squeeze them close to his chest. That kind of move would be far too risky, though.

"I wan chus to meed Lyle."

Connor whipped his head to the side, finding Skye next to him, clutching a plush lion tightly to her chest. Her eyes were glued to the floor as she blushed harder than any shade of red in the room.

"Hello Lyle," said Connor, returning her blush in kind as he thought about how silly he must look, "I'm Connor, it's nice to meet you."

Syke pursed her lips into a grin and held out Lyle for Connor to take, making sure to keep her sights trained on the carpet.

Connor happily accepted the petite lion as an offering to join the others in The Pile™. However, as he moved to set Lyle down, Skye flopped over to stop him.

"No!" Skye shouted, "He...he don wike ta be...sed down. You hafta howd him."

It hit Connor instantly that Lyle wasn't like the countless stuffed animals Riri had collected from around the room. Skye lived here. This was HER stuffed lion. With kind eyes, he tucked Lyle in the crook of his arms and held it against his chest. "Understood. I'll take good care of him until you want him back."

Skye's face brightened with a smile that could only be described as true childlike happiness. It was the kind of feeling you don't normally have as an adult. Just raw, unadulterated joy.

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Latasha couldn't believe her eyes. Pressed against the wall with her head leaning into the nursery, she observed Connor diligently, something she'd been doing off and on since the moment she'd stepped foot outside the nursery door. She was trusting, but she wasn't stupid. She believed in learning through experience, but she needed to be vigilant, just in case anything went wrong.

Still, the last thing Latasha expected was for Connor to connect so well with all of the Littles, especially Skye. She couldn't help herself but chuckle as Connor clutched Skye's favorite plushie while buried up to his waist in a pool of stuffed friends. "Skye must really like you if she's willing to share Lyle on the first day."

Feeling confident in her new employee, Latasha moved to the kitchen to start preparing lunches. She could take her eyes off of them for a few minutes. After all, Connor seemed to have a pretty good handle on things. Who knows? Maybe a vacation later this year wasn't out of the question.

The rest of the day transpired without too much of note happening. After Connor and Latasha fed the girls their lunch, it was nap time, which gave them an hour to get the TV room ready for afternoon cartoons. Connor sat in the middle of the couch with big baby girls leaning on both sides of him. And yet, it never once felt even the slightest bit sexual. All of them were perfectly content with some innocent cuddling, like heart and soul babies.

Mid-afternoon snacks and another nap came next before the girls were let outside into the backyard to play until their parents arrived.

Stacy's caretaker was the first to show up promptly at six o'clock exactly. Their name was Mal and, much to Connor's surprise, they were actually Stacy's full-time personal assistant. As it turns out, Stacy was a wealthy heiress who sold off all the shares of her father's company after he passed, cashing in for hundreds of millions of dollars. This afforded her the opportunity to live out her adult baby dreams. It was truly something to watch, as Stacy was carried out by her muscular caretaker and placed inside of a private pink limo. God, the rich really do have all the fun.

Next to show up was Martin, who was more than happy to see Connor again. "I hope Riri wasn't too much of a handful on your first day!" exclaimed Martin, as he ruffled Riri's hair, much to her delight. "See you both tomorrow!" As they left, Riri turned back and waved goodbye as if she'd never waved before in her life.

Connor did his best to bite his tongue to hold back fits of laughter. He didn't know why seeing something as simple as an awkward wave could make him feel so light inside.

“It never gets old, ya know?” said Latasha, capturing Connor’s attention, “After all the years I’ve been doing this, moments like that still melt my heart.” She patted Connor on the back, as the two shared an odd bonding moment.

Before long, the final parent arrived. Ellie’s mom, Carol, showed up at the door. Unlike the other two guardians who came before, Carol was the most stereotypical “doting parent” type. She entered the house with her arms open wide, picking up her little girl and spinning her around while delivering several big kisses all over her face. Ellie was helpless to contain her enthusiasm.

“I take it this is your new boy toy, Tasha!” exclaimed Carol, nudging Latasha. It was very out of character for Latasha to get so blushy, so imagine Connor’s surprise at seeing the longtime caregiver flush with embarrassment at Carol’s comment.

“Carol, stop! I told you, Connor is my new employee. Besides, I don’t take in little boys anymore and you know that,” said Latasha, sounding a bit more defensive than usual.

Connor’s mind started to drift, thinking about why Latasha doesn’t allow boy babies to be here. He didn’t get to wonder for long. Before he knew what was happening, Carol had marched right up to him and was staring him straight in the eye. They were about the same height, and yet, Connor felt so gosh darn intimidated for some reason. She cupped his chin, looking him over. Her hand slid to his cheek, giving it a gentle pinch.

“You watch yourself, Connor. Dommy Mommy Latasha loves her victims cute and unsuspecting,” warned Carol, patting him on the cheek twice before saying her final goodbyes and leaving with Ellie in tow.

“Well, guess that just leaves me, Skye, and Dommy Mommy Latasha,” said Connor, smirking.

Latasha slugged him on the shoulder. “Funny guy, huh? Come on, let’s get ready for supper.”

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