

The Padded Palace Act I: Chapter 7

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“A toast! To a fantastic first day!” Latasha raised up her glass of red wine. Connor and Skye joined in, holding up their glass and sippy cup respectively.

“Cheers!” said Connor, taking a drink. He grabbed his fork and dug into the top sirloin and asparagus that Latasha had prepared for both of them. He savored the exquisite flavor that exploded on his taste buds. She was one hell of a cook.

Looking over at Skye, Connor felt a little bad that she was getting to enjoy a steak while she was stuck with kiddie food. However, if you asked Skye, she’d say it was Connor and Latasha who were missing out. She made small roaring noises as she played with the dinosaur chicken nuggets before eating them, sneaking some fries in as well while completely avoiding the pocket of peas quarantined on the far corner of her plate.

Suddenly, Connor’s attention was caught off-guard by a TV turning on behind him.

Latasha held the remote in her hands, flipping through channels until she got to Cartoon Network. Skye’s attention was instantly glued to the TV.

Connor recognized the show from TV time earlier that day. “Does this channel play anything else besides Teen Titans Go?” he jokingly asked. He didn’t particularly care too much. At least he already knew the characters.

Latasha chuckled, “Don’t let Riri hear you say that. She doesn’t break from little space often, but she will talk your ear off about the “unfair” amount of air time this show gets.” They both laughed softly, enjoying each other's company, but not wanting to seem too eager. “Personally, I don’t really mind too much. Skye seems to love it. Look at her. She might as well be hypnotized.”

They both turned to look at Skye mindlessly putting food in her mouth as she stared at the TV unblinking. And judging from the smile plastered onto her face, she was loving every second of it.

Connor was practically in awe over how blissful Skye looked in her infantile position, and after seeing her and the others in action today, he was starting to understand why. There was genuinely something alluring about giving up all responsibilities and returning to the peacefulness of childhood.

“Alright, spill it. What’s on your mind?” Latasha said, once again snapping Connor back to attention.

Connor stared down at his plate, uncertain how to start. “I...I guess...how did you...start all this? I mean, I’m starting to understand the why, so I’m getting a little curious about the how, ya know?”

Latasha seemed a bit flattered by Connor's question, "Well let me assure you, it's not a life path I necessarily saw for myself. Ask me five years ago what I'd be doing today and running an exclusive daycare for ABs would not have been on the list."

Connor leaned forward in his chair, "Where did you see yourself, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Well, a little over four years back, I was graduating with a Master's in applied physics," said Latasha in a very nonchalant, but still very braggish way.

Connor nearly choked on his food upon hearing that. He took a big drink of water to stop his coughing. "Sorry, I hope that didn't come off as rude. It's just--"

"A bit of a shock? Don't worry, I get how silly it sounds," said Latasha. A look of sorrow crossed her face for a brief moment, but she regained her composure. "But hey, I had bills to pay. Student loans aren't cheap, which I'm sure is no news to you."

"Cheers!" Connor said sarcastically as he and Latasha grabbed their glasses, clinked them together, and downed the rest of their drinks. Both wincing at the amount of alcohol they just downed. "Oof! Feels like college."

Latasha giggled before resuming, "So anyhow, I'm trying to find a way to make more money. That's when I remembered an idea that my...a former play partner of mine had. To set up a sort of fantasy nursery where clients would pay by the hour for me to pamper them."

"Wait...was it like..." Connor looked over to Skye before shielding his mouth from her and mouthing the words, "...a sex thing?"

"PFFF! HAHAHA!" Latasha burst out laughing. Connor was just so sweet and adorable as he asked and it was just too much. He sat back in his chair feeling bashful about his question.

"Sorry, sorry. I didn't mean to laugh. One, you don't have to worry about mentioning sex in front of Skye. Don't let her babyish exterior fool you. She's still an adult and she has needs just like anyone else," Latasha said, lowering the tension. She stifled a chuckle as Connor nodded his head rapidly in response. "And two, I won't lie. Yes, it was a sex thing. Not always, but sometimes. I never went as far as actually having sex, but I did give my fair share of diaper handjobs and vibrator buzzies. It paid the bills and then some and I only had to work four days a week. In less than two years, I'd paid off my student loans entirely."

"Holy shit!" said Connor, who all but stopped eating as he was hooked on Latasha's every word.

"Hey now, it wasn't all clouds and rainbows. It was fun to play both Mommy and Dommy, but no one is more demanding than sex work clients. I have my fair share of horror stories from overzealous customers." said Latasha, throwing up sarcastic air quotes around "overzealous."

Connor couldn't help but feel curious about what some of those stories might involve, but he decided not to interrupt.

“But it also had its super rewarding moments too, and I met a lot of great people, including Ellie’s mommy, Carol. She was actually the person who came up with the idea for a long-term daycare. At the time, I didn’t even consider it. I was still planning on doing something with my degree.” Latasha’s mood shifted. “That all changed when Skye came into my life. Not long after that, I put in the down payment for this house and never looked back.”

Connor suddenly got confused, and a touch concerned. Latasha seemed to end the story quite abruptly, making him feel like something big must’ve happened in Latasha’s life.

Latasha didn’t wait for him to ask about it, though, continuing forward with her story, “Luckily, I had Carol and Stacy as old contacts. It was Carol’s idea, so she was ecstatic. And Stacy was one of my most frequent regulars, so she was more than easy to convince. Then I met Martin and Riri at a convention a few months later. He had been looking for someone to watch over Riri during the day. Apparently, she could be quite a handful for some of the nannies.”

“Whoa whoa whoa!” shouted Connor, butting in, “Sorry to interrupt, but I feel like we’re going a mile a minute here. I have so many questions and a convention?”

“Oh yeah, CAPcon,” said Latasha without a hint of self-awareness.

Connor exhaled a few chuckles, “You say that like it’s common knowledge. Anyway, can we back up to Skye for a second because I feel like we jumped a track somewhere?” He looked up to see Latasha, who was clearly having an internal debate. “I’m sorry. If you don’t want to talk about it, I won’t pry.”

Latasha shook her head, “No, no. You should probably know anyway.” She turned around and looked at Skye, making sure that she wasn’t listening. With a hushed voice, she took a deep breath and started talking, “I met Skye about two-ish years ago. Her daddy had dropped her off for a four-hour session. It wasn’t out of the ordinary for bigs to do that. Carol did it all the time. But she was different in one major way. She was shy. And I don’t mean that awkward shyness from an excited first-timer. She acted like...like I was only the second person who’d ever seen her like this. Luckily, it didn’t take much encouragement to get her playing like the adorable little that she is.”

“So what went wrong?” Asked Connor, knowing that something sour must be on the horizon.

Latasha felt her eyes watering up. She wiped them off before any tears could fall. “Her four hours were up. We stood by the door, I distinctly remember it was an absolute downpour that day, and we waited. And waited. And then we waited a little longer. I called the number he had left, but it was out of service. Skye didn’t have an ID or a cellphone, and she refused to talk to me until the next day. When I finally got her to speak, she told me she had no money, no home, and no family to go back to. All she had was her daddy, who didn’t seem to want to be her daddy anymore. So, she told me all about herself. It’s not my place to talk, so to put it short, she had a very rough life. And that left me with a choice. Tell Skye it was time to grow up and send her packing. Or...I could adopt. I knew what the latter meant. A full-time Little was a full-time job. But after that first night with Skye snuggled into my bed to keep her from crying, something

sparked within me. For the first time in my life, I had someone who needed me...someone I needed to protect.”

Connor was covering his mouth, feeling like he had just ripped open a mess of old scars, “I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t have dug so mu-”

“Connor, please. It’s okay. I want you to know...I want to understand just how special Skye is to me,” Latasha stared straight into Connor’s eyes. “I love Skye and the life we’ve built together. I wouldn’t give that up for anything in the world.”

BZZZZZZZ!!

Both Connor and Latasha jumped as the dryer announced that it had finished its cycle.

“Oh shoot! I need to change the laundry out,” said Latasha, tossing her napkin on the table. Her hands were trembling slightly.

Connor quickly jumped out of his seat, “I can take care of it, Latasha.”

Latasha smiled and scooted her chair back, “Thank you Connor, but I don’t want to troubl-”

“Please,” Connor’s plea was so sincere that it caught Latasha off-guard. “You cooked this wonderful meal for me. It’s the least I can do.”

Latasha smiled and nodded her head.

Connor closed the dryer shut and started the last load. He grabbed the basket of fresh laundry and set it on the table, with the intention of folding it after dinner.

Staring at the basket of clothes, Connor’s heart started to race again. Did he really want this? Part of him was tempted to reach into the pile of feminine frilly fabrics. However, after hearing Latasha’s story, he didn’t feel all that interested in exploring his confusing desires tonight. He promptly exited the laundry room and made his way back to the kitchen.

Along the way, Connor couldn’t stop thinking about what an amazing and selfless person Latasha was. It was only two days ago that Connor was first entering this house, completely unaware of what was to come. Now, he was a full-fledged caretaker, and he couldn’t be more thankful that Latasha trusted him enough to bring him on, inexperienced as he was. She was honestly one of the most interesting people he’d ever met, and he couldn’t wait to learn more about her.

But at the same time, Connor knew that Latasha wasn’t telling him the full story. She was leaving a lot of details out and he noticed how often she stopped herself from saying something that went too deep into her own history. He figured it’d be best not to bring it up to her, though. He’d only known her for two days. He felt privileged enough to be told as much as he was. No matter how curious he was, if she wanted him to know, she would tell him in her own time.

As Connor rounded the corner of the kitchen, he stopped in his tracks, keeping out of sight.

In the dining room, Latasha was standing next to Skye's high chair with a cup of chocolate pudding in her hand.

"Here comes the airplane! Nnnneeeeerrrrr!" Latasha wiggled her wrist as she inched a spoonful of pudding closer and closer to Skye's open mouth. Skye nibbled down as the spoon made contact with her tongue, gleefully sliding the sweet, slimy substance down her throat. After swallowing, she clapped her hands and giggled, as her mommy primed another bite.

Connor's smile was nearly as wide as Skye's, as he refused to let himself interrupt such a beautiful moment. As he watched, something sparked, not within his brain, but within his heart. Maybe this was what Latasha was talking about. That spark. The need to protect something. Latasha trusted him to look after someone she cared for this much, and he'd be damned if he was going to let her down.

TO BE CONTINUED...