

## The Padded Palace Act III: Chapter 14

### Written By: CrissieBaby

“Introducing the new and improved Connor!” said Stacy, spinning the chair that sat in front of the vanity to allow Connor to face his own reflection. After a few seconds passed with no response from her willing subject, she caught sight of him squinting his eyes closed as if too afraid to see what his new appearance looked like, “Silly head! You’ve gotta open your eyes to see all the pretty work we did!” She positioned her hands on either side of Connor’s hips and began to mercilessly tickle him.

With his eyes sealed shut, Connor tried to bat away Stacy’s hands as his body began to wiggle in place. “Stacyyyehehe! Stop it!” he whined, unable to prevent himself from cackling like a madman as the tickling grew more intense. Finally, with no other choice, he opened his eyes and looked down at his own waist to push Stacy’s hands away, simultaneously catching a first glimpse of his new look.

Due to the amount of focus that was needed to get Stacy to quit her all-out tickle assault, Connor was forced to double-take at his reflection. Gazing upon his well-made-up face, perfectly quaffed hair, and princess-like ensemble, his eyes grew wide with disbelief. The girls had done such a number on him that he could barely see his typical, male face from underneath the heavy layers of foundation, lipstick, eye shadow, and dozens of other products. “Th-that’s not me,” he stuttered, refusing to accept the reality that was slapping him across the face.

“You bet your padded patootie it is!” said Ellie, coming in hot for a big hug as she wrapped her arms around Connor’s satin-covered stomach, “I bet it’s everything you were hoping for, isn’t it?” She began bouncing on his tiptoes in anticipation of Connor’s answer.

Struggling to collect his thoughts, Connor’s hands slowly explored his new attire. I-It’s certainly something...” he said, tracing his digits along his chest and clutching the silky material tightly between his fingers. However, as he raised his hand to touch his face, his meek appendage was promptly swatted away.

“Ah, ah, ah! Don’t you dare smudge my masterpiece. Look, don’t touch,” scoffed Stacy, placing her hand on top of Connor’s and slowly bringing it back down to a neutral resting point.

Taking Connor’s other hand in hers, Riri meekly inched her way into Connor’s reflection. Unlike Ellie and Stacy, she was still being very considerate and deliberate with how she behaved. And despite not sharing a single word with Connor, the genuine happiness she had for Connor’s transformation did not go unnoticed.

Connor responded in kind by curling his fingers around Riri’s hand. He wasn’t sure why but this filled him with a strange sort of confidence that he didn’t know he possessed. That didn’t mean his anxiety had fully dissipated but he was starting to feel a bit more at ease with his new appearance. “Thanks, you guys. I...I never thought I could...look like this,” he said, his eyes still glued to his reflection, “So...um...what’s next?”

“Hehehe, I thought you’d never ask!” said Stacy, rushing to the other side of the room to browse through the knee-high bookcase that was filled with children’s books and kid-friendly

DVDs, “I thought after so much heart-pounding fun that we could slow things down a bit with a good movie-slash-cuddling session. So, Connor, which one do you wanna watch first?” She held up a pair of DVD cases in each hand, one containing The Princess Diaries and the other being the collector’s edition of Cinderella.

Glancing back and forth between the two presented options, Connor snickered at Stacy’s obvious reasoning for choosing these movies; that being the princess transformation sequences at the heart of each film. He imagined himself in Cinderella’s glass slippers for a brief moment, delighted by the vision of himself magically turning into a princess with a big ball gown. A giddy smile slowly grew on his face as he was quickly engulfed by a dream from which he never wanted to wake up from, “Surprise me.”

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“Changing supplies, check! Alcohol and mixers, check! Speaker test...” said Latasha, running through her checklist for the fourth and hopefully final time. Grabbing the remote to her Bluetooth music player, she clicked the play button and cheerily listened to a few seconds of music before pausing it again, “...check! I think we’re all good to go!” She clapped her hands together and turned to look at Jesi, Aanya, and Elma, all of whom were lounging on Latasha’s bed and looking utterly exhausted.

Stretching out her stiffening limbs, Aanya shook her head at Latasha solemnly. “Ya know, when you said you needed help setting up for a room party, I didn’t think you meant we’d be literally redesigning the whole goddamn layout,” she said, as she looked around at the shifted furniture and countless decorations. Still, as tired as she and her wife now were, she had to admit that their efforts did produce a good-looking party, “That being said, your room is gonna be this hallway’s hotspot. I can guarantee that.”

“You bet your booty it will be! I wonder how the other parties are faring,” said Latasha, sprinting to her door and peaking out down the long, plastic-covered corridor at the other rooms who’s doors were being propped up as their guests were getting ready for the hallway-wide room party, “Daaaaaamn! I feel so bad for anyone who booked a room on this floor and didn’t know what they were in for. This place is gonna be lit as fuck!”

Stepping back into the room, Latasha was forced to step aside as Elma came through with Jessy latching onto her torso as she carried him. “Well, if everything is set to your liking, I think it’s time we head back to our room and freshen up before the party,” she said, stopping in the doorway and gesturing with her head toward the small playpen that had been set up in the corner of the room. In the center of said playpen was Skye, whose pouty expression had returned in full force, “Not that I’m sure you need any reminding but you may want to check in with your Little, Latasha.” With those final words, she set off down the hallway, giving Latasha zero time to respond.

Snatching a Lisp Lolly from the wide arrangement of goodies that had been set out, Latasha stepped over the walls of the playpen and knelt down next to her baby girl, who promptly shifted away from her out of spite. “Oh, sweetheart, don’t be like that. I’m sorry I’ve been so busy tonight,” she said, cupping Skye’s cheek and drawing her eyes back toward her.

She raised the cherry-red sucker for Skye to see and handed it off to her, petting her playfully on the head once the lolly had been accepted.

“C-can I has some cuddwes instead?” said Skye, anxiously twirling the Lisp Lolly in her hands as her eyes darted back and forth, unable to hold eye contact with her Mommy for more than a moment at a time. In truth, she would’ve loved nothing more than for Latasha to call the whole party off and spend the rest of the night snuggling. Sadly, she also knew how much this Con and, moreover, how much this party meant to Latasha. If she could just get a little bit of cuddle time in, she hoped it would be enough to power her through the whole evening for her Mommy’s sake.

Opening her arms wide, Latasha didn’t hesitate to hug her baby girl upon request. “Of course, sweetie. You can have all the cuddles you want,” she said, pulling Skye’s head gently into her chest as she swayed back and forth, “I’m sorry that Mommy’s been a bit scatterbrained today. Truth be told, being back at a diaper con has me feeling like a little kid again. I promise that after tonight, we’ll spend all afternoon tomorrow just the two of us. How’s that sound?”

“Dat sounds fun!” said Skye, her energy output skyrocketing back to 100 percent over her Mommy’s grand promise. Now having a reward to work toward, she had twice as much of a reason to be on her best behavior for Latasha tonight. She leaned in for one more big hug, hoping that would satisfy her for the evening.

“Heyyo! Is there a party happening here?”

Pulling away from Skye at the sound of her first guests, Latasha scurried to the doorway, where a pair of cutely dressed girls were waiting to be invited in. “Yes, hi! My name is Latasha! Welcome to the Padded Palace,” she said, ushering the two girls inside, “Oh, I almost forgot.” Spotting the miniature Padded Palace sign that the girls from the nursery had made for her, she quickly attached some double-sided tape to it and hung it up on the wall next to their doorway.

Sulking back into her depressive state, Skye watched as Latasha began welcoming random strangers into her room. She looked over at Gary, who was preoccupied with a stack of letter blocks, and scooted toward him, clinging to any amount of familiarity she could get. This was definitely going to be a long night.

TO BE CONTINUED...