

# ~ Birthday Treat ~

by Shea K.

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General warning: This story involves a sexual relationship between two women.

A/N: This a little trip back into the universe of *Scarred for Life*, but it's not a sequel. If you are going to read this story, you might want to read [Scarred for Life](#) first. This would fit between chapters 15 and 16 if it was in [Scarred for Life](#).

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Dane Wolfe, more commonly referred to as Danny nowadays, was sitting in the small office inside of her girlfriend's house. She was on the computer, scanning websites, and biting the top of a pen that she was supposed to be using to write things down with. Her free hand ran through her short, ebony hair every few seconds, a gesture that often showed nervousness or frustration in the musician.

What was the problem that was causing her frustration? Well, it was about to be her girlfriend's birthday. She wanted to get something extra-special for her beloved, Nicole Cardell, especially considering what she put her kind-hearted, stressed-out lover through well over a month ago. She had disappeared for three weeks, only to show up on the lawn one cold night, high, drunk, and in terrible pain-both physically and emotionally. Nicole had first taken care of her before jumping down her throat from her thoughtless behavior. She still felt extremely guilty over it, knowing that it would have been better for her to just drag Nicole naked through broken glass than walking out like she did.

Then, she had to add insult to injury-in her opinion anyway-because Christmas came around a month after that incident and she could not afford anything suitable for her girlfriend. Why? Well, because on her three-week running away and crying fest, whatever little money she managed to save, she had pissed away on alcohol and weed. She had also lost clients thanks to her impulsive three-week "vacation," so she had not been able to make much money in her month home. She had been able to buy Nicole a book and a pair of emerald earrings that Nicole acted like were the best gift ever. While Danny appreciated the sentiment, she felt bad and disappointed with herself-even if Nicole genuinely liked earrings. All she could bitterly think was *Merry fucking Christmas* as she had peeled away the paper on her six large gifts. Never in her life had she ever felt so bad for getting presents!

She did not think that bringing in the New Year was much fun with her either. First, she was not drinking anymore; end of story, never again. So, to her, that made going out for New Years a disappointing trip, even though Nicole swore up and down that she had a blast. To Dane, it seemed like them being surrounded by a bunch of drunken strangers, who were way too close to her girlfriend for her liking. Nicole ignored all of that and just enjoyed being with her lover and her friends. She did not need a drink and made sure to remind Dane of that, so that the younger woman could stop thinking of New Years as a drinking holiday, but more as a time to look forward to the future and enjoy those around her. They even had one of those celebrated New Years' kisses with Nicole's friend and coworker Mina taking a picture of the couple as they were locked in the embrace. The picture was now the screensaver on the computer that Danny was killing her eyes with at the moment.

Danny was determined to do better for Nicole's birthday. A girl only turned twenty-eight once, after all. More importantly, this was the first birthday that Nicole would celebrate while they were a couple and Danny wanted to make sure it was special. She wanted to make Nicole's birthday as close to perfect as possible, especially considering the birthday that Nicole had treated her to months back. They had not even been a couple then, but Nicole still made her feel so...loved. It was a feeling that she cherished, would never let go, and wanted to give Nicole in return.

"I won't be able to do anything if I can't even find a proper gift. I mean, geez, is it really this hard to shop for women?" Danny groaned, leaning down to bang her forehead on the desk a few times.

She had never actually shopped for anyone before. This was going to be her first time buying a birthday gift for a woman point blank; never mind the fact that she was in a relationship with this woman. She groaned again, feeling like a failure because nothing was grabbing her eye. It seemed like she was going to fall on her face before she even got started.

"Nick is going to think I'm the worst girlfriend ever!" Dane uncharacteristically whined, tugging at her hair as she picked up her head.

She just did not know what to get. She did not even know where to start! She was no good at this gift thing, her brain insisted on that. She sighed while turning away from the computer and glancing at the telephone. She got an idea and she was just desperate enough to use it. She grabbed the phone and dialed a number, hoping that someone was home; maybe everyone worked as late as Nicole did, she considered.

"Hello?" *And maybe they're just trying to drive Nick to drink*, she thought since someone picked up the phone.

"Hello, it's Danny. Mister Cardell?" she guessed it was him because the voice had that touch of bass that Kathleen's voice lacked.

"Yes. What can I do for you, Danny?" Raymond, Nicole's father and boss, asked curiously. He could not help wondering why she was calling him. He knew that Nicole was fine, he left her at

the office about an hour ago. Nicole was not prone to getting into trouble, so he doubted something happened within that hour.

"I was wondering what you think I should get Nick for her birthday. I'm all out of ideas," Dane admitted, managing to hold in a disappointed sigh. She ran her fingers through her hair for what had to be the millionth time at least-she thought anyway. *I'm going to rub myself bald at this rate!*

"I'm not too sure, Danny. I mean, if you can't figure out what to get her for her birthday, maybe it's a sign," he replied as if that was the most logical thing in the world. She could picture him shrugging indifferently to her plight, which he was doing.

Danny resisted the urge to scoff, but she did roll her eyes. She knew that neither of Nicole's parents were crazy about her, but she thought that Mister Cardell might help since he was willing to give her a chance. But, she guessed that he was willing to let her fall flat on her face too if it might mean Nicole would leave her for screwing up. Well, she had a trick for that.

"Well, I guess I'll just have to go with my last plan then. I figured I'd propose. Is Nick a diamond girl? I was going to go with emerald since they remind me of her eyes," Danny said very casually. It was a thought that she had in passing on days where she was just overcome by Nicole's gentle spirit, but the more that she thought about it, the more she liked the idea. She just thought it was too soon for her to really entertain such thoughts.

Raymond made a gagging noise, like he was choking on air. "Propose?" he audibly gulped. Of course Dane could not see, but he looked like he swallowed a bug at the mere mention of her proposing.

"Yeah. I'm sure that would make a good gift." It was tempting as hell too, especially since she did not have any better ideas. Still, she would never do something that drastic just because she could not pick out a birthday gift. Besides, it would hurt like hell if Nicole turned her down, and she could see Nicole gently turning her down in her mind.

"Wait, wait, wait, Danny, don't you think you're jumping the gun? I mean, you haven't even known Nikki for a year yet and you haven't been dating that long," he hurriedly explained, wanting to talk her out of that idea obviously.

"I know it's hasn't been a year, but I've felt this thing for Nick for a long time and I feel it deep. I'm sure Nick does too. Maybe I should just skip it all and propose. So, like I said, I think an emerald ring would look good." She smirked to herself, looking like a clever imp. It was surprising that she was not patting herself on the back.

Raymond sighed heavily. "Danny, I think you're being too hasty. Give it time before you start thinking about proposing. Kate and I will go with you to the mall to and help you get a gift. We haven't gotten her anything yet either."

"Really? Great!" Danny cheered, grinning madly now. She quickly hopped out of her chair, thrusting her free hand in the air for victory, and then quickly sat back down, her knee reminding her that she should not make sudden movements like that anymore.

"All right. We'll go Saturday," Raymond stated.

"Okay. See you then." Dane disconnected the call before he had a chance to change his mind and did her version of a little dance, moving her hips while making sure her legs did not move at all. "Okay, now, let me go warm up dinner for Nick," she said, running off downstairs...well, more like power-walking downstairs and even that caused her knee to complain. It did not slow her down much.

Meanwhile, Raymond's reaction was not quite as jovial as Danny's. He frowned deeply, wrinkling his brow with tension, as he placed the phone back on the base. His eyes stared hard at the device as if everything that happened was its fault. He turned to his wife, who was standing not too far away. The pointed look in her sharp, brown eyes let him know that she heard the phone conversation quite clearly.

"Did you just agree that we would go to the mall with Dane on Saturday?" Kate asked in disbelief.

"All we have to do is help her pick out a gift for Nikki," Raymond answered as if was no big deal, having the nerve to try waving it off. The scowl on his wife's face said otherwise and caused her to give him a look that demanded more than that, so he continued on. "It was either help her find something or she was going to propose to Nikki and at this point Nikki more than likely would've accepted just to spite us. This way, we can at least avoid a wedding for a few more months," he reasoned.

Kate frowned deeper than before, even though she agreed with his thinking. Hell, they might have dodged a bullet there. The last thing she wanted to hear from Nicole right now was that she was engaged to Dane. Kate was holding onto the hope that Nicole would come to her senses, dump Dane, and find a decent man to settle down with.

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Dane groaned from her space on the bench in the bustling, crowded mall as yet another person bumped her knee while walking by. She hated mobs of people now, mostly for the reason that her knee was just getting brutalized by clumsy idiots. At least at a club people had the excuse of trying to dance; at the mall, it just showed people were idiots and never developed the proper motor skills that they were supposed to have at three years old. Her knee was throbbing, begging her to get the hell out of the mall while she still had the ability to walk.

Dane took a deep breath and shook her head, telling herself that she was just cranky because she had not been able to do something as simple as by the love of her life a birthday gift without assistance. She put her head down for a moment, just feeling absolutely pathetic.

*Maybe I should've just called Crow...* Danny thought. She knew that was a horrible idea, even if it would have been much less humiliating. Crow would not have been much help because she refused to look at anything unless it was black or...well out of Dane's price range. For some reason, Crow still had it in her head that Danny could afford the finer things in life. Right now, Danny could barely afford the crappiest things in life. It was a good thing she was not being charged for breathing or she would have either died a long time ago or been in debt up to her eyeballs.

"Danny, are you okay?" Raymond inquired as he and Kate walked up to her. They both looked at her curiously and for once it had nothing to do with the way she was dressed. She looked like she was about to be sick.

"I'm fine," Dane replied, picking her head and smiling as best she could as Kate was glared the usual daggers at her. She had to take another deep breath before climbing to her feet-and kept a wince at bay thanks to her now sore knee.

"Let's just get this over with. It's not that hard to buy Nikki something," Kate huffed as she turned away from Dane, making sure to give the younger woman a dirty look before doing so. From her voice, it was clear that she thought Dane was the stupidest creature on Earth for not being able to find Nicole something on her own.

Danny ran her copper-toned hand through her hair, but told herself that everything would be fine, even though she knew that Kathleen would sooner spit on her than truly help her with anything. She wanted things to be perfect for Nicole and if that meant spending time with Kate, then so be it. Her hands went into her pockets as she waited the parents to lead her off somewhere, half-expecting them to know some secret location hidden away in the mall that might be Nicole's favorite store or something.

"Do you have any idea what you might want to get her?" Raymond inquired curiously, looking at the musician. He wrapped his arm around Kate, silently reminding her that they were hanging around Danny for the greater good. The reminder did not get Kate to stop glaring at Dane as if she was trying to melt the younger woman.

"Not really. I was scanning a lot of store websites, but nothing really caught my eye," Dane explained.

"You really should've just brought her something online. The selection is basically limitless," he pointed out as they started walking. There was really no destination in mind, but it seemed that none of them wanted to just stand there and give people an excuse to bump into them.

"Well, there's two problems with that. One being if I did see something I really like, I probably wouldn't have been able to afford it anyway. Two being that I don't have a credit card or a debit card to buy stuff off line," Danny replied with a slight shrug. When she was going through websites before, she had been hoping to find something in a store nearby that she could go pick up in person.

"You don't have a debit card?" Kate asked in sheer disbelief. Her mouth would have been on the floor if it was possible. No debit card meant no checking account, which she just thought was impossible. In her mind, everyone over the age of twenty-one with a job should have a checking account, but then again, she did not expect that much from someone that she viewed as an unemployed loser.

"I don't have a checking account," Dane added, knowing that she was making things worse. Still, she felt compelled to be honest with her girlfriend's parents, even if meant that their opinion of her would be lowered...not that Kate's opinion of her could get much lower than it was already.

"Do you even have any money at all?" Kate huffed, a frown slicing across her plump, olive-toned face. "Or are you just wasting our time? I mean, do you even work?" she snapped soundly and continued to glower. Surely if she tried hard enough, she could will Dane's heart to stop beating, she thought.

"Kate, I'm sure you remember that Danny gives music lessons," Raymond said with the hope of keeping the peace. He then turned to the caramel-skinned musician. "How much money are you working with, though? I mean, I remember Nikki saying that she was trying to keep you from jumping right back into work and everything."

"I don't have much," Dane admitted with a sheepish look on her face. "I've got about three hundred dollars to spend." *It'll leave me poor as hell, but Nick is worth it.*

"That's all the money you have saved up? You're really a gold digger, just admit it," Kate hissed like an angry snake.

Grey eyes rolled and a chuckle escaped the younger woman. "I wish. Lately, it seems like one of the main things I've been doing with Nick is turning down money. She wanted to start a joint account for us, but really for me. I couldn't let her do that when I didn't have as much money to bring to the table."

"You keep going at this rate and you'll never have enough money to bring to the table. Maybe you should go out and get a real job," Raymond suggested, sounding quite polite and friendly, even though he suspected it was rude to say point blank. Kate nodded in agreement with that, even though she would not have put it so nicely. They wanted their daughter to be with someone that would take care of her, not someone that she needed to take care every second of the day. If only they had paid attention to Nicole's last relationships as closely as they were doing with her current one, they might have known that Dane was one of the least dependent people that Nicole had ever dated.

Dane shrugged and ran her fingers through her hair. "Nick doesn't seem to have a problem with what I do and I like my job for the most part. Money isn't everything." *Except on holidays that require gifts.*

"Yet, I'm sure you'll spend Nikki's money freely as soon as she gives you the okay to do so," Kate snapped. If possible, her deep brown gaze would have set Dane aflame. The look of sheer,

intense hatred that burned there did not bother the younger woman much and she was able to ignore it for the most part.

Dane sighed. "I doubt there's anything I can say that makes you believe otherwise. Unless, of course, I told you that I had a trust fund and really had no need for any of Nick's money."

"Do you? Nikki said that your parents..." Raymond paused and tried to think of the phrase that Nicole used because it was odd, but clever in his opinion, like many things that came out of his daughter's mouth. The words escaped him, though.

"If only my parents gave enough of a damn about me to sign off on a trust fund. My siblings probably have one, but I damn sure don't," Dane scoffed and then she noticed an ATM. "Excuse me while I go empty my savings for the third time in less than a year. I wonder if there's a limit to how many times a bank let's your account balance be zero," she remarked, speaking mostly to herself while walking off.

"Nikki told you about Dane's parents?" Kate asked curiously, glancing at her husband. She wondered about what type of people could raise someone as uncouth and distasteful as Dane.

"We were talking recently about the Wolfe family since I've been observing Tyler closer after finding out that he might be harassing some of the female clerks and things. I was wondering how Danny's related to him at all. I thought that they might be using the term 'cousin' as loosely as possible, but it turns out that they're very closely related. His uncle, Russell Wolfe, is her father," Raymond answered.

Kate bristled and her face went stone cold. She turned to look at Dane, who was walking back over to them. If looks could kill, Danny would have died a thousand times before she hit the ground thanks to the murderous glare from Kate. The short woman then turned back to her husband.

"He had a bastard child?" Kate inquired. A chuckle came from the "bastard child" as she settled in next to the couple.

"If you're talking about who I think you're talking about, he likes to think his wife had the bastard child," Danny remarked with a lopsided smile, appearing almost proud.

"Sorry, Danny," Raymond had the good manners to apologize. He was well aware that it was not very polite to speak about a person's family, especially just because that person stepped out of earshot. Kate did not even think to apologize, but instead regarded Dane as if the musician was something that she found on the bottom of her shoe.

"No need. Nick told me that she's talked to you about my family before. I don't really care about it. I just don't make it a point to talk about that bright bunch much," Dane replied with a shrug. Her voice was calm and indifferent, like she truly did not care one way or another about her family.

"No? I would ask if you're adopted, but knowing what I know about Russell, that bastard wouldn't do something that selfless," Kate commented with even more bite and disgust in her voice. Danny guessed that Kathleen did not care for her father much, which was something that they shared.

"Got that right," Dane agreed. She put her hands in her pockets; she was wearing pants at Nicole's insistence since it was wintertime. Her usual chain swung at her side, going into her pocket with the other end connected to her belt loop.

"You're his youngest, aren't you?" Raymond asked as the trio started walking. He was trying to start a conversation and he hoped that it would keep his wife from glowering at Danny so much. He wished that she was better at hiding her emotions when she was outside of a courtroom anyway, but when Kate disliked someone, that person was always aware of it through everything she did and said around the person.

Dane frowned, not really wanting to talk about it, but she reminded herself that she needed to stay on the couple's good side. "I am." She hoped that the short, clipped answer was a big enough hint that she did not want to continue.

"So, he has a mistress? I wouldn't put it past that bastard," Kate said, disdain dripping from her words. Her top lip curled in disgust just from thinking about that awful cur.

"Not that I'm aware of," Dane answered honestly. She would give it to her father; he was bastard on many different levels, but despite it all, she was pretty sure he was always faithful to her mother, even when screaming that Danny was not his child. She would give her mother some props too for never going out of her way to prove her father right by having an affair. As bad as the couple were to her, she would bet that her parents held genuine, real affections for each other.

"Then how did you come into the picture?" Kate inquired suspiciously. She was starting to feel lied to by the younger woman, like Dane was playing some sort of sick game with them.

"I got here just like most kids get into the world. What, you don't think my mother could have blond hair and blue eyes?" Dane countered with a smart-ass smile on her face. She could not help it; she was starting to get really irritated. She honestly wished that she never called the couple to help in the first place now. *I should've known this was going to go bad really fast!*

It was Kate's turn to frown. "You think you're funny, don't you?"

Danny shrugged. "Just answering a question. You don't want the answer, don't ask the question. Isn't that a lawyer rule? You never ask a question you don't already know the answer to?" she asked, running her hand through her hair. At this rate, she knew that she was never going to get on Kate's good side and she might even work her way on Raymond's bad side if she continued to antagonize his wife. She just hoped that their feelings never influenced Nicole's feelings for her.

"Is that what your father taught you?" Kate sneered.



Dane chuckled, shaking her head because it was better than verbally responding. She doubted it would be a good idea to get into what her father taught her. Instead, she tried to focus on why she was at the mall in the first place. She needed to find a present for Nicole's birthday, so she started her search by walking just a little bit ahead of the couple and scanning the stores that they passed by.

"Something elegant, fitting for an angel," Dane crooned, singing the words in a low tone. This oddity earned her glances from the couple that she was with.

"Danny, do you have something in mind?" Raymond asked curiously, trying to get his mind off of the fact that Danny might actually have a talent in something. He figured since she seemed to be moving with intent that she might know what she was looking for now.

"Not really. I'm hoping for something spectacular," the musician answered with a smile. She wanted something that would just take Nicole's breath away.

"You're not going to get something too spectacular with a mere three hundred dollars. Maybe you should call up your daddy and get him to send you money," Kate mocked her.

Danny thought that it was best not to answer at this point or else she and Kate were just going to get into an argument. And it would be an argument if she was lucky; she hated to think how Nicole would react if she found out that Dane beat the crap out of her mother in the middle of the crowded mall. The funny thing was that the musician thought they had actually come to something that they could agree on, which was that her father was a bastard. It was just that she doubted that Kate would believe her that they agreed on that point.

"Something fit for an angel..." Dane sang again in a low voice. She knew that if the search went on long enough, she would end up writing a song in her head while seeking a birthday gift.

"Danny, you have a rather nice singing voice," Raymond noted, giving her a curious sidelong glance. He never would suspect such a beautiful voice to come out of someone like Danny, not that he would say that aloud. He was not out to pick a fight like his wife, after all.

"Didn't expect a punk rocker to have a nice voice?" she countered with a teasing smirk on her face.

Raymond chuckled. "I have to say, it is a surprise."

"I like singing almost as much as I like playing my guitar, which I guess is good since I was the lead singer in a band once upon a time," Dane replied, hoping that revealing a little more about herself would wash over her earlier behavior in regards to talking about her family. She figured this would show that she did not have anything to hide; there were just certain subjects that she would rather steer clear of.

"I think Nikki was telling me about that. She says that's basically how you made a living before you got into teaching music. I didn't know people could still make a living off of playing music without being really famous," Raymond said.

A warm smile worked its way onto caramel features. "This is actually a very big music town...well, the city part anyway. The suburbs, not so much. There's a huge music culture in the city and if you're good, you can make a decent living. If you're great, sky's the limit really."

"Were you mediocre then? Why is it that you don't do it anymore?" Kate inquired with a smug look in her eyes. "You know the saying goes, those who can do and those who can't teach."

"I think I've heard that before. It's a bit insulting to teachers, but whatever. I was better than mediocre. I was great. I was a god when I played my guitar," Dane declared proudly, eyes shining like silver. Kate could rip into her for a lot of things, but she would be damned if she was going to let someone downplay what was now her third greatest passion-music. Nicole held the first place and second place. Not even music could not touch Nicole to her.

"You think rather highly of yourself," Kate noted with naked disgust. Her lip curled up and her nose wrinkled a bit as if she smelled something bad.

"When it comes to my music, yes. I know what I'm good at. I used to play my guitar damn well. I could touch things inside of people they didn't know was there when I played. I was a big draw at a lot of clubs not too long ago," Dane stated. It felt like another lifetime ago, but she remembered being a celebrity and she had loved every bit of it back then. All of the money, women, drugs, and alcohol. None of that mattered now, though. Yes, she missed what she could do with her guitar, but she would never trade in what she had now for what she had then. This realization put a smile on her face, renewing her devotion and her determination to find Nicole the perfect gift.

"What happened?" Raymond inquired curiously.

A hard look settled onto Danny's copper face. "...People proved to be what I know them to be," she answered, trying to flex her left hand into a tight fist, but she could not even do that with it. She growled and tried to storm off, away from the questions and the memories. Unfortunately, her sore knee made her hobble off, which only burned her up more. She decided that she would not answer anymore questions since she could not make a clean getaway while maintaining her dignity.

"I think I might have touched a nerve there," Raymond commented, rubbing the back of his head. He was a bit troubled by seeming to do something that Kate had not even managed to offend Danny.

"Who cares? With luck, she'll limp out of Nikki's life now," Kate proclaimed, turning her nose up.

"Kate," Raymond sighed.

"What? You know she's not good enough for Nikki, and it has nothing to do with the fact that she's a woman. She just happens to be the worst woman that Nikki has ever introduced to us ever. She is worthless, has a horrible job, no money, and she dresses like a clown. Could you imagine taking her to one of the firm parties? Having to introduce her to clients? And worst of all, she's *his* daughter!" Kate hissed with utter contempt. Her face was twisted into a venomous scowl.

"I can confidently say that he is not a father to her. I saw what he did to her with my own eyes. And we did allow *his* nephew to join our firm and date our daughter, so I don't see why you would make such a big deal out of that. But, other than that, I suppose I agree with you. Danny does make Nikki feel special, though. She makes Nikki happy and until I see otherwise I'm going to root for her...a little anyway," Raymond explained with a chuckle.

"Okay, Tyler was an exception, first of all. He was almost the total opposite of his jackass uncle when we met him and interviewed him for the firm. Besides, his father is not a complete and total jerk, unlike Dane's father. As far as things with Dane, though, Nikki could do better. Much better," his wife insisted.

Raymond shrugged; he could not argue that one. He was about to say something, but he noticed ahead of them Danny had stopped. She was staring into a store, a jewelry store from what he could tell. He and Kate stepped up behind her, wondering what caught her attention. They did not even need to ask.

"You can't afford that," Kate sneered at the musician.

Dane did not say anything, but she took off toward the ATM once more. Raymond and Kate only watched her go; Raymond was certain that he had never seen a person limp so fast. Dane was doing a sort of hop/skip in order to get to the ATM. Raymond turned his attention back to the piece that he was certain had Danny's attention.

"Well, she does have good taste," Raymond remarked. It was certainly something that he would pick out for his wife if he was shopping for a special occasion.

"She can't afford that or she simply lied to us about how much money she had," Kate stated, turning her nose up again.

Once again, Raymond could not argue that. After all, not even ten minutes ago, Danny told them that she only had three hundred dollars to spend. It seemed she had a little more than that because she came back and rushed into the jewelry store, pointing to the display at the front to the first salesperson that caught her eye. He looked skeptical, but he did go get the item that she wanted.

Raymond and Kate both arched an eyebrow when the salesman picked up the exact item they were so sure she would not be able to afford. Dane hugged the bag to her chest when the jewelry was handed to her in exchange for every single dime that she had to her name. No one would

know from the content look on her face that she was seriously penniless now. She could not even afford the bus fare home, so she would have to walk, but she did not care.

"I thought you only had three hundred dollars. You took money out of Nikki's account, didn't you? I'm sure she gave you the numbers and a card," Kate huffed. A familiar, burning glare fixed itself into sharp amber eyes.

Danny smiled, feeling too good about herself at the moment. "I'd never do that. Look, guys, thanks for coming out, even though we didn't look around much. I'm gonna get going since I got my gift and I doubt you guys want my company anyway. I wanted to tell you guys too that Nick told me usually to celebrate her birthday you guys all go out for a family dinner. I didn't know that until after I planned on making a birthday dinner for her. I was...well, I was hoping...um...you'd come over for dinner instead of going out," she explained in a slightly shaky voice. Her hand went through her hair as a second of silence past between them.

"You're going to make dinner? But, Nikki said you do that almost every night. Going out is special. I hope you don't think we're going to take Nikki and leave you at the house to wait up for her or something because that's not the case," Raymond assured her.

Dane shook her head a little. "I wasn't worried about that, really. I just want to make a special dinner for her. I also want to make desserts. I already figured out what birthday cake I want to get and everything," she informed them.

Raymond's eyebrows shot up and his mouth bent downward, impressed with the young woman. "You've really thought this out, huh?"

"I did. Cooking at this point is something I can do well and can make happen. I can do it big with some forethought. I'm just better at being domestic than at giving gifts it seems," Dane remarked with a slight chuckle.

Raymond nodded and put his hand over to his chin. "What kind of food are you going to make?"

"Nothing too fancy. Just some of Nick's favorites and I'm going to try out a few things. The cake'll be chocolate if that helps," Dane commented, smiling. She knew it counted with Nick. She just hoped that her girlfriend got her sweet tooth from one of her parents-hopefully, the parent that semi-liked her too.

"Kate?" Raymond turned to his wife, who looked just as sour as she had all day.

"No. We're not going to break a tradition for some passing fancy in Nikki's life," Kate stated, scowling in Dane's direction for even suggesting such a thing. She waved the whole idea off with a flick of her hand, as if the very notion was an affront to her.

"I just thought-" Dane tried to explain herself, but Kate cut in.

"No, you've been in Nikki's life for a few months and you think you can just come and rip apart our family traditions? We've been taking Nikki out for her birthday since she was four years old. I'll not have you show up for months and try to ruin everything and then when you finally do run out on Nikki leave us to pick up the pieces!" Kate snapped, a fire burning in her eyes and trying to ignite the insolent musician.

Dane was shocked that she had not lost a finger in that tirade just from the bite in Kate's words. Having learned recently that there were some battles that she just could not win and should not fight, she withdrew. Dane turned and walked away, giving them a short wave as she did so. Her dinner plans would have to wait.

"Kate," Raymond sighed.

"No, no, no, Raymond, don't make it seem like I went too far. I refuse to let her disturb any of our family traditions. Do you know what type of mess Nikki will end up being when this degenerate runs out on her if we let her break up our family norms?" Kate huffed, folding her arms tightly across her chest. The tension in her jaw caused a vein in her neck to bulge out.

"I think you're being a little hard on Danny, Kate," Raymond insisted, putting an arm around her shoulders with the hope that the closeness would calm her down.

Narrowing her eyes, she looked up at him. "I think you're being too soft. You know good and well she's not good enough for our daughter and now knowing the family's she from, I know for sure she's only going to break Nikki's heart. You know those people have no value in any human emotion," she pointed out harshly.

Raymond scratched his head a little, mussing his straight, auburn hair. Damn it, his wife just kept catching him. "Kate, she's not her family. From the little things Nikki has told me, her family doesn't want anything to do with her, especially her father."

"Oh, one can imagine what depravity she must've done to get disowned by that man," Kate spat, looking quite scandalized.

"Tyler is from the same family," he gently reminded her.

"Tyler is his nephew, not his son. Tyler has a father that is bearable with some moral values. Dane is from the lowest mongrel in that repulsive kennel. I have no doubt that she's an obnoxious bitch," she stated soundly.

Raymond, much like Dane, knew when it was time to give up. He briefly wondered if Dane's behavior was learned in the same way his behavior was. He knew when to not fight or to give up the fight from being with Kate so long. He then shook that away, doubting very much that sweet, little Nikki could ever be as snappy as her mother outside of a courtroom.

"Come on, we still need to get Nikki a present," Raymond said and he ushered Kate off into the mall. He hoped that Danny just accepted that Kate wanted to keep up the family tradition and did

not try to take matters to Nicole. He was certain that Nicole would just go with Danny's plan, which would crush Kate. He would not feel too good about it either.

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"Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you..." A smile spread across Nicole's sleeping face as she heard those words softly whispered in her ear. Emerald eyes fluttered open and her smile grew wider when Danny's face came into focus. The musician was hovering over her, grinning merrily.

"I get the feeling it's going to be a very happy birthday," Nicole remarked, her voice scratchy from sleep. She wrapped her arms around her girlfriend.

"If I have anything to say about it, it will," Dane declared before leaning down for a good morning kiss.

Nicole grinned to herself when her lover's lips met her own. They both moaned as their mouths made contact. Olive-toned hands wandered the caramel back as Dane crawled on top of Nicole, making sure not to break the blissful kiss. Warm skin touched equally warm skin, but wanting more, Dane lowered herself onto Nicole until she was almost lying on the older woman. Nicole did not mind, trying to pull the music teacher even closer. They moaned again as Dane started moving like a serpent, hinting to just how happy she was willing to make this birthday. Suddenly, the alarm clock sounded, startling them enough to pull away.

"Shit! Is it really this late?" Dane growled as they both reached out for the alarm clock. Nicole did the sensible thing and turned the alarm off while Dane yanked the bothersome device out of the wall.

"Danny," Nicole sighed, rolling her eyes a little.

"What?" Dane flashed a charming grin and green eyes rolled again. The grin remained, knowing that she was out of trouble. "I'll go start your birthday breakfast. Don't want you to be late for work."

Nicole groaned. "I wish I could just call in, but my parents would be so suspicious and I know they'd probably come here just to call my bluff." The last thing she wanted to do was give her parents an excuse to show up at her house, possibly finding her in a compromising position with her girlfriend.

Dane nodded in understanding and gave Nicole a quick peck on the lips before climbing off of her. Nicole sighed and frowned, wanting the body contact to return. While Danny just grabbed a robe to go make breakfast, Nicole got up to search for her outfit for the day. She was tempted to throw on something naughty, just to tease Danny for a little while, but she really did not have the time for that.

"I can't believe we slept so late!" Nicole huffed, speaking under her breath. But, then again, she could understand how they had slept so late since they had just gone to bed four hours ago. From the start of her birthday at midnight last night, it had been a very good day and she had been hoping to continue right where they left off when they woke up. Fate was against that plan, though.

As Nicole showered and dressed, Dane made her a breakfast that she could eat on the way to work, even though she really had planned on making a big breakfast for the birthday girl. *I can't believe I slept that late! Totally screwed up my plans! Shit!* Dane cursed mentally through out the whole meal preparation.

"Danny, you okay?" Nicole asked as she noticed her girlfriend marching around the kitchen in a fit.

Dane immediately turned to the love of her life and smiled sheepishly. "Uh...no, actually," she admitted, running a hand through her hair.

"What's wrong, sweetheart?" Nicole asked, walking over and wrapping her arms around her lover's waist.

"I wanted to make you a special breakfast today, but I overslept, so I couldn't do it," Dane mumbled pathetically, resting her head on Nicole's shoulder. She returned the hug, holding onto the redhead tightly.

"Honey, you don't need to make me a special breakfast. Besides, I was the reason you overslept," Nicole reminded her lover with a smirk on her face.

Dane laughed. "I didn't object to it then. I was sure I'd get up in time to make you strawberry pancakes, though."

"I missed out on strawberry pancakes? Damn it," Nicole playfully pouted. "Love, you know I'd rather be with you than have all of the strawberry pancakes in the world. Even though, you do make some killer strawberry pancakes."

A grin was in place when Dane pulled away to look into Nicole's eyes. Both their eyes sparkled and Nicole gave Dane a quick peck on the lips, keeping that grin on the musician's face. The attorney caressed Danny's cheek before pulling away.

"I made you an egg and bacon sandwich for breakfast. Is that good?" Danny asked, moving to retrieve the meal.

"Perfect!" Nicole chirped happily, going so far as to clap twice.

"Lunch is leftovers again, even though I doubt you'll need it. I bet my ass that your friends treat you to a really good lunch today," Dane declared.

Nicole nodded. "You're probably right, but thanks for looking out for me anyway, Danny."

"Hey, I love you."

"I love you too."

Danny walked Nicole to the door as usual and kissed her farewell. Once Nicole was off, Dane ran her fingers through her hair, knowing that she had a day ahead of her. She needed to survive dinner with Nicole's parents later on, after all.

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Nicole was smiling ear to ear when she got to work, which was expected now. Only a few people knew why she came in smiling everyday, but the whole firm knew they preferred that to her coming in with a chip on her shoulder. Her assistant greeted her with a warm, polite, and sincere smile, making sure to call her "Miss Cardell" while he was at it; he honest and truly did not want to get on her bad side ever again.

The redhead went to her desk and started to set herself up to get to work. Before doing so, she glanced at a recent addition to her desk, a framed photograph of her and Danny. Mina took it during the New Years' celebration they attended together; it was not the infamous "kissing picture." The couple was engaged in a simple embrace for the camera, nothing over the top-except maybe Danny's monster grin.

"You always smile so big, sweetheart," Nicole said, speaking to the picture.

Before she could get lost in any thoughts about her lover's smile, the door to her office opened. Green eyes shot to see the last person that Nicole wanted to see enter her office. And he had the nerve to be carrying flowers!

"Get out, Tyler," Nicole ordered, her voice so cold it was a shock the walls did not frost over. The sound did not affect him or the wannabe charming look on his face, though.

"Aw, Nikki, you don't mean that. Look, I brought you roses," Tyler cooed, slightly waving his dozen, long-stem roses.

"I don't want a damn thing from you, Tyler, aside for you getting the hell out," Nicole firmly commanded, glaring at him with fuming green eyes. Her face was tense and her body was rigid.

A light laugh was followed by a boyish smile. "Come on, Nikki, don't be that way. You remember this time last year, how special I made sure your birthday was," he reminded her.

Green eyes narrowed dangerously and a snarl tugged at her lips, baring her teeth. "I remember all right. I remember you filling my office with junk I did not need and did not want, probably due to the fact that you couldn't remember what type of flowers or stuffed animals I do like, so you just brought them all. I remember my friends wanting to take me to lunch to a café I really like,



but you refusing without talking to me first and instead dragging me to some expensive place I hate to this very day and then you graciously allowed me to pick up the check. And then when we had dinner with my parents, you graciously allowed my father to do the same thing. No, I haven't forgotten how 'special' you made my birthday last year, which is why I don't want you around this year," she stated, not caring how harsh she sounded.

"Nikki-" he started, but she cut him off right there, her voice more effective any blade that she could wield.

"I've told you time and time again to not call me that," she informed him sharply.

A frown conquered his face and anger flashed in his eyes. "Oh, but I bet my dyke cousin can call you that!" he snapped, flaring his nostrils.

"What Danny can and cannot call me has no bearing here. Now, I suggest you get the hell out of my office or I will throw you out and then I'm going to file a harassment claim because you don't seem to follow instructions well unless there's consequences involved," Nicole pointed out, referring to the fact that he had only recently stopped trying to pick up every woman in the firm because he heard one of the bosses was watching him.

His tight mouth twitched and his scowl deepened. The sound of his teeth grinding echoed through the office for a moment. His anger burned so intensely that she could practically feel it on the other side of the room, but it was canceled out by her infuriated aura. Ignoring her emotions entirely, he pressed on.

"What the fuck does Dane have that I don't? How the hell can you keep defending that drug-addict bitch and denying me?! Does she eat you that good?!" he demanded, face turning bright red as he threw his arms out in a fury.

Nicole growled and shot up from her desk, pointing at the door. "Get out of my office right now, you jackass! And never come in here again or I swear you'll regret it!"

"Are you threatening me?" he inquired, eyes narrowing.

"I'm promising you," she answered in a deadly serious voice.

"Nikki, you've made a big mistake. You're going to regret sticking up for that bull-dyke of a cousin of mine. She's a no-good, dirty bitch-"

"Tyler," Nicole cut him off again, now walking around her desk. The look in her eyes as she approached him caused him to gulp and take a step back. "I'm tired of you injecting your opinion in my life, especially in regards to the woman I LOVE! Get your ass out of my fucking office right NOW!"

Tyler really had no intention of obeying her, but he did take a step back every time she took a step forward. As soon as he was across the threshold, the door was slammed in his face, hitting

his roses in the process. The expensive flowers slapped him in the chest and chin, scattering several petals that hit the floor. The movement also caused the roses to turn a bit, so the thorns on the stems scratched his hands.

"Ah, shit!" he hissed, dropping the flowers and shaking his slightly injured hands.

"Is everything all right down here?" a familiar voice asked the young attorney, causing him to turn. He was about to point out the obvious that no, everything was not all right, but he bit his tongue when he saw it was Raymond Cardell asking.

"Everything's fine, sir. Nikki wasn't thrilled about my birthday gift," Tyler answered, dusting himself off. He bent down to pick up what was left of his bouquet of roses.

"I don't think this is the best place to try to give Nikki birthday gifts, do you?" Raymond inquired with a craned eyebrow. He wondered if Tyler really never noticed that Nicole was all about business when they were in the office. It was possible since he never really noticed how much Tyler disregarded Nicole's strict desire for professionalism in the firm until now.

"It doesn't matter. She didn't want them anyway. All she can think about is her precious Dane. I swear, she will not listen to reason when it comes to Dane and I know my cousin is just taking advantage of her," Tyler proclaimed and he would have continued on, but Raymond put his hand up.

"I'm sorry, Tyler, but I don't have time for this. I have to see Nikki," Raymond explained. "Have a good day," he said, entering the room that Tyler had just been banished from. He quickly shut the door behind him.

Nicole's head snapped up as soon as she heard her door open, thinking that Tyler really wanted to try her today. A sigh of relief escaped her when she saw it was just her father, even though she doubted that he was bearing good news. It was just that even extra work sounded better than having to put up with Tyler again. Noting that her father did have a folder tucked under his arm, she figured that he did have more work for her. *Just once I would like a birthday gift in the office and it would be for everyone to leave me alone for the day so I can handle whatever I already have*, she thought.

"Hi, Nikki, and happy birthday," Raymond greeted her with a proud smile.

"Hi and thank you. What can I do for you, Daddy?" Nicole inquired peacefully. From the way she looked now, he would never believe that she had just been screaming her lungs out at Tyler if he had not heard it in the hallway.

He shrugged a little. "Nothing much. I'm just passing this contract onto you. Pierce Hamilton seems to think that you're the best when it comes to these sorts of things. He wants to make sure this contract is as solid as a bank safe and as much in his favor as it seems to be," he explained, placing the folder down on her desk.

Nicole nodded. "I'll do my best with it, Daddy."

"I know you will, Nikki." Raymond paused for a moment, thinking something over. "Is everything all right between you and Tyler?" he asked, even though he could guess.

"Of course not. Tyler's too much of a jackass to know how to make everything all right between us. He refuses to leave me alone," Nicole huffed, frowning as she thought about the encounter that she just had with the insufferable twit.

Raymond nodded. "Do you think that he's just worried about you?"

The vicious glower that Nicole shot her father told him to leave this topic alone. Instead of saying anything else, he took his leave and left Nicole to her work. The auburn-haired woman was left alone until it was close to lunchtime. She started putting her things away, knowing that any second Mina and Clara would be in her office, dragging her off to lunch. Her timing was almost perfect; they came in just as she was shutting down her computer.

"Come on, workaholic, time to go celebrate your birthday. What are you, fifty now?" Mina teased, bright smile lighting her chestnut features.

Nicole laughed a little. "You don't want to go down that road with me since you are *older* than I am," she reminded her friend.

Mina smiled. "Don't even go there. It might be your birthday today, but I won't pull any punches."

"I'm sure you won't. I'm shutting down my computer, so give me a second and then we can leave," Nicole informed them.

The pair nodded and Nicole was with them in a few seconds. After that, they were off to Nicole's favorite little café. They had to sit inside because of the winter chill and a waiter quickly made his way over to him; the rapid service was one of the many things that Nicole loved about the place.

"Tyler didn't bug you today, did he?" Mina asked curiously.

"As a matter of fact, he did. Were we shouting so loudly that you heard me on the opposite end of the hall?" Nicole countered, thinking that her friend was being sarcastic with her question.

"No, actually. I came in around the same time as that jackass and noticed he had flowers in his hand. Doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out why he had them, but I was hoping that I was wrong," Mina explained, shaking her head. Her top lip curled in disgust that Tyler just did not know when to quit.

"He brought you flowers? To work?" Clara asked in disbelief.

"Yes," Nicole snorted, turning her nose up. It pissed her off just thinking about him in her office. The fact that he tried to give her something for her birthday only fueled her displeasure.

"He's such an idiot. He brought you flowers to work last year too, didn't he?" Clara inquired. Nicole nodded and Clara snorted too. "It kills me how he doesn't seem to realize you hate that."

"You know what's really funny is that Danny knows how much you hate it and she doesn't even work with you. She hasn't sent you anything at work or shown up during business hours or anything like that," Mina pointed out.

Nicole shrugged. "Danny's a bit smarter than her cousin, apparently."

"But, Danny's also breaking you out of that a little. I mean, you do take calls from her at work. It used to be that you would never think to take a personal call while you're at work, no matter who was calling you," Clara pointed out.

A blush stained Nicole's cheeks. "Well, Danny makes me see why some people do mix a little personal in with the business day."

Mina laughed. "Danny is just outstanding. She's getting you to come out of your shell and making you feel alive. Not to mention, she takes a killer New Years' Eve picture!" she remarked with a teasing grin. Nicole blushed a little, embarrassed by the praise and also by Mina bringing up that little public display she and Danny engaged in during New Years'.

"Danny understands me and makes me feel special. I know we still have some work to do on our relationship, but right now, I'm really happy with her," Nicole informed her friends, eyes sparkling, as they always did when she spoke of the musician.

"We know, sweetie, believe me, we know," Mina commented, reaching out and rubbing her friend's shoulder for a moment.

"You two will be fine. We have faith in you," Clara assured the birthday girl.

Nicole smiled graciously at her friends, hoping that they were right. She knew that relationships took a lot of work, but Danny seemed willing to work at it. Given the effort, Nicole could see them lasting as long as they did not give up like before or let others come between them like before. She highly doubted that Danny would let anything come between them like before considering the state that Danny was in during their separation.

The friends made small talk and laughed together through out lunch. Mina and Clara got the café staff to sing "Happy Birthday" to Nicole, who blushed all the way through it because there were others in the eatery. The redhead was so happy when the song was over and she was surprised that she did not die of embarrassment.

"Happy birthday, sweetie," Mina said, putting her gift onto the table. The box was small; Nicole suspected it was jewelry of some kind.

"Open it quick, so you can open mine next!" Clara urged her friend, barely able to keep in an eager squeal.

"Okay, okay, okay." A smile stayed on Nicole's face as she reached for the gift and peeled away the perfect shiny blue wrapping. Her smile widened when she revealed that Mina gave her a new watch. "Oh, god, I actually needed one of these!" the redhead said, in awe that her friend knew.

"I noticed your other watch is hanging on by a hope and a prayer. Now, you can take it out back and shoot it," Mina remarked with a proud smile.

Nicole chuckled as she quickly removed her worn out watch and replaced it with her new timepiece. Emerald eyes admired the piece for a few more seconds as it was twisted and turned at all possible angles. After that, Nicole turned to Clara, who handed her an envelope. There was no surprise that there was a card in the envelope, but it was a surprise that it held two tickets.

"Oh, what are you sending me to, dear Clara?" Nicole cooed with a delighted grin as she examined the tickets.

"Oh, just some play that you liked that left town for a little while and then made a come back," Clara said in a humming type of voice, waving it off with her hand as if it was trivial. She bit her bottom lip, pretending to suppress a smile.

Nicole almost jumped up and down, but instead leaned over to hug her friends tightly. Clara and Mina each got a huge hug for their gifts, which put smiles on their faces. After that, they had to return to work. A phone call was the only interruption Nicole had from her duties.

"Hey, baby," Nicole answered the call, knowing it was Danny because her assistant now got Danny's name right every single time she called. It sort of ruined Danny's fun because she could not surprise her lover anymore.

"Damn it, I was going to pretend to be a lost lap dancer needing your address," Dane playfully huffed.

Nicole burst out laughing. "You need to stop that."

"But, it's so much fun. Speaking of fun, did you have fun with your girls at lunch today?"

"You bet I did. Mina bought me a new watch."

"I know. I helped!" Dane declared proudly.

"You did? When?" Nicole inquired. She had no idea that her lover met up with her friend at any point in time without her around.

"Yeah, she called out sick some day last week. She came over to the house like right after you left and asked me about things that you needed. When I finally stopped and thought about it, I

remembered how messed up your watch was, especially after you accidentally kept it on in the shower the other day. After I said the watch, it dawned on her too. After that, me and her went shopping and boom! You got a watch," Dane excitedly explained. There was a beat of silence between them and the musician cursed mentally. "You're mad at me, aren't you? I mean, she's your friend and I shouldn't be hanging out with her!"

Nicole quickly interjected before her girlfriend could go on. "No, no! Danny, it's fine! I'm sorry if I scared you. I was just wondering if you helped Mina get me a watch, then what did you get me?"

Dane laughed. "Nah-uh! Wait until tonight to find out."

"Meanie."

"Hey, angel, you keep that up and I won't give it to you at all."

"You're a double-meanie. Oh, honey, do you want me to come get you for the dinner with my parents or do you think you could make your way out here without harming your leg in any way?" Nicole inquired, making sure that her lover could hear the seriousness in her voice involving her leg.

"I promise you I can make it out there without hurting my leg or my hand and properly dressed to boot!" Dane replied, grin evident by her voice.

"All right, then come to the firm by six, please."

"Six it is! Oh, what did Clara end up getting you?" Dane asked curiously.

Nicole smiled, thinking about how last year, her significant other would have never thought to ask that question. Hell, Tyler did not even know her friends got her gifts on her birthday. He also just invited himself to her dinner with her parents while Danny had quite shyly asked if she was allowed to come. That reminded Nicole that she had to talk to her mother before dinner.

"Chem, you still there?" Dane asked curiously.

"Oh, yes. Sorry, I got wrapped up in my own thoughts. Let me ask you this one, what do you think of the theater, big dog?" Nicole countered, a smile playing on her lips.

"Hmm...don't really got an opinion. Why? Are we theater bound?"

"Only if you want to be."

"I want to be wherever you are, angel."

An elated smile conquered Nicole's face, not just for the charming words, but the sincere voice they were said with. "You are too sweet, baby."

"That's the pot calling the kettle black. Look, I'm going to let you go, chem. I know you have plenty of work to finish up."

"That I do. I can't wait to see you all dressed up, honey."

"I'll be sure to wear something extra-nice just for you."

"I'm sure whatever you have planned will be fine. No need to go all out for me, so please, put the tuxedo back in the closet," Nicole joked.

Dane burst out laughing. "Fine, fine, fine, I'll leave my tux where it is. Now, I'll let you get back to work."

"Okay. I love you, big dog."

"Love you too, chem."

The lovers hung up and Nicole resumed working. Glancing up every now and then to check the time on her new watch, Nicole started packing up at 5:30. Once she was done with that, she got up and marched to the elevators, going up to her mother's office. She waved to anyone she passed as people started going home until she got to her mother's corner office at the end of the hall. After knocking, Nicole waited for acknowledgement.

"Who is it?" Kate called.

"It's me," Nicole answered.

"Oh, Nikki, please come in," her mother urged her. Forgoing any birthday greetings, she glanced up from her desk as the door opened. She always saved birthday well wishes for when they were outside of the firm. She was definitely the parent that Nicole got her sense of professionalism from.

As soon as Nicole entered, Kate got up from her chair. Kate met Nicole half-way across the large office and hugged the younger woman. Nicole accepted and returned the embrace, smiling as she did so.

"You're a little early if you're picking me up. I was just finishing up my work for today," Kate explained.

"Actually, Mommy, I'm here to talk to you about dinner tonight," Nicole replied.

Kate's eyebrows raised a bit in curiosity. "What do you want to talk about? Do you want to go to a different restaurant this year?"

Nicole shook her head. "No, nothing like that. Mom, Danny is going to join us for dinner and I don't want it to be like the last time you two shared a table. I don't want you sniping at Danny the whole night or saying insulting things to her."

"Listen, Nikki, I don't trust that girl," Kate stated with a frown.

"I understand that, Mom, but that's not what I'm asking you. I do trust Danny and I enjoy having her around. I don't want to sit through you talking down to her the whole night," Nicole said.

"Listen-" Kate was about to go off, but her daughter held up a hand, cutting her off right there.

"This is not up for debate. I'm putting my foot down on this. If you don't have anything nice to say to Danny tonight, then don't say anything. I don't want to spend my birthday playing referee and wondering when I should walk out of our dinner," Nicole explained as plainly as possible in her opinion.

Kate's face was instantly tight. "Nikki-"

"If you can't agree to these terms, I won't even bother going. I'll take Danny out somewhere else. She knows plenty of restaurants."

"Listen to yourself, Nikki! You'll take her out. It's your birthday. She should be taking you out!" Kate huffed, frowning at the mere thought of that limping freeloader. She could only wonder how Dane had conned her poor child and continued to trick her darling daughter into being in a relationship.

Nicole slapped her hands together. "It doesn't matter! I'm not with her for a bankroll! I'm with her because I love her. Now, will you just do me the favor of not trying to pick a fight with her tonight? If you don't have anything nice to say to her, don't say anything to her. It's that simple because I know she won't say anything to you if you leave her alone. That's just how she is."

Kate growled, really wanting to object, but she could see that glint in Nicole's eyes. The glint that told her Nicole meant business here. Kate glanced away for a moment and then turned back, seeing the same glint still in those jade orbs.

"Fine. I won't say a word to her tonight," Kate begrudgingly promised. She was not going to be the one to ruin her daughter's birthday, even if she thought that the event would be marred by Dane's presence.

"Thank you, Mommy. I do appreciate it," Nicole said with a smile. "Danny and I will meet you and Daddy at the restaurant, okay?"

"Fine. Do you have to go pick her up too?" Kate inquired, not bothering to hide her sneer.

"No, she's quite capable of getting here on her own. I do want to go keep an eye out for her. I told her to be here at six."



Kate nodded. "All right. Just remember that our reservations are for 6:30."

The redhead nodded and then she took her leave. She checked her watch again, finding out that it was ten to six. She went back to her office to grab her coat and briefcase, figuring that she would wait for Danny in the lobby. There was no wait necessary, though. She was tempted to whistle as she spotted her lover leaning against the wall in the lobby.

"My, my, my, don't you look good enough to eat," Nicole remarked, approaching her girlfriend.

A small smile crept onto Dane's face. "I think that'll have to wait until later, birthday girl."

"I hope that's a promise," Nicole commented. "Where'd you get this outfit from?" she asked curiously. Dane was wearing her clothes a little more fitting than usual. Her black pants hugged her legs just enough to call attention to them. Her top was a burgundy button-down shirt that was clearly her size and a girl's shirt; it was very rare for Dane to wear something that was clearly made for females. It clung to Danny and made Nicole want to rip it off of her.

A shrug of the shoulders and a hand through ebony hair seemed like it was the only response that would come, but Dane decided to vaguely explain things too. "I bought it," she replied.

"Clearly. I would remember if I was the one that bought it. You look very nice, honey," Nicole stated with an appreciative face.

"Thanks. I wanted to look my best on your special day. Glad I did the job right."

Nicole nodded, agreeing that Danny did the job quite right. "You did a wonderful job, but, baby, where is your coat? You better have one," the lawyer said with a threatening gleam in her eyes.

"Of course I have! I don't you yelling at me about the weather and my outfits anymore," the taller woman answered with a playful smile.

"I only do it because you act like you don't care about your health. I do care about your health, even if you don't."

"I know, chem. I'm doing my best not to make you worry too much anymore. So, let me just get my coat and we can go."

Danny went to a row of chairs by the wall, picking up her long pea coat and putting it on. She went back to her lover and offered Nicole her arm, which the lawyer readily took and they exited the building. They got to the restaurant before Nicole's parents, but that was fine. They were happy for the time alone, sitting at the table just talking about anything that came to mind. Raymond and Kate showed up about ten minutes later. True to her word, Kate did not say a word to Dane, not even "hello."

"So, Nikki, whatever happened to this back-to-school nonsense you were talking about?" Raymond asked curiously after a waiter took their orders. He had ordered a bottle of wine to

celebrate, but Dane still ordered a lemonade for herself since she did not drink anymore. She also ignored the glare that Kate gave her when she made her beverage order, not caring to wonder why the older woman was looking at her.

"Oh, it's not nonsense, Daddy. I start classes at the end of the month. I will be in class on Mondays and Wednesdays from six to nine. I got accepted to a very good program and I plan to see it through," Nicole stated soundly. The idea of having her chemistry degree and hopefully being hired as a chemist brought a smile to her face. Okay, Danny taking her hand might have also brought the smile to her face.

"I don't understand why you're doing this," Raymond said, shaking his head slightly.

"It really makes no sense," Kate concurred.

"Uh...Maybe we should get champagne to celebrate Nick's big day instead of wine. It's not often a girl turns twenty-eight," Dane suddenly said.

Kate turned and looked like she was about to say something to the musician, but turned away at the last moment. Raymond was ready to say something too, but then he realized what Danny was trying to do, namely save the family from getting into an argument at a very bad time. He smiled at the young woman and then agreed, springing for champagne to go with their meals. Of course, Dane did not have any. From that moment on, the dinner went very smoothly.

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"Thanks for enduring dinner with my parents," Nicole said as she and Danny exited her car. They were both wearing their coats to fight off the minute that they would be spending in the freezing cold.

"It was for a good cause. Besides, your mom ignored me the whole night, so that made it easy," Danny replied with a laugh while they walked to the house. She had her key in hand already, so she opened the door.

"I actually had to talk to her about it because she seems to have gotten worse in a past few days. Daddy told her who your family is and that's just got her going over the edge now. She thinks your family, more exactly your father, is evil and you're the spawn of the devil," Nicole explained while stepping through the door.

"She might be right about that one," Dane remarked with a chuckle.

"Still, I wasn't going to stand for her badmouthing you through out my entire birthday dinner. I told her before that you can't pick your family, so it's not your fault that you were born to that man," Nicole explained.

Dane laughed. "I wish you could pick. If that's the case, I would've been born from a rock or inside a chestnut shell!"

A small laugh escaped Nicole, but it was to cover up her true feelings than to show amusement. She wondered what Danny's childhood and her birthdays could have been like with a father that denied her, a mother that despised her, and siblings that disowned her before they even understood that she was different. She recalled that the birthday surprise that she had given Danny months ago was declared her best birthday ever by Danny, so she wondered what exactly Danny had to put up with at home.

Nicole was taken from her thoughts as Dane took her coat off of her shoulders and hung it up in the closet. Danny also hung her own coat up in the closet. With the clothing away, the musician turned back to her girlfriend and smiled brightly at her.

"Let's not bother with anymore of that. We're home and now I'm hosting your birthday after-party!" Dane declared, clapping her hands together.

"Does it include chocolate?" Nicole hoped. Her eyes lit up at the thought.

"In more ways than one. Go to the table and I'll serve you dessert. Plus, I want to give you your birthday gift."

Nicole grinned, wondering what her girlfriend got her. She went to the table while Danny rushed off into the kitchen; neither of them bothered to turn on the lights. She knew that the cake was going to be chocolate, but she wondered what Dane meant by there being chocolate "in more ways than one." She squirmed in her seat, thinking about it.

The squirming became a little more pronounced at Danny returned, holding a beautifully decorated chocolate cake with a few candles lit on it. Her face was lit because of the fire, dancing across her face, making her look like some glowing phantom. Nicole's breathing sped up as did her heart rate as the ethereal figure approached her, gently singing "Happy Birthday" with soul that Nicole would have never thought possible for such a simple song. A blush spread through out the emerald-eyed birthday girl as her lover leaned down to put the cake on the table, their bodies not quite touching, but they were so close.

"Happy birthday, angel," Dane whispered, leaning down to speak into Nicole's red ear.

The lawyer opened her mouth, wanting to speak, but nothing came out. She turned to stare into loving grey eyes and tried to go in for a kiss, but Dane pulled back. The musician shook a finger at her lover.

"Naughty girl, you have to blow out the candles and make a wish first," Dane reminded the birthday girl. Her breath tickled Nicole's neck and teased her senses.

Nicole blinked and shook her head a little, trying to clear her head. "Right. I've forgotten." She turned her attention to the delicious-looking cake and let loose a short breath-surprised that she had even that much in her-to blow out the candles.

"Good girl," Dane said, kissing Nicole's cheek.

The auburn-haired lawyer turned, wanting to go in for more, but Danny was already busy cutting a slice of cake. Nicole put her hand on Danny's, earning a glance, but nothing more. They cut the cake together. One slice with one fork, for them to share.

"When do I get my birthday gifts?" Nicole asked with a teasing smile before taking a bite of the cake that Dane was offering to her. She made sure to make a show of eating the cake, liking the fact that Danny's attention was stuck on her lips.

"Huh?" Dane blinked. "Oh! I have the first one right here in my pocket."

Nicole snickered a little, happy that she was getting to Danny in the same manner that the former rocker was getting to her. Dane went into the pockets of her slacks, searching for the little box. It was hiding underneath her wallet and she presented it to Nicole with a shy smile and hopeful grey eyes.

Shaky copper-toned hands held the box out that Nicole graciously accepted with a smile. It was perfectly wrapped with plain green and red paper that was left over from Christmas. A deep red bow sat on top of it like a crown, causing a flutter in Nicole's chest. She carefully opened it, not wanting to tear the paper and discovered a black, velvet box waiting for her. Swallowing hard, she slowly opened it and her mouth dropped open when she saw the gift.

"It's beautiful and goes perfectly with the earrings you got me!" Nicole declared, pulling out the bracelet. It was dotted with emeralds and diamonds encased in platinum with a small emerald heart dangling from the center. "Please, put it on for me?" she requested, eyes shining as brightly as her gift.

Danny nodded and took hold of the bracelet. She attached it to her beloved's wrist and then clasped onto Nicole's hand, holding it tightly. Green eyes met grey, witnessing a hurricane of emotions in the stormy depths. This caused Nicole's heart to beat just a little faster.

"Nick, I want you to know that I'm giving you more than just a bracelet. What I'm about to tell you is not to make you feel bad, but for you to understand the lengths I would go for you. I spent every penny I had on this. I would give you everything and all you would have to do is ask. Even if the request seemed outrageous, I would work my ass off until I could make it possible. I want to start a new life with you and live it with you until the end of my days. I've never loved any person, anything, as much as I love you. You are everything to me, you're my life, my world, my heaven," Dane explained and then placed a tender kiss to Nicole's palm.

Nicole's bottom lip trembled and a few tears slid down her cheeks, glistening like the diamonds on her wrist. She leaned down, capturing Danny's mouth in a passionate, loving kiss. Eyes closed, a moan passed between them, and eager hands started reaching for Danny's shirt. For a moment, the younger woman was ready to lose herself to those questing hands.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait," Dane said, pulling away from the powerful embrace. She glanced down to see that Nicole had managed to open all of the buttons. *How the hell did she do that that fast?!*

"What? Why are we stopping?" Nicole inquired, placing her hands on the bare midsection that was before her. Her new bracelet felt cold against Dane's hot skin.

"We'll get to this, but I have other things planned before that. I mean, I know you didn't think I just had cake waiting for you, right?" the musician countered with a cocky half-smile.

"I would never think that's the only trick up your sleeve, honey," Nicole replied with a sly smile.

"Then you sit here and finish your cake. I'm going to run us a nice bath with the works to relax in for a little while, okay?"

Nicole nodded, figuring that there was more coming than just a bath. Dane ran off as best she could while Nicole leaned back, wanting to finish her cake quickly. It was a good cake and she was looking forward to sharing a piece with Danny. *Maybe tomorrow*. She had already taken the day off, so they would have time to recover from tonight and share some cake.

As if on cue, as soon as Nicole was done with her cake, Dane returned. Wordlessly the musician took her lady's hand and led her upstairs to the candlelit bathroom where soft, classical music played and a hot, bubble bath awaited them. Dane slowly undressed Nicole, placing soft kisses to revealed skin as she slid the cloth from Nicole's body. Shivers coursed through the attorney and her eyes fluttered shut. She swallowed a moan with each kiss and caress of loving fingertips.

Nicole silently reached out to return the favor and Dane allowed it since Nicole was the birthday girl...and Dane loved it when Nicole undressed her. Amorous hands brushed the shirt from Dane's shoulders and lingered on the uncovered flesh for long seconds. The adoration drifted to her legs when Nicole rid her of her pants. She stepped away when she was totally naked, smirking at Nicole. The green-eyed woman returned the expression with a smirk of her own.

Dane helped Nicole into the rich bubble bath that was filled with all of her favorite little skin softeners and such. A long sigh escaped the lawyer when she was submerged in the hot water. Before Dane slid in, she reached into one of the cabinets in the bathroom and pulled out a basket. She turned to Nicole and grinned while showing off the treat.

"Chocolate covered strawberries? My god, Danny, you really did put a lot of thought into this," Nicole purred as her girlfriend climbed into the hot bath next to her.

"I want this to be a birthday you remember for the rest of your life," Dane replied.

"That was already a given. It's my first birthday with you," Nicole remarked with a sincere smile.

"Sweet talk, my dear, will get you everywhere," Dane said, plucking a strawberry out of the basket and putting it to her lover's lips.

Nicole bit into the fruit in a way that made Dane moan. The noise only got louder as she watched ruby red juice ooze down the corner of her beloved's mouth. And then a playful pink tongue

darted out to slowly clean up the sticky mess. Dane doubted that she was going to be able to last long if Nicole was going to eat any more strawberries like that.

"These are good. You have to have one," Nicole ordered, taking a berry in her hand and putting it to Danny's lips.

The musician opened wide and took in the whole strawberry. A smile worked its way onto her lips as she chewed slowly, wanting to tease Nicole a little. It worked; the lawyer gulped. As a distraction, they continued feeding each other strawberries, but they knew that they would not be able to finish the entire basket that night.

"I was going to have some champagne for you, but I know how you hate drinking alone," Dane informed the smaller woman. She put the strawberries down when she was certain that Nicole would not want another one.

"It's no fun if you can't do it with me," Nicole replied as she turned her body to lean against Dane.

"Then we'll just have to find other things that we both can do," Dane whispered into a nearby ear, bringing her hands up to massage Nicole's shoulders and back.

A small moan escaped Nicole as powerful, but gentle hands worked out her muscles. Emerald eyes drifted close. "You keep this up and we'll be going to sleep together and that's about it," she warned the younger woman.

"Well, that's no fun. I still have a couple of things planned for your special day before sleep is even an option."

Nicole groaned and turned a little to give Danny better access to a spot that deserved some attention from those gifted hands. She ignored the slight tremble from the left, telling her that Danny's left hand was acting up. She knew that the last thing Danny wanted to hear about was her hand. Besides, if she started talking about Danny's hand, she would then get to the knee, and the leg, and ask how physical therapy was going, which only led Danny into a rant about how evil her therapist was. They did not need that tonight.

"You keep this up and I'm going to think I'm good with my hands," Dane quipped with a light chuckle.

"You are. You are *so* good, sweetheart," Nicole purred.

Dane grinned like a goof, happy that her lover could not see her. The deep mew rumbled against her skin and made her smile more. Usually, she was the one purring because of Nicole. It felt good to be able to cause the sound for once.

"Ready to get out?" Danny asked.

"Very much so. I don't want to fall asleep on you, but we are going to revisit this new talent of yours sometime in the future," the older woman answered with a lazy smile.

"You bet!" It was a promise; Dane wanted to hear more purring out of Nicole.

They both stood up to get out of the tub; the water was getting cold anyway. Grabbing their towels, they wrapped up and Dane started blowing out the candles. Nicole picked up the basket of strawberries.

"I'm going to go put these in the fridge," Nicole said.

"Okay. I'll be in the room," Dane replied.

Nicole nodded and something told her to take her time with her chore. She briefly wondered if she should grab some water or one of those sports drinks that Danny was starting to get fond of. Shaking her head to herself, she turned and started up the stairs, figuring that Danny had everything planned out well. There was no need for her to do anything aside for go with the flow.

Ascending the stairs, she noticed a gentle glow in the dark hallway coming from their bedroom. Swallowing hard in anticipation, she continued on into the room and sighed when she saw what was waiting for her. Red rose petals covered the bed as if it rained flowers in the room earlier. There was a bouquet of roses by the bed too.

"No one is going to believe me when I tell them about this birthday," Nicole muttered and then her next surprise caught her attention.

The light plucking of a guitar string turned her head toward the closet. Dane was standing there with her guitar in hand...and nothing else. She strummed the strings and approached Nicole, but stopped a few feet shy of the lawyer. The playing paused for a moment, allowing Dane to flex and shake her left hand. She then started again, playing softly and then she started to sing.

*"The light in your eyes, show that you're a gem.*

*There's such a priceless, wonderful shine in them.*

*You're a diamond, you're a pearl.*

*You're everything in this world.*

*You're an angel. You're my angel..."*

Dane did not make it passed those words as her lips were halted by Nicole's mouth and plundering tongue. The towel was gone and guitar was yanked away, almost taking Danny's arms with it. Replacing the guitar in Dane's hands were Nicole's hips. Nicole wrapped her arms around Dane's neck, pulling them closer together. Nicole then led Dane to the bed, toppling them both over while daring not to break the connection between their mouths.

Dane was the one that broke the kiss. She peeled her head away to give them just a breath of space. She stared into emerald eyes darkened with passion and smiled. She brought her hand up to caress the side of Nicole's face.

"You're incredible, angel. You're worth everything to me. You are everything to me. I love you so deeply that words will never be enough to express it. Hell, sometimes, I don't even think it can be expressed in this universe because it's just so vast," Dane said.

Tears slid down Nicole's cheeks and a seriously happy smile spread across her face, lighting up her watering eyes. "You're the incredible one. No one's ever done anything like this for me on my birthday. I've never been this romanced before. Damn it, Danny, you wrote me a song!"

"That you didn't let me finish," Dane playfully pointed out. Not that she would have been able to finish the guitar portion of it anyway.

"You can finish it later. Right now, we have more important things to do. I want to love you."

A smart-ass grin spread across the musician's face. "And I want to let you."

Nicole decided to occupy Danny's mouth before she said something even more joking than that. Danny moaned when those soft lips and probing tongue attacked her again. Of course, she accepted her fate and gave herself to the smaller woman on top of her.

The auburn-haired woman spent the night turning Dane inside out, committing every inch of her to memory. And then she let Danny return the favor. By the time it was no longer Nicole's birthday, they were both in a deep sleep. Little did Nicole know, but Dane still had one last trick up herself, which happened to be breakfast in bed that morning...well, afternoon. And making it even better, it was strawberry pancakes.

"Sweetheart, you are too good to me," Nicole commented and this earned her a kiss.

"Chem, I'm just trying to make sure you know how important you are to me and just how special you really are. Now, hurry up and eat before the food gets cold. You're going to need the energy," Dane replied with an adoring, but naughty smile.

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The grin on Nicole's face when she returned to work told just what kind of birthday she had. Mina could not resist teasing her about it while Clara congratulated her-before she even had a chance to tell them what Danny did for her. Lunch could not come fast enough for Nicole and she grabbed her friends, dragging them to the nearest bistro to tell them about everything that her girlfriend did. Sparing only a few steamy details, Nicole made sure her buddies knew just how wonderful her girlfriend was.

"Damn, I wanna date Danny too!" Mina declared by the end of the account. "Do you think she has room for one more?" she asked with a seductive smile.



Nicole rolled her eyes. "You go near my Danny with as much as an impure thought and I'll call all your clients and tell them I do all of your work for you."

"God, they already think you're the superman of lawyers. They'd drop me like a hot brick if they thought I wasn't doing most of the work on their cases and they thought you could fit them in your impossibly busy schedule," Mina said, shaking her head.

"Nicole, I'm happy you finally found someone to treat you right. You make sure you hang onto Danny," Clara ordered.

Nicole only smiled. She was never going to let Danny go, of course. She felt very confident that Danny was never going anywhere ever again either. After such a magical birthday, she figured that they were going to have a "happily ever after."

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The end.

Once again, contact the lunatic at: [starving.lunatic@gmail.com](mailto:starving.lunatic@gmail.com) and lemme know what you think of the story. Thanks for reading.

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