

Vanessa sighed in relief as she brushed a stray lock of short blonde hair away from her eyes and rang the doorbell. The door slowly opened, revealing a sullen looking Stephanie on the other side.

"Sorry I'm late." Vanessa struggled to keep the frustration in her voice down. "I found the visitor's parking lot, but the numbering system here is so bizarre. I've been all over the complex and back trying to find the right building."

"It's okay." Stephanie motioned for her come inside, and as she crossed the threshold Vanessa took in her surroundings.

"Nice condo. I'd say Danny has good taste."

"I suppose."

Vanessa's brow furrowed. "Are you okay? You seem upset about something."

Stephanie silently nodded toward the kitchen, offering her friend a cup of coffee as she pointed to the stools in front of the breakfast bar.

"Stephanie, if you're not feeling well, it's okay. We don't have to go to the mall if you're not up to it."

"I'm okay. We'll leave in a few minutes." She grabbed the carafe and filled a mug for Vanessa. "But first, I want to show you something."

"What's up?"

Stephanie set the steaming mug on the bar and reached for a card resting on the other counter. Her face looked somber as she sat down on the barstool next to Vanessa.

"As you know, Danny went to the office this morning to catch up on paperwork, and he told me to help myself to coffee and cereal whenever I got up."

"Well, that was certainly thoughtful of him." Vanessa picked up her mug and took a sip.

"I suppose." Stephanie's voice sounded uncertain. "After I got up, I discovered that the TV remote wasn't working, so I went to get some fresh batteries. You know how everyone has a junk drawer in their kitchen."

"Uh huh," nodded Vanessa.

"So, while I was searching for the batteries, I came across this. It was stuck in the back of the drawer."

She set the valentine card and its envelope on the breakfast bar. Vanessa raised her eyebrows as she set her coffee mug down.

"So, who's Martha?"

"You're about to find out," said Stephanie as she picked up the card.

"Wait a second." Vanessa's voice was firm. "I can understand how finding a card addressed to your boyfriend from some other woman would upset you, and trust me, if I ever came across a letter addressed to Mike from another woman I'd be mad as hell. But Stephanie, you really shouldn't have opened it."

Stephanie gave her a sharp look. "It was outside of its envelope and stuck to something else. When I removed it all from the drawer, the card fell on the floor. I had no idea it was there, and when I picked it up I noticed it had a note written on the inside."

"So, did you read it?"

"Not intentionally, but at that point, it would have been hard not to." Stephanie's voice was firm but sad. "Danny and I have had an exclusive relationship for some time now. Or at least, I thought we did."

"I understand. So, what did the note say?"

Stephanie opened the card and read it. "*Dear Danny. You know you're still my valentine, and I miss you. So does Brayden, but don't worry. We understand you're still on a time out, and*

*we're okay with it. We just wanted to wish you a happy Valentine's Day, and let you know that we're thinking of you and we can't wait to see you again. Love, Martha."*

Vanessa looked stunned. "Wow. I'm sorry, Stephanie."

"Me too. It was quite a shock."

"I'm sure it was. So, who's Brayden?"

"I have no idea," shrugged Stephanie.

"I wonder if she has a kid."

Stephanie grimaced. "I wondered the same thing. And if Brayden is her son, then who's his father? Danny?"

"Hopefully not. So, was there anything else?"

"Nope, that was it. But now that I've seen it, I feel like I've opened Pandora's box."

"I'm sure you do. Has Danny ever mentioned anything about her before?"

"Maybe...I'm not sure. When we first started dating, he mentioned that he'd recently broken up with someone, but he didn't elaborate."

"I see. And has he ever mentioned anything about having a kid?"

"Nope." Stephanie shook her head as she spoke. "When we first met, I asked him if he had any kids, and he said he didn't."

"Well, in that case, if she has a child, then it probably isn't Danny's. I just hope he hasn't been seeing you on the rebound."

"Me too."

Vanessa wanted to reassure her. "You two have been seeing each other for some time now, haven't you?"

"Yep. For about eight months now."

"Then that's certainly a good sign. So, here's what I think. I think if you were just a rebound fling, or if he were actually on some sort of hiatus from this Martha person, he probably would have ended it with you by now."

"Maybe."

Vanessa looked at her watch. "Well, why don't we head over to the mall, like we planned? That should help you get your mind off things for a little while. And while we're there, we'll find you a hot new outfit. You mentioned something earlier about you and Danny having plans tonight, right?"

"Yeah, we do." Stephanie took Vanessa's mug back into the kitchen. "We were planning on spending the rest of the weekend together. He's taking me to dinner tonight, then tomorrow afternoon we're going to O'Malley's Grill to watch the Rockies game."

"Well, that certainly sounds encouraging." Vanessa hopped off her barstool. "He wouldn't be spending the entire weekend with you if he were still involved with Martha. And besides, Valentine's Day was months ago. She may have just been feeling lonely at the time. I'm sure by now she's moved on and found someone else."

"Hopefully. But it still doesn't explain why Danny's holding onto her card."

"No, it doesn't, and you may want to have a little talk with him. Nothing good ever comes from keeping secrets from one another."