

2 - Night One

Daniel couldn't remember the last time that it took him more than five minutes to get from the front door to his dining room. Probably because he'd never lived somewhere where the kitchen was separate from one, nor a place big enough to take more than a minute to fully traverse.

Had it even been five minutes? Ten? One?

"How...how big is this place?" Daniel struggled to keep the pace with his sister. Every step Rose took was thrice the amount her little and small brother was forced to take.

"It's a little roomy?" Rose looked back long enough to smile, though she didn't stop.

Roomy was an understatement. The amount of money it must have taken just to furnish the hallways was astonishing enough. Where did she find all the wealth for this, assuming it actually was his sister's home?

Squatting? Renting?

Or the alternative,

Stocks? Cryptocurrency?

And as his calves started to ache, the ludicrousness of working a warehouse job on his feet all day somehow got to him. Yet even at that, he may have been standing around a lot, but it was a great deal of standing in place. He labeled the boxes as they reached him, not when he reached *them*.

"Danny? Are you alright?"

In his exhausted train of thought, Daniel barely noticed the gap between them that was starting to expand.

Rose had stopped, looking as energetic as she'd been on her sprint through the front door. Was it her size or her stamina? Both?

And in a panting voice he said, "I'm...fine..." His hands came off his knees and his back was straightened. "I just...needed a second..." And many more with how long he stalled in speaking.

Then when it had become obvious just from looking at him compared to the girth of the corridor, a crease formed in Rose's brow.

As she closed the distance she frowned. “I’m sorry, Danny, I didn’t stop to think that this might be a little bit of a walk for you...”

“What?” He tried to feign ignorance and hide his depleted tanks. “N-no! I’m fine! We’re almost there, right?” Right? Please?

“Well, it’s...” her head looked down the other end. “It’s a little bit more...”

And how much was a little? Relative things like “little” or “big” had completely lost their meaning in a place like this. Big had become small and little had become minute. Nothing but the one word he needed to hear was enough to make his tired leg muscles twinge.

It was a distance, but the problem wasn’t that. It was trying to move so far at such a fast pace! It was the difference of maybe a few minutes, but at least it meant Daniel would arrive with some air still in his lungs.

“Wanna slow down?”

And for once he was honest.

“Please...”

And so the pace was adjusted to comparatively a snail’s. They’d overcompensated and walked even slower than Daniel normally could, precisely because the work exerted on his legs had already been done. The onset of morning soreness was already at play and it meant there was a reduced limit on just how much he could extend himself.

But if mundane work had taught him anything, thinking about the task at hand only made it worse.

“So...you’ve...lived here for a...full...year?” Not good. Now he had the job of balancing wasted breath and speaking and walking?

“Mmhm!” Rose stayed peppy, though her steppies had started to become slightly infrequent. Her mind must have been trying to decide whether to take many tiny steps or just the occasional pause. Neither looked comfortable for her and both siblings seemed to be in an awkward position. Only one of them seemed to be managing, though.

“And actually, I can’t tell you how excited I was when my work told me they were sending me here!” she cupped her cheeks with audible glee from the memory alone, and Daniel by now had his well-placed suspicions.

She continued, “I *really* wish we could’ve gotten something closer to where you live now, but my work wouldn’t let me! Ugh, they said I had to be in the same city as the lab...”

“Lab...?”

“Oh?” her head bobbed back. “I didn’t tell you?”

Even without reading the mini-novella that’d accumulated from her many unread messages in Daniel’s inbox, he had just as much guessing power to figure that she did.

But Rose didn’t wait for an answer.

“Yeah! So when I wrapped up my master’s in biomed, it was *really* scary getting so many offers from so many different places!” she remembered with an inkling of up-played fear and Daniel had no basis to relate. “I never liked getting approached all the time,” she sighed, “really, all I wanted was...” and on she went while Daniel shrunk inside himself.

Leave it to his big sister to enter such a female-dominated field, fresh from the shackles of valedictorian among a class of two-thousand, just to decide that the next stage of life wasn’t a big enough pond either.

No, probably no pond could fit a fish so big. Case and point, her size, her might, and her big–

“--juicy melons! Mmm!” Rose fawned, so caught in her own words that she never noticed Daniel stopped listening. “Really, I can’t wait for you to see everything Naomi’s made! I wasn’t joking when I told you to bring your appetite, by the way!”

The boy blinked. What had she been talking about? “Wh...what?”

“Were you distracted?” she giggled. “Whatever~! I guess it’ll make the surprise even better! And speaking of which...!”

Finally, their long pilgrimage had come to an end. Able to breathe more than pant, Daniel leaned his head inside the spacious, double-doorless entryway. A grand table sat in the middle of a room with towering windows stretching from near-floor to just beneath the ceiling, overlooking a stretch of clearing that could just see the city skyline so very far away.

Much closer to them though was a grand wooden table, polished and primed for the night's festivities. Its size however was one in the same with the mansion's ongoing proportions, meaning Daniel couldn't even see the table top from his lower position.

And yet, even if in a magical and imaginary world he was tall enough to see, he hardly expected to see any table top at all. Undersides of silver platters, bowls and trays, excessive ornaments that served as multi-tiered serving stations were all filled to the brim with fresh glistening, steaming and sometimes chilled varieties of food.

He could see the garnish of greens just beginning to leave their plates and the steam rising from wooden pots and bowls of likely stews and stir fries.

With his eyes transfixed and his mind amiss, he only yelped after he was already ascending. "W-wha-?! Rose! Stop!"

"What?" his sister frowned, with him held against her hip. "I know you can't see it all from down there?"

"Down there" was suddenly feeling like his own little slice of caviar at this point. Low enough where he didn't have to deal with his sister's advances.

"That...that doesn't mean you can just pick me up when you feel like it..." he started to complain, but gave his new horizons a refreshing look.

While the underside looked promising enough, having it all in view was simply astonishing. Maybe a buffet rivalled the quantity of what he was seeing, but surely not the quality.

Intricately organized dishes covered the table. Fried shrimp on beds of rice surrounding a bowl of dark soy sauce; coated pasta with flecks of something that looked like spice and halved cherry tomatoes. A grand bowl of seasoned, salted and marinated chicken mingling with asparagus, carrots, onions and more, all with just their edges beginning to char, ensuring just the right amount of crispness...! And so, so, so much more... More than Daniel's overwhelmed mind could put to words, simply because he lacked so little knowledge of the culinary arts.

He couldn't name a single dish and could simply identify the ingredients. He may not have known what any of them were, or what corner of the world they had come from, but Daniel's stomach was turning all over just to make a mad dash in cleaning its room. All to make more space for all such delicious, magnificent-looking guests...!

“I think somebody likes what they see...!”

Daniel’s face went warm when he realized just how much his sister had been watching his reaction. Trying to wipe the surprise from his face, he did a poor job of tempering his mood.

“It...it looks good, is all...!”

But Rose, at least to Daniel, was never a vocal judge of character. “Right? Doesn’t it!? I made *extra* sure that tonight’s dinner was going to be special!”

And just as Daniel opened his mouth to ask why...

“--Ahp!” his sister hushed him. “For your *birthday*, obviously!”

“Yeah, but, it’s not really that--”

“Says who?” Rose frowned, and also apparently said not the birthday boy himself. “My baby brother only gets *one* twentieth birthday in his *whole* life, and you want me to pretend like it isn’t special?”

While trying to think of a rebuttal, one that wouldn’t be gunned down immediately, Daniel’s mouth warbled. But then a door swung open across the room.

“Oh! Naomi!” his sister called as Daniel jumped for a moment, or rather was simply jostled while he was adjusted against his sister. When was she going to put him down?

Anyway, the other giantess who appeared had gone through a wardrobe change, short now of her lower skirt and white apron. Her headband was gone, and while she certainly looked less the form, the woman’s “maidly” aura hadn’t left.

“It all looks so *good*, Naomi!” Rose beamed and spoke what both siblings had been thinking.

“W-wait,” a surprise stammered from Daniel. “She...the maid...she made *all* of this?”

Everything? A spread of food that dabbled in one form of cultural cuisine to another? A variety so impressive that it looked like a collaborative undertaking from three different restaurants and not just a single person?

“Yes, *Naomi* did,” Rose corrected with a grin. “And also, we don’t call her ‘the maid’. Naomi is just Naomi!”

Naomi...

Why was that suddenly sounding so familiar?

“Would either of you like something to drink?” and like that, Naomi had undone all the work she’d put in to looking like a resident rather than a servant.

“Just water, please? Danny?” she jostled him, “Want something? We have milk or juice?”

“No...uhm...water’s fine for me too...” he muttered with Naomi’s name still on his mind.

“Okay, water for us, please!” Rose started strolling them around the feast as Naomi disappeared.

“Do...”

“Hm?”

“Do I know her? Naomi?” Their first encounter of the night was nothing short of unsettling. Partly because of her indifference, but primarily due to her sheer size and everything that came with it.

“Well, I’d hope so?” Rose frowned, “I’ve known her since high school?”

That Naomi.

Naomi the quiet. Naomi the silent. Naomi the wallflower.

The times he had seen her maybe exceeded the number of fingers he had on both hands, but she definitely wasn’t a common face as Daniel remembered.

Different schools meant different circles and less opportunity and time to meet. As a kid he spoke to her next to none at all. Once, maybe? As if he remembered any of what it was about, though.

But how was she here now? What? Was the plan to be her best friend’s servant for the rest of her life?

An excited noise escaped his sister’s mouth. “I’m so glad we get to celebrate your birthday, though, Daniel! I can’t even remember the last time we got together like this!”

It certainly had been a while, though he couldn't exactly say he was "glad" to be doing any of this just yet. *Different*. That's all it was. Strange. Too many curveballs were coming to find any foothold in any of this. His sister looked like a new person, she lived in a fairytale mansion sitting on the edge of a metropolis with her best friend (former?), now a maid that was even less recognizable.

The second they sat down in a chair, Daniel waited, but nothing came of it.

"Uhm..."

A small jolt ran through him when he felt her hands on his waist. "Huh? What's wrong?" she maneuvered him on her lap, crossing a dangerous line the moment his back was against her...chest.

"Rose, I can sit on my own?" Suddenly it seemed that he was too lenient the moment his feet left the ground. Just as he was trying to slide forward and off her legs her arm draped over his stomach like a safety rail on a rollercoaster ride.

"Oh—did you not want to sit in my lap?" she asked earnestly, and her brother tried to not be bewildered.

Why and in what way would his sister be inclined to think that it was his first preference? A thought to be considered at all?

"No— I just want to sit in a normal chair," he flared a small sense of distress. It had only been thirty minutes at most and Daniel's worst fears and trauma were already being realized once again.

"Mmm..." she made a dissatisfied noise, and even when Daniel got what he wanted, he still didn't. Rather than being let off her lap, not only was he lifted, but directly deposited into an adjacent chair. "Better?"

"...Yeah. Thanks."

Finally in a situation that was actually reasonable since getting here, Daniel could finally take in the view of all the food with pure, simple admiration. Gluttony. It wasn't difficult to make any kind of dish seem appealing; not when he lived on a diet of off-brand cereal and pot-boiled ramen.

Though, thankfully he saw no desserts. While he was certain to appreciate the night's meal, regardless of where he was and who was hosting him, he knew that his prized store-bought cream pops simply would have no competition. Whether it was a diamond hiding in the rough or his poorness protecting his taste buds, Daniel knew what he liked.

Naomi returned with three glasses in hand. Three waters, maybe committing to peer pressure herself.

Despite a table so large and holding so much food, all there was for the night was three souls, one of which being someone substantially smaller than the other two. The area could hold far more than three, yet a small sliver of the chairs were occupied.

On either side of Daniel was one of them. Naomi on his left. Rose on his right.

"Thank you," Daniel watched Naomi move next to his sister who warmly received hers.

Then he looked at his glass.

Up at it.

While he may have gotten his own seat at the table, suddenly the consequences of his actions and being born a small man slapped him square in the face.

Only his eyes and nose saw above the table, and any try to shimmy his chair closer was an exercise in futility. It was an obvious issue though the moment he heard Rose speaking to him.

"Danny, you might not be big enough to sit like—"

"It's fine!" he huffed, "I'm fine." He wasn't, but he could already imagine what she would try and suggest. Naomi didn't comment openly, though Daniel knew he was about to be an attraction. It wasn't graceful, nor was it preferable in a perfect situation. But none of this was perfect. The food sure looked good, but apparently it was guarded by a Herculean trial such as this.

And the moment he drew up his first leg to start sitting on his knees, promptly he was—

"No, no," Naomi's first emotion since meeting her flared in the most miniscule amount, but the disapproval could be heard. "No feet on the cushions," she warned.

“What?” Daniel asked, though he did not stop. “I’m not putting my feet on it, they’re gonna be on the edge... I just need to—”

And yet Naomi was already out of her seat and Daniel was off the chair by no volition of his own.

“I wasn’t gonna put my feet on it!” Daniel groaned suspended in the maid’s arms. “Put me down already!”

“You just did,” Naomi said simply and pointedly.

Just as Daniel was going to fire back, his sister in front of him gave a sympathetic look.

“Danny, Naomi works really hard to keep this house and the furniture clean. If she says not to do that, it’s probably for the best...”

“Then how am I supposed to reach the stupid table?” he frowned. After all the differences in size and being carried once already, he was primed for aggravation. By no means did he ever want Rose carrying him, but she was his sister. The stranger he was being held up by the arms of had no business as a stranger whatsoever!

Unable to even look his captor in the eye, he spoke aloud to the room, already swinging his foot. “Fine, what if I take my shoes off? Then it’ll—”

“No. Feet are still dirty.” Her deadpan sense of reason was immediately getting to him. Would it kill her to just let him finish a sentence?

“Then what am I supposed to do?”

And the situation couldn’t have felt any more bleak the moment Rose’s eyes lit up like the sun. Daniel the foolish had uttered the words to a spell he had no intention of casting. Maybe it was a trap, maybe it was calculated, but all he felt now was nothing short of embarrassment. Holding out her arms, Rose pinched her hands eagerly for the return of her sibling.

“Nn...No! I don’t want to sit in your lap! Can’t...isn’t there something I can sit on? To boost the seat?” Surely in a mansion this big, they had a thick book or *something*?

“Nothing that won’t get the chairs dirty,” Naomi promptly bit down, apparently knowing exactly when to chime in at the worst moments possible. Even Rose was shaking her head.

“I’m sorry, Danny, but this was so last-minute that I didn’t even think about getting you a booster seat? I promise we can look into getting one tomorrow, though?”

“Boos—?” he started, then stopped. A *booster seat*? Suddenly it was the car ride with Jess all over again, only with much more prejudice. “I don’t need a booster seat! Just like...like a book, or something?”

“No.”

God, why did this maid have to be so irritating?!

Rose, the closest opponent sitting next to a fair sense of reason, looked like she was thinking of a solution, yet somehow the servant of the house overpowered her rationale. Supposedly.

And the moment Daniel saw the look of concern on his sister’s face, he knew he’d lost. “Danny, please?”

“No!”

“Would you like to sit in my lap?”

Damnit, Naomi!

“No!” he tried turning his head just to shout at her.

“Danny, but it’s your birthday?” Rose leaned in, “Naomi made *all* this food for us? I know it feels unfair right now, but can’t we just have a nice meal together? Why don’t you want to sit in my lap?”

“Because it’s *embarrassing!*” How could it not be obvious? “I just turned *twenty*, Rose! I don’t sit on other people just to eat my dinner!” Right then he wished that he *did* have the selfishness to call Jess to take him home. This was a mistake. This was stupid!

“I don’t think that it’s embarrassing?” Rose put a hand on her chest, then looked above Daniel’s head. “Naomi, do you?”

“No, not at all. I just want to keep the furniture clean.”

And under Daniel’s pissy breath he muttered, “Yeah, sure...”

Maybe he wanted to be heard, but maybe he also didn't. It certainly didn't help the situation when Naomi followed right up with his comment.

"Yes. I am very sure."

"Daniel?" Rose tried once more, "Are you telling me you're not gonna have any of this food because you can't sit in a chair?"

"No! It's because I have to sit on my sister's lap!"

"I said you could sit--"

"--*ANYONE'S lap!*" Daniel shouted over Naomi. Crap. Maybe he really was making a scene.

"You won't even notice? It lets us hear each other better, anyway?"

"No!"

And another interception from the maid. "You let me carry you, right?"

"That's--!" He bit his tongue with that one. Give her an inch and she takes the entire fucking mile. He spun his head down at all the good food that he was ruining. His stomach was pleading and his cheeks were burning. Both women were telling him not to be so shy, that they wouldn't care what it looked like, and all that was interfering was Daniel's own pride. All he had to do was suck it up just this once. For a situation that his sister just promised to rectify in the future, assuming there ever was another visit back here.

His pits were getting tired of hanging from Naomi's arms and the look of frustration on his face was oscillating between reason and stubbornness.

"Danny? Please? For your birthday? Don't...don't you want mom to hear about tonight?" a smile of hope came over his sister's face.

And his kryptonite had been found. Mom's tears over the phone from last night were like bullets to his heart. It made him upset the way his mom constantly poked him about Rose, and he certainly didn't like Rose using their mom against him. But...maybe he was being ridiculous, and he *did* love his mom. He never fully stopped to think just how important this truly must've been to her. Maybe even Rose? They were trying to fix something that Daniel took a great part in destroying, all for silly reasons like this.

He stared at his sister's thighs hidden away by her slacks. All over childish indignance from not wanting to sit on something like that.

"F...Fine. Fine! Just put me down!"

A switch had been flipped and Rose exclaimed, "Really?!"

"Yes, fine..." For mom. And that was it. One night. One night he'd put up with this. "Can we just eat now, please?" An honest request from both his stomach and troubled mind. Daniel never even got to touch the ground, changing hands from Naomi to his big sister, situating him squarely on her legs. Next she guided him by the shoulders just to keep him as close and from the edge as possible. Right against her cushions.

And again, Rose had draped her arm over his stomach like a safety strap. "Comfy?"

"Please, let's just eat..." He wanted to die of sheer embarrassment, yet the only thing preventing that was the lack of stares, surprisingly. Naomi had swapped to Daniel's former seat and his plate and glass of water were now right next to Rose's.

Just focus on the food... Not how this looks... Not how this feels...

"Okay! Let's eat!" Rose announced, and for once tonight Daniel couldn't have been any happier. "Danny?" he felt her hand on his shoulder. "What looks good? What do you want to eat first?"

He went quiet, still dealing with the shame of his attitude. It was a miracle he hadn't been teased or looked down for it. Had this been his workplace, he'd probably be searching for a new job by now.

Looking blindly, in part because it all seemed so delicious, Daniel pointed at something random. "That one."

"Your wish is my command, birthday boy!" Rose giggled as she partially stood them both to reach.

Begrudgingly, he watched Rose place a generous serving of shrimp and rice onto his plate,

"Anything else? Ou- Naomi? What goes well with this one again?"

Naomi who was already filling her plate looked over, pointing a dish out. "That stew. It has mushrooms so it should pair nicely."

“Naomi’s a *really* good cook, too!” Rose explained as life went on and he still sat chained by his moment’s earlier attitude. Was he really feeling bad? Their nonchalant attitudes had him feeling self-conscious now. “Mmm? Hello? Pouty pants?”

That got him. “I’m not pouting!”

“Mr. Worrywart,” she gingerly corrected, “Nobody’s mad at you, okay? Can I try and figure out what my brother’s been up to for all this time now?”

Daniel looked out at all the food. The kind that could feed him for months, a year, maybe, all assuming food had no expiration date.

But the scents were getting to him, especially now with food right on his plate. It looked mouthwatering...and he could reach his fork and finally dine on something himself. Why had he been getting himself so worked up? And...delaying himself from something as good as *this*?

And as soon as he took his first bite, he was in absolute heaven.

“Wow, Danny! I still can’t get over that!” Rose marveled between bites of food. “Living on your own, working a job...! I’m...I’m so proud of you!”

“Well...” Daniel paused to drink from his large glass of water. Large dinner plates, large bowls, large everything. As expected from such a large sister. The amount of chilled water in the condensation-covered glass he’d been given was easily twice the amount that he normally drank. Maybe Rose was more suited to herself, but Daniel was dealing with exceptionally large portions. He was only on his second serving of a new item and was beginning to slow down.

“Both hands?” Rose reminded for the umpteenth time with the glass of water in his hands. As much as he hated to admit it, the glass was very large. He did need both hands, otherwise a spill with such a hefty amount of water was a dangerous outcome, especially one that wouldn’t only affect himself.

“Use the coaster.” Naomi would also remind him every time he went to set the glass down. It was like they had a silent agreement just to micromanage such subtle things.

Daniel was setting down his fork as he looked around the room.

“So you’ve really been here a whole year?”

Rose hummed a contemplative thought. “Well...excluding a couple expo events and holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving...close to a year?”

“And...” It felt weird talking about someone else in the same room. “Naomi, too?”

“Yes,” Naomi answered while she cut a piece of meat, eating so carefully to avoid any kind of mark on her spotless face. “I’ve also been here for a year.”

“I hired her with the house, actually!”

“So your...friend has been your maid since you got here?”

Both of them shared looks.

“Well...” Rose popped her lips open, “Naomi is my maid, but since we’ve been friends for so long, it really isn’t like a worker’s type of relationship?”

Naomi merely sipped her water. No comment. Apparently she had total faith in Rose’s assumptions.

“Uh-huh...” Daniel nodded, then he noticed another piece of something winding up on his plate. Figuring it as a mistake, he let it slide.

Then another piece of food showed up...and another...and another...until, a whole second full-course meal was right in front of him.

“Rose...?”

“Yeah bud? Oh! More water?”

“No...uhm...” Maybe he could’ve handled one or two bites, but the willpower he would’ve needed to make it happen vanished the instant he lost sight of the end.

“I was getting kind of full, actually.”

Rose was mid-bite of food, but she made a noise of surprise.

“You’re done already?”

He tried to spot the remains of food that had just been built upon by a whole new civilization of chicken, rice and stir fry.

“W-well...I ate a lot, Rose?”

“Mm...” sounds of disagreement were evident, but her words were yet to be used. Then he watched Rose pick up his fork, stabbing a piece of chicken. “Why...don’t we just have another bite, huh? Just a little bit more?”

Just to finish what was originally on his plate? He felt a slight stretch in his stomach. It was full, but not jam-packed. “”

“Fine...just a little more,” he relented, and was so out of it that he let Rose maneuver the fork for him. Just moving made his full stomach cry. But hands down, it was some of the best food he had ever tried. Ever had, eaten and finished. Though, realizing

One painful bite became two, and then he promptly shut his mouth, throwing in the towel.

“C’mon, Daniel? Just a little more?” Rose held the fork in front of him, food and all.

The smell of food was quickly starting to become his enemy.

“Rose...I said I was full a few bites ago...!” he gently leaned forward to push back her arm.

“I know you did, but you don’t want so much of it all to go to waste, do you?”

Obviously not. “No...”

“Here, drink some water, it’ll help,” Rose instructed and down the hatch it went. Maybe it cleared up a tiny room, but now Daniel had the pleasure of working with water weight in his stomach and oncoming food.

It had quickly become a coaxing and reluctant biting match. Daniel would ask to leave and be excused, but there was somehow always “one last bite” he’d need to take. So many last bites later and he had truly hit his max.

“Rose...?” Daniel groaned, rubbing a hand on his slightly expanded stomach. Was that all from tonight? He put a hand against his extruded stomach, wincing at the discomfort just from feeling it. He...he needed to lay down.

“Daniel, *please?*” Rose used the same trick she had for the last fifteen bites. “I promise, just a little more, okay? I know you’re not used to eating much, but it’s important to eat regularly?”

Much? He didn’t eat *much*? Normally, fine, yes, this was true. He may have somehow alluded to that along the way in explaining his daily life, damnit. But cereal and noodles aside, Daniel knew what much looked like, and this was certainly it.

“My stomach hurts, Rose...please!” And in a moment of weakness he looked over at Naomi like she could offer some kind of help, yet she was still slowly cutting into her meals and chewing like she’d barely felt a thing. Then it all clicked.

Big bodies. Big stomachs.

“No...Rose...please!” Daniel pushed the gentle fork back. “I’m full! I feel like I’m gonna vomit if I eat anymore...!”

“Daniel, I’ve seen how you eat at home; this isn’t going to make you vomit.”

“Yes it will!” He had certainly never exploded on account of food before, but there was a first and likely time for anything. Not to mention, it only proved how misconstrued his sister’s memories were to think that food from then equated to what was now. Gargantuan sizes not meant for smaller folk like Daniel.

Since so many tricks had been used tonight, Daniel felt hardly a shred of guilt using this one.

“Please? It’s my birthday, isn’t it? Can we just stop?” Hell, they didn’t have to stop eating, but Daniel sure did. Unless he wanted a new hole inside himself...!

And a small sigh left his sister.

“I guess you *are* the birthday boy...!” Rose rubbed the front of his stomach, but that only made him squirm uncomfortably. Bloated was no other way to describe it.

And in an instant he laid back with relief. “Thank...you...” Relief was gone the moment he rubbed against the two cushions behind him.

“Okay,” Rose decided, “Naomi? Can we move on to dessert?”

Dessert?

“D-dessert? Rose, I can’t...”

His sister made the sound of a wholesome addict without her fix. “What? Dessert, too? Danny, you *can’t*! Naomi made this cake special just for *you*?”

“Yes, for you!” Rose made the mistake of bouncing Daniel on her leg for just a second, making his stomach do violent and painful gymnastics.

And indeed, a cake had been made.

“Ta-da!” Rose cheered from right behind Daniel. “Ahhh! Oh my gosh! Naomi! It looks *amazing*! I only got to see it before it was iced this morning!”

“You suggested the writing?” Naomi mentioned.

“Oh, you’re right! Guess I did do that,” she chuckled.

Daniel meanwhile watched with pure discomfort. Using both hands Naomi set down yet another oversized platter; a cake meant for a party of twenty and not just a meager three. Two candles, a “2” and a “0” were planted in the white frosting with red velvet trim. Ornaments of chocolate sculpted flowers and dandelion heads made from whipped cream spotted the pastry landscape. A single tier alone was near-twice of what he was used to.

“Doesn’t it look *so* yummy?” Rose squeezed Daniel’s shoulders, and he was trying not to gag.

“Can we try it?” Rose excitedly asked her maid the moment the cake was slid right in front of them.

“Shouldn’t we sing, first?”

“Good point!”

“But...Rose...” Daniel went much more quiet, afraid of what his stomach was about to have to endure, “I’m—”

“Naomi? Could you dim the lights?”

And before Daniel knew it, he was staring down the warm glow of his brand-new age.

“Happy birthday to you~! Happy birthday to you~!” Rose couldn’t have sounded happier, and Daniel could swear he was even hearing Naomi sing along as well? Only because of the dip in collective tone. Though, the unhappiest thing in the room was Daniel’s bulging stomach. Quite easily he’d eaten enough for the night and tomorrow combined... The sight of anything was making him feel queasy.

And finally the closing sequence came... “Happy birthday to youuu~! Yaaay! Blow out your candles! Make a wish!”

Rose was already leaning in, beginning to sandwich her overstuffed brother between her oppressive chest and thighs, applying just that much more pressure on his poor war-torn tummy.

Barely even able to suck up a breath, Daniel weakly blew. Not even a gust of wind came out.

“What? Come on, Danny!” his sister playfully teased. Her jostle on his shoulder rocked like an earthquake. “You can do better than that! Come on, how about we do it together? On three! One... Two...!”

And sucking up just a little more, barely with the willpower to continue, Daniel exhaled prematurely, but a strong, energetic gust came from Rose’s mouth, undeniably holding the lion’s share of the extinguishing act.

“Yay!” Rose cheered for Daniel, and he did his best to smile appreciatively, all with a crease in his brow from the discomfort everything was giving him now. He really did just need to lay down...! “I guess since we both blew it out, we *both* get a wish, huh?”

But a brief flash blinded him. Bewildered the moment he came to, he could see Naomi at the other end of the table, phone in hand trained at them both.

“W-wait, pictures?” He looked up at his sister incredulously.

“Well yeah?” she cracked an uncertain smile, not reciprocating the worry. “It’s your *birthday!* A special one, at that! Unless, you don’t think getting to spend it with your big sister counts?”

Maybe it would if Daniel couldn’t stop shuffling uncomfortably.

“It is...but Rose...please, I can’t eat anymore...! Can’t I just have a slice of this tomorrow?” Maybe Rose had her mind on something else, but Daniel sure was ready to cash in on his birthday wish immediately. Get him away from all this food. Now chock-full of it and being forced to see it, smell it and even consume more of it... It had all gone from gold to gagging.

“Danny! You have to have one piece of cake!”

A genuine whine escaped him. “But I can’t...!”

“Just a small one? Please? Naomi was excited making this, you know?”

Then just eat it your damn-self and give a glowing review...! It’s what Daniel wanted to say, but he just wanted out. He kept trying to gently slip himself off, but Rose continually kept sliding him back in. Whether she thought it was escape attempts or just slippery behavior, she didn’t allude to it. Instead, she continued to passively handle him like a fussy child.

And with his back against a wall (against a pair of breasts), Daniel grimaced looking at the sweets that were sure to be his end. It was not only his twentieth, but his final day on this planet. Scratch that; if he couldn’t have the birthday wish of escaping from this unscathed, at least make it so that he’d never be hungry again. Never need an excuse to bring him to such intense levels of discomfort...!

With his stomach slightly reaching over his pants from over-maximum capacity, Daniel in one last-ditch effort tried the one final thing he could.

“Can...can we just share a piece?”

“Share? Of course!”

As fast as he could snap his fingers Rose’s adoration shot through the roof. Of course it made sense. She wanted nothing more than to reconnect with her long-lost little brother. What better sign was there to rekindling the sibling flame than sharing a piece of birthday cake? A piece that he dearly hoped Rose would be responsible for eating every last bit of.

“Naomi, are you going to have a slice too?” Rose asked, hugging Daniel’s sides. Thank god it wasn’t a tight hold, otherwise his glistening birthday cake was certain to have a “personal touch” of something else added on top of it.

“Definitely,” a small smile reached Naomi’s eyes, already nearby with a large knife.

“And Danny, look!”

Daniel in his haze followed Rose’s finger to a chocolate card angled on the top with a dark sauce inscription on it.

Forever my sweet little brother, Danny!

Sweet. Maybe. Not the pastry kind of sweet. God, that had him softly moaning in pain again. Sweet as in the kindness sense. Maybe sweet though. His mind was too amok to process anything.

“Okay, one slice for us!” Rose accepted the plate topped with a dense cube of cake. It came from the corner, veneered on two sides with frosting and the other ends a dark, moist-looking chocolate sponge.

But nothing looked good anymore. It was all just lethal substances at this point.

“Mmmm! Thank you, Naomi!” Rose gently rocked Daniel with a whisper, “she made this all for you, Danny!”

“Th...thank you...” Daniel moaned between trying to choke down whatever was trying to come back up.

“Alright...! Let’s try it!”

Rose was in charge of the fork, severing and securing a piece of the dense birthday treat, bringing it up to Daniel’s mouth.

“Open wide! Come on! Birthday boy’s get to eat first!”

Even in getting to share it was a mistake. Agreeing to any cake at all was a mistake. Surely Naomi would understand, right? The absolute ludicrousness of how full he felt and how much they were trying to stuff inside of him? This wasn’t right. This wasn’t real. Why couldn’t they see how much this was hurting him? “R-Rose...I-”

“Choo-choo!” Rose announced the food’s arrival with a giggle and a bullet train crashed inside Daniel’s mouth.

His mouth closed in a delayed panic, forced to chew down on the moist, delicious chocolate cake. But it was so much more than just chocolate. Too many flavors were going on to write it off as just that.

Banana. Chocolate banana cake.

Nuts. Chocolate banana nut cake?

Red...velvet? Chocolate red velvet banana nut cake?

Maybe more, or maybe less. Daniel couldn't decide. But it was good. So good. So good for that first millisecond of traveling down his throat, just after gingerly spreading itself across his taste buds.

And then it hit. Another rock in his stomach. Another empty cylinder fired in the gun, drawing him one step closer to pure explosion.

“Oops!” A finger swabbed the corner of his lips. Oh, he had frosting on it. He heard his sister's mouth pop from pulling her finger from her mouth. “Mmm! Okay, my turn!”

And so it had been. Naomi ate hers reservedly, though shared in comments with his sister as well. They talked and Daniel barely even listened. But the nightmare returned once Rose held him another bite. *Another.*

“Rose, I can't...! Plea—”

And like Daniel had forgotten how to taste, Rose made sure to make up the reaction for him. Another speeding forkful had reached his mouth before he could even finish a protest. “Mmm! I think somebody's got a little food coma going!”

Surely, his stomach was starting to tear.

Then he felt the gentle pat on his stomach.

“Oh! Danny! You have a food baby!”

What a deliciously horrible birthday dinner.

“Awhh...” Rose rubbed her cheek against Daniel, trapped against her hip, too pained and full to even resist. “My little piggy really did have a lot, huh?” his sister teased and Daniel tried not to scream, lest his strained vocals somehow summon the food from within back out the way it came.

“I told you...!” he groaned, clutching his stomach. “I told you I was full...! Why didn't you listen...?”

They were in the company of themselves now, strolling down the hall. The moment Daniel had been released from his sister's lap, his first few steps were unsteady and sent tremors up to his stomach. His abdomen hurt just from trying not to follow the outward curvature of his stomach.

Her large hand found its way up and down his back. "I'm sorry, Danny... I just wanted to make sure you had a good birthday dinner?"

All he did was groan. "I feel gross... It hurts...!" Rose said they were headed to his room for the night, but would sleep even remotely solve this? Would he even be able to sleep?

"Danny, does it really hurt that bad?" Finally with the consequences of her actions before her, it actually sounded like she was concerned. Past the point of teasing.

"Yes, it does...!" he winced.

"...Okay. Just bear with it a little bit longer, okay?"

Daniel huffed a sigh. A bit longer until what?

Maybe his mind had been read, as his sister soon assured, "Big sis'll do something about it, okay? Let's just get you upstairs..."

Naomi had stayed behind to clean all the leftovers up. He was barely paying attention as they ascended the grand staircase that forked on either side to the top. The walk down the hall even through Rose's grand strides felt painfully slow. Each moan and groan from the boy tearing at the seams was met with a hush or a coo. Not all the verbal encouragement in the world could do a damn thing about how he was feeling, especially from the very girl responsible for why he felt this way.

Yet again, his sister blinded by her own wants and needs; trampling so unapologetically on her brother in the process.

After enough time it was clear Daniel didn't want to talk, namely because of the physical pain. Consequently, Rose had simply swapped to the occasional whisper and soothing comment. All deaf ears were in the audience, however.

"Okay, here we are..."

With the twist of a knob they entered a room. No, an apartment. A studio apartment.

It was the size of one, at least. Had the massive bed been removed, a subpar kitchen be added, the balcony be shrunken to just a metal fence against the doors and his windows shortened into simple portholes rather than expansive stretches, and just maybe Daniel could have thought of this as his home. But even then it was a farce. Even an unfurnished room like this was better than what was at home. No mold, peeling wallpaper, dreary scenery or bed-pounding, never-ending sex blaring through the walls. The floor was probably softer than his bed mattress, even.

Finally beyond his sense of reason, he begged dearly for some kind of release. Hell, cut his stomach open if they had to...! "Rose...please!"

"I know, Danny, I know..." Rose laid him down on the cool covers, sitting on the bedside right next to him. "Let me call Naomi, okay? She'll bring you up something..."

Daniel tried to stay quiet, but his mouth didn't even want to listen anymore, latching onto Rose's gentle strokes on his leg while she held her cellphone to her ear.

"Naomi? Are you there?"

The bed was soft and being on his back with a weight like this was nothing short of a newfound ecstasy. Maybe he was just overreacting; maybe sleep actually could get him through this...!

"Danny's having a tummy ache...I think he did eat too much."

"You *fed* me...!" Daniel moaned while his sister went on.

"Can you please bring him up something soon?" she stole a worried glance down at him. "It looks like it hurts..." The one-sided conversation briefly continued, ending shortly after. "Okay, perfect. Thank you, Naomi!" She hung up.

Daniel rubbed his eyes, clutching his tummy. Somehow the fetal position on the bed was treating him well enough. "What? Is she coming?" With a scalpel, maybe?

"Naomi'll be right up, okay? Just tough it out a little longer... I'm so sorry, Danny; I promise to be more careful, alright?"

"Fine...whatever!" It wasn't even fair to ask questions at this point. As far as he was concerned, this was something tantamount to entrapment. But at least deep down he knew that there would certainly not be a next time. The first thing he was doing tomorrow was calling Jess and getting the hell out of this wonderland made for giants.

“Oh, perfect, Naomi brought your bag up...!”

Daniel looked over at the other end and saw his duffel bag, but only for a moment. Suddenly his sister’s breasts were draped over him as she stretched to grab it from so far away.

“Rose...! Watch it...!” he moaned.

“Watch what?” she cluelessly asked. “Danny, look! Naomi brought your clothes up! What do you say we get your jammies on before she comes, yeah?”

Jammies? Pajamas?

“Then leave...! Give me privacy...!”

And yet he felt his sister’s finger hook on the edge of his jeans. She stopped right there, however. “Danny, I can see how much pain you’re in right now. Please? Let me do it? I...I’m the reason why you’re feeling like this, so it’s only fair that I fix it?”

No! How did that even work? There wasn’t a justification for this! It didn’t undo that fact she made him into an overstuffed balloon!

“It’ll be quick. Promise...”

And the moment Daniel felt her talon sink and tug on his pants, he reflexively kicked her way. But alas, the first kick missed, and the second was promptly grabbed by the foot.

“Danny, I know it’s uncomfy,” she rhythmically traced her thumb on the sole of his captured foot, “but try not to move so much, okay?”

He blinked, with his eyes wide and his cheeks ablaze. Did she think he was playing? Being fussy?

His pants ultimately came off with such little resistance. It was hardly a struggle though with a pained little brother at the helm of a tattered and worn ship. By the difference in their size, Daniel trying to resist right then was none other than fighting a babysitter during a diaper change. His kicks and twists and twirls were nothing more than “squirmy-worminess,” dubbed so by his sister.

“I promise, I don’t see anything?” Rose smiled down on his back, snaking up the underwear between his legs.

Daniel was too mortified for anything right then. Too painful.

“Shh...shh...almost done, okay? Now let’s put on your...” Rose went quiet, and Daniel listened to her thoughtful hum as she rummaged through his bag.

“Danny, where are your PJs?”

“In the bag...” he said the obvious, but apparently not so obvious. “The white shirt?” The medium-sized T-shirt that wore humongously on his small, sometimes extra-small build.

He heard her hand go back in and the article was quickly found. “Just this shirt?” A crease had formed in her brow as she held it out. “You don’t wear anything else?”

And get in the way between him, the sheets and his blankets?

“No. That’s plenty...” And speaking of which, he couldn’t help but notice how soft this bedding actually was. While he liked to think fondly of his spring-loaded bed mattress, it was simply his pride that forced the belief it was enough. It was enough because it had to be. He could not financially afford for it not to be.

“Okay...” Rose reluctantly nodded more to herself than her brother, then carefully rose his upper half.

“Can you stick your arms up for me? Like a superhero?”

Better yet like a poor man plummeting into his own embarrassment and certain death. Where was Naomi already? The shirt came over his head and right then he poked through.

“Okay, you can lay down. Naomi should be here any—”

There was a knock, but before either could approve Naomi had entered anyway. In her hand was a small platter. And...

“No...! Please...!” Daniel immediately turned the other way, catching the sigh of something that made him hurt all over. He flinched the moment he heard the glass touch the nightstand.

“Danny, you don’t have to drink it all? Right, Naomi?”

The tall, large glass of water was surely staring lasers into his back, daring him to put anything else in his stomach. To put this horrible night into even riskier straits.

“Daniel, can you sit up for me?” he heard Naomi say as the edge of his bed depressed even more with a second woman by his side.

“Here, sit up against your pillow...” Rose fussed as she closed in on him, stuffing her pillows right in his face while she fluffed the one behind his head.

And now against his pillow, by his side was a concerned-looking sister and a Naomi who looked the same as she always did.

“Swallow these,” Naomi instructed with a handful of two pills.

Daniel reached out his hand, but Naomi’s went straight over his and directly to his mouth.

“Naomi, I don’t–” he suddenly gulped the moment two dry pills were popped into his mouth.

It was another degree of freedom lost in the moment and an added weight of shame. He wanted to complain, but there wasn’t any physical or mental strength left. The only thing that could arouse motion from him was his throat the moment Naomi tried to bring the water to his lips. Dry or not, those pills went down immediately.

“I swallowed them! I swallowed them!” Daniel was fast to say, though it became almost instant pleading the second Naomi didn’t stop the second he said it the first time. But thankfully his pain must have actually garnered sympathy, because for once he was being listened to.

“Open your mouth,” Naomi instructed once more, and Daniel complied. She was quiet as she inspected his orifice for a moment. “...Okay. good. That will make your tummy feel better soon.”

“What was it?” he asked, hoping for this wonder drug to work soon.

“Feel-good tummy medicine,” Rose jumped in to assure with a smile. “Don’t worry about it, okay? You just need sleep at this point. The medicine should start working soon.” And given Rose wasn’t even the one to get the medicine, all her words amounted to were baseless sisterly assurances. Granted, he didn’t expect to be poisoned by Rose’s best friend.

And for once, despite this all being their fault, Daniel muttered, “thank you...” While he had yet to get any of the relief, the thought alone of subsiding the pain was enough to convince him of gratitude of his own volition.

Thanks for not killing me when you force-fed me bad enough to make me want to vomit on myself!

“Can we get you anything else?” Rose rested her hand on his calf. “If not, we’re both gonna be nearby, okay? My room is just a few doors down, and Naomi works a bit later...”

“Let me sleep...please.” That’s all he wanted now. Peace and quiet, and for this mystery medicine to act fast before his stomach lost whatever remaining strength it had from a miraculous second wind.

Naomi was already standing back up, collecting what was left on the nightstand.

“I’ll be back to check on you later,” Naomi announced.

“--And I will too!” Rose suddenly blurted out. “I’ll come and check on you...but make sure you get some sleep, okay?”

“Mhm...” He just wanted to close his eyes and forget. Forget what he was feeling like. Yet he felt her hand rest on his bare foot, giving it a gentle squeeze.

“I’m sorry you’re feeling so stuffy, Danny... I promise we can do something fun tomorrow, okay?”

His mouth moved for him. “Yeah...” At least his mind was straight enough to have a conviction. A resolve to get the hell out of here first thing in the morning.

But before Rose left, the foot squeeze became a shoulder rub.

“Are...are you mad at me?”

Mad? Probably. Definitely. Maybe that could change if she let him get some sleep and digest this gargantuan amount of food inside his stomach, but that wasn’t until later, and this was now.

“Rose...please...” Daniel turned over in bed, facing the window looking out into the night. “Just let me sleep...!”

“Okay...” the slope in the mattress decompressed and the foam remembered its way back to a perfect shape again. “Goodnight...”

“Night.”

Daniel may not have seen it, but he could hear the gentle, slow turn of the handle to the door, letting the latch fully recede before opening the door for a soundless opening. The same was performed in reverse on the way out. He waited a good long minute or so before rolling back over, nearly expecting there to be an unwanted lingerer, or for some reason his sister or Naomi staying behind.

Empty.

A long sigh of relief left his mouth, physically reminding himself of his aching fullness. The pillow was soft, the mattress was soft, and the comforter was comfy. What he was in couldn't even be called a bed. It was a personal parade float all for himself. An attraction to the rest of the spacious room without a soul to be seen other than himself. It really was his studio apartment again, except so much more lavish.

And before maybe what was the medicine started to work its magic, Daniel noticed across the room a door half-ajar, leading into a dark room. A bathroom, most likely. Unbelievable, too. A room with its own bathroom?

With a sense of drowsiness he closed his eyes, squirming uncomfortably, but finding sleep all the same.

A big mansion, a big room, big bed, big dinner, big maid, big-big sister, big everything. And big, yet hopefully soon shrinking pains in his stomach...

It was still the middle of the night when Daniel woke up.

Tossing.

Turning.

The flaring grunt and whimper-inducing noises and feelings inside of him made it impossible to sleep. Having just been pulled out of a somewhat comforting, dreamless sleep, there was nothing more that he wanted then to just get that pseudo-serenity back...!

His stomach hurt, yes, but it was a new feeling. A pushy, incessant feeling. Like he was backed up. Like he was ready to explode, yet finally could feel a valve for release. A means of doing something about it. And as he quickly lost his groggy state of mind it quickly became clear of what was going on. What he needed.

Grunting uncomfortably, he rolled over to the edge of the cushiony plateau, feeling a sudden and desperate need for the bathroom. As quickly as the food had entered his body, apparently so too was it trying to leave. The urge was so desperate and the panic had set in so quickly that Daniel in all his tunnel-vision neglected to remember how high he was off the floor.

The moment he swung his legs over the edge and dropped down, expecting to touch the floor not more than a foot later. But once his feet had yet to find any floor beneath it in the time his dulled brain had expected, quickly his heart sank and he tumbled onto the floor, falling quite the drop with a resounding thump.

“Ow...” He muttered. Still alive. No bruises, nor broken bones. Just a desperate need to poo.

A bump on his head may have been just what he needed, because finally in a moment of clarity he did make one good connection, and that was the bathroom in his room.

Hurrying over he slipped inside, scurrying across the cold tiles and looked for a light switch. With the moonlight as his friend, he did spot the switch, and yet...

He jumped once, putting an immense burden on his straining bowels. In the air he waved his hand, yet the light switch was out of reach.

“Shit...!” he quietly panicked. Everything about this place was against him! The furniture, the people, the food, and now the light switches too?

He could just barely graze the plastic cover plate shrouding the tiny notch, but just out of reach it would stay. Feeling so desperate and with such little time left, he scrambled over to the toilet, just as weary to find its immense size as well.

“God, can’t one thing please be my size...!” Daniel huffed, worriedly grabbing anything he could find as some kind of stool to leverage himself off of.

After knocking over a metal trash bin with a loud clang, Daniel rolled it over to the front of the toilet, standing it upside down and carefully mounting it, squeezing his sphincter shut with all

this strength the entire way. But alas, he had little time to spare as he could feel himself losing a desperate battle he simply had to win.

With a small grunt he lifted the toilet seat and pushed it back, immediately dropping his underwear to his ankles and sitting on the edge of the seat. It was big. Big enough for... bigger people than himself. A distant memory of potty training as a kid was all that this felt like. His feet reset on the trash bin as an immense sigh left him and it all came out at once.

Like his stomach had deflated and the blockage was cleared, Daniel trembled from sheer exhaustion of wonderful, resounding relief.

Sinking his face into his hands, a weary smile started to grow. "Thank...thank God...!" He chuckled, finally earning himself a victory. It was just to make it to the toilet, but he couldn't have felt more accomplished. An obstacle he had finally overcome...!

Almost a victory...

Even in the partial shroud of darkness, Daniel looked between his legs, down at his underwear...frowning.

Smelling.

It wasn't much, but something was certainly more than nothing. Something that there should be none of.

But he made it? He made it in time? Did...did he really need to go that badly? Why didn't he notice?

Swiveling his head, he leaned out for the toilet paper, but it was just an inch away as he feebly swiped his hand at it.

A partial victory, at best. Needless to say, he'd be needing clean underwear... Shit. Literally. Just his luck...

Then a blinding flash came from the flick of a switch he could not reach.

"Daniel?"

The world went quiet and his body went stiff. Raising his gaze in a rickety fashion, the moonlight that afforded him his vision was no longer needed, now enveloped in the cool glow of a fixture from the ceiling.

His hands trembled in nothing short of complete embarrassment. Sitting on the toilet, stained underwear at his ankles, using a trash can as a footrest, no less, Daniel stared up at the person in the doorway in complete, mortified silence.

Her headband was gone and so was her apron. No black cloth or form-fitting uniform, not even her blocky heels. Bare feet and the slightest sign of bags under her eyes, drowsy from having woken up maybe moments prior. Her snowy hair was slightly disheveled and the nightgown she wore sunk back to herself from the waterfall of bosom it rolled off of.

“Nao...Naomi?”

Shit.