

Danielle knocked on Alma's door. The girls had been bouncing since Thomas had parked the car.

As soon as Alma opened the door, Luz and Poppy accosted her with hugs.

"There's my two favourite girls!"

"Thanks again for watching the girls, Alma. Though I still don't know why we need you to watch them or where we're going."

Thomas smiled innocently, though his eyes widened when Luz opened her mouth, almost bursting with excitement.

Marcus noticed it at the same moment and jumped in before Luz could vocalize her thoughts.

"Hey girls, did your Auntie Alma tell you that we bought ingredients for cookies?"

Both Poppy and Luz lit up, each of them grabbing one of Marcus' hands.

"Come on, Uncle Marcus! Let's go!"

The girls dragged Marcus off with barely a backward glance at Thomas and Danielle.

Danielle slightly narrowed her eyes at Alma. "Is there something I'm missing here?"

"Nope! Not at all! Gotta run and make sure Marcus doesn't destroy the kitchen." She all but slammed the door in Thomas and Danielle's faces, but not quick enough for Danielle to miss the grin that started to split on her face.

"There's something she's not telling me."

Thomas pulled Danielle close, nuzzling his nose against her cheek. "Don't think so much about it. Let's just go and enjoy the you and me time."

Danielle got delightful shivers, as his breath ghosted her face. "You make a very good point. Let's get going."

A short while later, Thomas and Danielle hiked through the woods, hand in hand. It was a brilliant, sunny day with just the right amount of breeze.

Danielle gave him a cheeky grin. "I'll have you know, I'm really fighting the urge to ask, 'are we there yet?'"

He grinned sheepishly. "It's not that much longer. I promise."

“Can’t you just give me a hint?”

“You’ll survive the wait just fine and it will be worth it. Trust me.”

“You know I do. With all my heart.” Danielle glanced around. There was something familiar about the place but she could not place what exactly.

Thomas got even more excited. “Yes! Just right down this way.” He led Danielle down to a small ravine.

It finally clicked for Danielle. “Wait a second! This is where we saved the hawk, isn’t it?”

The grin threatened to break Thomas’s face. “You’re absolutely right!” He clasped her hands in his. “This is where the four of us had our first family experience. It’s here I realized just how well we work together and how we’re all perfect for each other.”

“Thomas...” Danielle started to speak but stopped when he shook his head.

“Let me finish, please. We’ve all meshed so well with each other. It’s like we’ve always been a part of each other’s lives. That’s one of the many reasons I’d like to make it official.” He reached into his pocket, pulling a small jeweller’s box out as he dropped to one knee.

Danielle’s mouth was slightly agape. She had been figuring things were headed this way but she was overwhelmed by just how much thought he had put into it.

Thomas opened the box, gazing up at Danielle with a hopeful expression on his face.

“Danielle Day, would you do me the honour of being my wife?”

Danielle didn’t even register the ring, her eyes trained on Thomas, happy tears brimming on her eyes. “Yes, yes, yes! A million times yes!”

He wasted no time in plucking the ring out of the box as he rose and sliding it onto Danielle’s finger. “You’ve just made me the happiest man in the world!”

She pulled him in for a tight, passionate kiss, which he eagerly responded to in kind.

“By the way, I made sure that the diamond is an ethical diamond from Canada.”

“Of course, you did!” She snuggled close to him. “So, I’m guessing this was why Alma was acting so cagey?”

Thomas laughed, his arms tightening around his future wife. “Yes, thanks to Poppy and Luz. I talked with the girls first to make sure they’d be okay with me asking you.”

“I’m guessing you got their seal of approval?”

“They were ready to chase me out the door and go to Alma’s themselves the same day! It was all I could do to talk them down.”

“My next question is very important and very crucial.”

“What is it?”

“When exactly do we have to pick the girls up?”

“If you’re asking if we secretly planned a sleepover at Alma’s for them... the answer is yes.”

Danielle got a wicked grin on her face. “Then I suggest we get home and make the most out of the empty house.”

“Your wish is my command.”

It was all they could do to not sprint back to the car.

“Luz, why do you keep calling Danielle ‘Poppy’s mom’? Do you have that much trouble remembering her name?” Thomas’s tone was lovingly teasing.

“Um... no... it’s... because...”

Something finally clicked in Danielle’s head. She squatted down to meet Luz’s eyes. “Is it because when you call me ‘Poppy’s mom’, it’s like you’re calling me ‘mom’?”

Luz opened and closed her mouth a few times, at a loss for words for once.

Danielle took Luz’s hands in hers. “It’s okay sweetie. No one is going to be mad at you.”

“Promise?”

“I promise. Cross my heart.”

“Yes. I still love and miss my own mom, I always will. But I love you too.” She looked down at the ground. “If you don’t want me to call you that, it’s okay.”

Danielle placed her finger delicately under Luz’s chin and tilted her head up. “I would be ecstatic if you wanted to call me ‘mom’. You mean every bit as much to me and I love you just as much as I love Poppy.”

Luz's eyes widened. "Really?!" She looked over at her dad. "You wouldn't be mad about it?"

Thomas also squatted down. "Of course not, honey. I only wish you would have talked to us about this sooner."

"Luz, it's okay to be scared. There have been times where I've been scared to talk to your dad about something and him me. As scary as it can be, we still do it because we love each other too much to keep something from the other. Your dad and I are always going to be here for you. You can always talk to us about anything."

Luz flung her arms around the two. "Thank you, Dad... and Mom."

"Thomas, do you have a minute I could talk to you about something?" Poppy looked up at him with her big, blue eyes.

"Of course, Poppita! I always have time for you."

"Well, there was something I wanted to ask you about."

Thomas furrowed his brows but his face was kind. "All right."

"Now that you and my mom are getting married, we're all going to be a family. A real family. To keep calling you Thomas... just seems wrong. I don't want to hurt my dad's feelings, so I think I've come up with a solution. Would it be okay with you if I called you Papi?"

Thomas was stunned for a second before breaking out into a huge grin. "I'm more than just okay with it. It would be my absolute privilege and honour to be your Papi."

Poppy squealed and threw her arms around Thomas's neck, giving him a fierce embrace.

"Thank you...Papi."

He held her tight. "You're welcome, Poppita."