

"Cherie, sweetie, wait up!"

Cherie turned around at the call and stopped.

"Hey Dominic," she said brightly. Her birthday euphoria was still running strong.

The thin man caught up with her and held out something long and thin, wrapped in crepe paper, with a little tag -- simply made of cardboard with a rather crudely drawn shooting star on the front.

"Happy Birthday," Dom said with a grin.

Cherie was taken aback. She hadn't expected anything from any of their new friends.

"Thanks, Dom, but you really didn't-"

"I know, I know. But how could I not give a present to my best babysitter, eh?"

Cherie laughed, and Dom waved the package a little to get her to take it. She could barely make out the Irishman's scrawled, tiny handwriting on the tag. His grin turned sheepish as she glanced at the picture on the front.

"Best I could do," he said with a nervous laugh. "I was never much of an artist."

Cherie unfurled the dark blue crepe -- where had Dom gotten it from? -- and into her hand rolled two long, thin, smooth sticks with simple flowers at the top.

"They're hair chopsticks," Dom said quickly, and Cherie assumed it was in case she didn't get, for she already knew.

"They're wonderful!" She said. "Where did you get them?"

"I, uh, made them, but credit has to go to Kyrano for getting me the sticks, Brains for the sandpaper and Alex for getting me the modelling clay. I know the flowers look a little silly but as I said, I'm not much of an artist."

Cherie let him ramble on before giving him a hug. Dom seemed taken aback.

"They're really, really cool," she assured him, admiring the hardened, varnished flowers on the top. In truth the flowers were actually much better than the drawing. "Thank you so much!" Dominic grinned widely.

"I'm really glad you like them," he said. "Now," he clapped his hands briefly and gave her a wink, "I'm off to tell Josh that he's going to get to see some horsies. And," he added, "that he'll have to give his babysitter a break for the day."

Cherie laughed, and Dominic strode around a corner and out of sight, his own chuckling resounding in the hallway.

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 8/18/2005

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