

"Kat," Scott asked. "Where's Nikki?"

"She was dancing with a very good looking young man," Kat answered. "But I don't know where she is. I can't see her at all."

Scott looked annoyed. "Damn."

Virgil looked at his brother. "I think we should look for her. It's nearly time to leave."

After the song had finished, Jake took Nikki to the bar to buy her another drink. "So what would you like?"

"I-I better not. I'm meant to be celebrating with my friends and I have a feeling that they would be missing me. But thanks for the offer."

Jake received a beer from the bartender. He turned to Nikki and smiled. "So, where are your friends?"

"Now that's a good question." Nikki looked through the crowds of people.

"Do you want me to help you find them?"

"You don't have to."

"It's okay. I want to. We have to make sure that you get back to them safely and in one piece." Jake held his arm out to Nikki to escort her back. They didn't get far before Alan found them.

"There you are. We were wondering where you'd disappeared to."

"I'm sorry Alan. I didn't realise I was out there for that long." Nikki answered. She looked between Alan and Jake who were looking at each other. "Oh, I'm sorry. Alan, this is Jake. Jake, this is my friend Alan." Nikki said pointing to each person.

Alan took Nikki's arm and looking at Jake, said. "Thanks for seeing her safely back." Nikki tried to shake off Alan's arm, but he held her in a tight grip.

"Come on, Nikki," he said. "Scott was wondering where you were."

"Is this Scott your boyfriend?" Jake asked Nikki.

"No, no, I don't have a boyfriend," Nikki replied, wishing that Alan would go away.

"So, buddy," Jake said, looking at Alan, "if Nikki doesn't have a boyfriend, then why the protectiveness? Surely she can decide for herself whether she stays a little longer with me."

Alan looked round to see if he could catch Scott or Virgil's eye, but they were all talking together, heads turned away from him. Alan tried again. "Please Nikki, we have to go back to the others. We will be leaving soon."

Jake looked at Alan. "Say, buddy, why don't you leave the lady alone? Surely one more dance won't be that dreadful."

Nikki looked from Alan to Jake. She didn't quite know what to say or do. She took a few deep breaths and looked between Jake and Alan. She really didn't want to spoil Alan's birthday. Her gaze finally rested on Alan. "Alan, you don't need to protect me. I'm old enough to take care of myself."

Alan slowly let go of Nikki's arm. Nikki turned to face Jake. "I'm sorry, I wish that we weren't going. But if Alan says that we have to go, then we have to go."

Jake looked down at the bottle in his hands. "Yeah, I'm sorry, too. Hey, maybe if you ever come back here or if I ever pick up my butt and go to London, we could meet up again."

"Yeah, sure," Nikki replied. "I enjoyed dancing and talking with you tonight."

"Me too." Jake leaned down and gave Nikki a peck on the cheek. He then disappeared into the crowd.

Nikki turned back to Alan, who was looking at her arm. He finally looked up at her face. "Look, we better get back to Scott."

"I suppose." Nikki began to walk with Alan. "Look, I'm sorry about before."

"It's okay."

Nikki walked back with Alan to join the others.

"I hope you didn't talk too much to your friend." Scott demanded, looking hard at Nikki.

Nikki glared at him. "No I didn't," she retorted, and walked round the table to stand behind Kat. Kat stood up a little unsteadily.

"Hey, careful," Virgil laughed, "or we'll be carrying you out."

"I am quite okay," Kat replied, holding out her hand. "There, see, and steady as a rock."

Brains looked at Kat. "Mm, you don't look too steady at all."

"Well, I am not the only one," Kat responded, "I don't think Scott is all that steady."

Nikki looked over at Scott who was leaning slightly on Virgil. He immediately tried to stand up straight. The group began to laugh.

"Too late, Scott. We caught you already." Brandon put his hand on Scott's shoulder.

"Looks like you can't hold your drink, Scott." Alan teased his brother.

Scott glared at him as everyone once again laughed. He pointed towards Alan. "You're lucky that it's your birthday."

"Well technically, it's not." Virgil stated.

"Hmm," Scott looked like he was planning his brother's downfall. "Nah, I'll leave it until tomorrow. I'll let him have his night."

"Sounds like you'll have to watch your back Alan." Nikki said.

Alan shook his head. "Scott wouldn't do anything me. Especially when I have you lot to protect me." Everyone took a step away from him, much to the amusement of Scott. Alan looked around at everyone. "So much for my friends."

"Aww, poor Alan." Kat tried to hide her laugh behind her hand.

Post by TheWrongTrousers, Nikki-browneyes1, and Tawnyangel22 on 07/10/2004

---