

## Sixteen - First Date

My third week at college has come to an end, and it has been mostly uneventful. Zander has been avoiding me, which is fine by me considering I am avoiding him too. I just can't believe he actually kissed Viv. It makes me wonder what else they might have done which really makes me want to chuck-up and bang my head against the wall. Or Viv's.

Our group date has been arranged for tonight, a er I finish work at seven. I am so nervous for what it will bring. I am just hoping that Zander and Viv aren't going to be too lovey-dovey. My heart and stomach won't take it, and I am planning to enjoy the meal considering I am paying for Rylan and me. I spent some of my precious coins on a new dress for tonight, which has the right mix of sexy yet sweet.

Zander texted me the details yesterday – we are going to a fancy five star restaurant in town. It is more of a third-date-this-is-going-well type of restaurant if you ask me. By text, I mean he literally just sent me the address, so I made sure to let him know how excited I am to be going on my first date with Rylan. He let me on read, not rising to the bait unfortunately.

Last night Roxie came over for dinner as Sofia had male company, so I told her about my arrangement with her brother – reluctantly revealing my feelings for Zander. She has obviously heard and seen a few things considering we are acting like a couple in the honeymoon period, so it is only fair that we let her in on it. Roxie simply laughed and said she doesn't care if I end up sleeping with Rylan, as long as I don't give her any dirty details. As if I would talk about that with her! She is seriously underestimating my awkwardness. Roxie invited me to go clubbing with her tomorrow, but I already have plans to spend the day with Waverly visiting a few art museums she really wants to go to.

Throughout my whole work shift, I am a nervous wreck, anxiously waiting for the moment the clock drags around to seven. When it finally happens, I have embarrassingly messed the orders up more than once and I no longer have any nails, as I unconsciously nibbled them off in my anxiety. I hurry into the stalls and change into my tight black mini dress with lace detailing along the hem. I hastily apply some red lipstick to match my bright coat and touch up my makeup before switching my old sneakers for strappy heels. I take an appreciative glance at my appearance in the old slightly inverted mirror, before John bangs on the door for the third time so I let myself out. His face is priceless as he takes in my long milky legs and curves on display, but I don't give him the chance to get flustered as I rush by him, already seven minutes late for Rylan who is a timing freak. Amanda gives me a judgemental look as I stride past her, flippantly calling out 'bye'. I wouldn't be surprised if she told me she wanted to be a nun. If my skirt is above the knee or I have a cropped shirt on, I can always feel her disapproving gaze on me. She may as well call out 'whore' every time I walk by; it wouldn't be any more obvious.

As I step outside, I shiver in my thin dress, regretting my tendency to dress for style instead of practicality. The once salmon and purple sky has transformed into a vast expanse of jet-black that engulfs the town, and a canopy of luminous stars materialises amongst the ocean of blackness. Some are dull, merely flickering into existence every now and then, but there is an adequate amount of shimmering stars to illuminate the dark, moonless night. We are certainly heading towards winter now. Rylan is leaning against the shop window with his hands deep in his pockets and one foot crossed over the other. He looks really good in slacks and a shirt, with a long black coat thrown over his shoulders.

"Oh there you are, I was wondering how much longer I was going to have to wait." He teases me.

"Sorry Rylan I was just getting changed." I explain as I dawdle over towards him and he stands up straight.

His bronze skin glows under the yellow streetlamp and his brown eyes appear more vivid, like droplets of honey. He is certainly handsome, and his easy grin makes him all the more appealing and charming. I wonder how Zander will look tonight.

"I can tell... You are stunning Nell." He compliments me as his eyes run down my body, making me blush, eyes open wide in awe.

"Thanks Rylan." I chuckle nervously.

"It's the truth Nell. You are beautiful, and I hope Zander sees what I see tonight."

Gah! I never know how to handle compliments!

"Aww you're so sweet! You look very nice yourself." I compliment him back as I hook my arm around his extended one.

"You should feel special – I don't even dress this nice for real dates." He flirts as we make our way down the sidewalk.

"Lucky me!" I giggle. "Ok, so how was your day?" I ask, and our conversation carries on smoothly from there.

Soon enough we arrive outside the establishment, which certainly has an emphasis on fancy. As I gaze in the large shop-front windows, I notice the restaurant is almost full, and the light has a warm yellow tone. I glance around at the busy tables, trying to find Zander and Viv as Rylan holds the door open for me. We are instantly hit by a blast of warm air and a couple of curious eyes glance up at us. There is an old couple eating side by side, one glass of wine each, studiously bent over their meals, and a group of young women in their thirties collapsing into helpless giggles as a smile-less man dining alone looks on and frowns. A family and their teenage children are sat looking bored under one of the large crystal chandeliers, dressed in formal wear fitting in with the tinkling grand piano player in the centre. My heart skips a beat as I notice the beautiful couple seated next to them are no other than Zander and Viv.

Oh Zander... My heart throbs as I take in his crisp white shirt rolled up to his elbows exposing his veiny forearms (drool), and the way the top two buttons are popped undone is just so masculine. He has a stony expression on his face as he drums his fingers on the table and has shrunk low in his seat, and Viv taps away on her android.

"There they are... come on let's go over." Rylan whispers as he spots them too, and we head over without waiting for a waistcoat-wearing waitress.

Zander's expression turns even grimmer as he notices Rylan and me hand in hand strolling over to them. I flash him a smile as his eyes widen on my outfit and turn hard, his nostrils flaring. I internally cheer, glad that the expensive dress has fulfilled its purpose. Rylan pulls out my mahogany chair as Viv finally notices us and squeals out a hello as she laces her hand with Zander's.

"Hey guys it is so good to see you! How cute is this date?" She giggles irritatingly with a shake of her shiny curls.

"Hey. It's good to see you too little lady." Rylan replies with a charming grin.

I am sat on the opposite side of Zander, so if I stretch my legs out just far enough I will brush my heels against his leg.

"Hi Zander." I purr with an innocent flutter of my long lashes as I lean on my elbows further towards him.

"Hello Nell." He replies with pursed lips, an irritated frown pulling at his eyebrows as Rylan casually leans back in his chair and puts his arm around me territorially.

"Finally we can order drinks; I'm so thirsty and hungry!" Viv chuckles as she motions for a waiter to come over and serve us.

I have barely got my coat off let alone had time to check the menu, but what Viv wants, Viv gets. We all order a drink, Rylan and I getting a simple lemonade as we are not old enough to drink, which Viv finds absolutely adorable. Zander stays quite quiet but Viv can talk for the whole of the US, and is annoyingly being sweet and nice to me, taking an interest in what I'm studying and asking about Rylan's life and mine. Why can't she be a bitch 24/7? It would make her so much easier to dislike. Still, I am nowhere near a fan of her, as she keeps Zander's hand clasped tightly in hers on top of the silky tablecloth letting the whole restaurant know that she is his - for the time being anyway.

"I have just got to say Nell... I love your dress, you are so pretty!" She gushes.

"Thank you Viv... you too." I reply with a tight smile.

Sadly, it's true. She has on a tight red PVC dress that dips tauntingly low into her sizeable cleavage, and makes her I-just-got-back-from-an-exotic-holiday-skin glow. It is so annoying! The only fault she has is her eyes are a little far apart, but you only pick up on it if you stare at her for too long. God I sound like such a creep!

As if he sensed my souring mood, Rylan leans over and starts whispering nonsense in my ear, one of the jealousy-inducing tactics we talked about. Feeling his hot breath against my skin makes me squirm and giggle, especially when he starts murmuring about his love of noodles. I feel victorious when Zander shoots us daggers, and Viv carries on unaware, talking about her birthday, which is coming up, and how she wants a Chanel bag.

"Oh aren't you two just adorable? Such couple goals!" She exclaims with a happy smile when she notices us snuggled up together. "Aren't they just so sweet Zander?" She prods making him grimace.

He gets out of answering as the waiter comes back with our drinks and asks if we would like to order our meals. Zander and Viv choose the sirloin steak, Rylan sausage casserole and I have a chicken salad. This is not because I'm a health freak or anything like that, I love meat way too much but the salad is the cheapest item on the menu. Hashtag broke girl.

Our meals come out half an hour later, and Viv keeps the conversation from dropping dead with her bubbly personality. Her voice is like a siren, going on and on and on and on. Zander doesn't offer much to the conversation, only murmuring in agreement and catching my eye a couple of times. Rylan is very mischievous and is always touching and flirting with me, causing Zander to look more and more angry. As soon as his food comes, he rips into his meat, even making Viv notice his almost-violent motions. We all dig in, and my salad is nice - fresh and crisp, but my mouth salivates for a thick slab of juicy steak.

"That was delicious! Did you all enjoy your meals?" Viv asks cheerfully fifteen minutes later.

"Yes it was delicious thank you. How was yours babe?" Rylan asks me as he dabs at his mouth with a napkin.

"It was good thanks." I nod in agreement.

"Well, this has been... lovely but Viv and I have to get going now." Zander declares.

"What do you mean baby? I haven't had dessert yet." Viv pouts.

"I will get you something on the way back to your dorm, ok?" Zander decides as he stands up and starts pulling his jacket on.

"Well we should probably get going too." Rylan suggests as he calls over the posh waiter for the bill, and Viv continues fussing but pulls her coat on anyway.

"Yes we should." I add in hastily, not wanting the night to be over already.

We must look quite comical to all the other diners, hurriedly pulling our coats on and rushing around.

Zander then chucks some crumpled twenty-dollar bills on the table and drags Viv out of the restaurant, barely saying bye.

"Oh, bye guys, see you on Monday!" Viv calls out as she stumbles after Zander. "God, what has gotten into you?" I hear her hiss as I quickly swipe my card to pay the remaining balance, eager to catch up to them.

The machine whirrs as I bounce on my heels, wondering how darn slow it can be! When it finally flashes 'accepted', I thank the guy and pull Rylan along behind me.

"Come on let's catch up to them!" I hiss. "I want to see if they are going home together!"

My curiosity is going to be the death of me one day.

But as we cause a commotion scurrying out of the restaurant mimicking Zander and Viv's previous actions, with Rylan only having one arm in his coat, I notice Zander stop outside under the streetlight causing Viv to bump into him and look up at him in bewilderment. I feel my heart beat uneasily in my chest as Zander peers into the restaurant, who gives in until he notices me, before slamming his lips onto Viv's, eyes closing easily and draws him closer.

I freeze in shock feeling sick to the core as they passionately make out on the other side of the glass to me.

"Come on, let's just go home." Rylan whispers as my lower lip wobbles, putting his arm around me protectively and leading me outside, going the opposite way to them.

**Edited**

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