

## Eighteen - Dating

I moan and wrap myself tighter in the duvet, waves of nausea adding to my misery. My brain feels like it is going to swell beyond the capacity of my skull, and now my dehydration is too obvious to ignore. I am going to have to crawl out of the room on all fours in search of the kitchen, like someone in the desert crawling to their mirage. Again my stomach lurches and gurgles. I definitely had too much to drink last night... I am such a lightweight. Perhaps some painkillers will help. I raise my heavy eyelids half way only for them to fall shut. Suddenly there is a knock on the door making me moan and retreat further into the haven of my blankets, the noise bouncing around in my skull.

I have never gotten drunk before, and if this is what it feels like when you drink to an excess I'm not sure I ever want to drink again!

"Nell? Oh you poor soul, why did you do this to yourself?" Waverly sighs like a disappointed mother. "Come on, sit up. I've got some water, painkillers and toast for you."

"Oh thanks Waverly." I moan as I sneak a hand out the blanket, flopping it around so that she will get the idea and hoist me up.

She does so with a sigh, and my stomach lurches again before settling.

"How did I get home?" I ask, my memories blurry.

"Zander brought you." Waverly hums as she sits on the bed, offering me the glass of water.

"Really?" I ask a little breathlessly as I take a slug of the water and swallow a pill down.

My memories are faint and blurry, but I do remember seeing Zander at the club. I hope I didn't embarrass myself in front of him.

"Yeah you were asleep in his arms... it was pretty sweet actually." She giggles, and I wish I could remember what that felt like.

"Hey how was your evening? You went out for dinner?" I ask as I rub my pulsing temples.

"Yes it was really nice. River is sweet." She comments, and I nod in response. "Do you want me to open the curtains?" She asks.

"No!" I call out dramatically, only just surviving in the dim light as it is.

"Ok." She giggles. "If there's nothing else you need me to do I am going to go grocery shopping."

"You go ahead." I mumble as I nibble on the toast.

"You should take a shower. You stink." She playfully teases me before leaving the room.

I don't get up for another hour, until my head starts to clear a little. I trudge down the hall to the shower feeling quite unwell. Luckily I don't have work today, but I am on the early morning shift tomorrow. I don't remember an assignment due tomorrow as I step under the hot waterfall, but I can barely string a sentence together let alone write an essay right now. I do feel a little worried about my studies as I stand silently under the comforting water, as I have been procrastinating a little and focusing on Zander when I'm not busy with work. I don't think I'm behind yet, but I will be if I'm not careful. I'm starting my fifth week now, so things are only going to get more intense as we start preparing for exams.

Once the water runs cold, I hop out the shower, wrap a towel around me and head to the kitchen. Scrounging around the cupboards I find a carton of chicken soup and heat it up whilst my hair drips down my back. Once the soup is done, I grab a slice of bread and make my way back into my room, still feeling pretty dead. As I collapse into bed and start slurping the soup down I feel a lot better, and as I get dressed into comfies I decide to catch up on the reading and go over my lecture notes.

An hour into being proactive I hear a knock on the front door, and expecting it to be Waverly forgetting her keys again I trudge to the wooden door looking like a member of the dead. Instead, as I pull it open there stands Rylan looking way too handsome and alive considering what we got up to last night.

"Oh... Rylan." I gasp, my cheeks heating up as I am made free and wearing clothes that look one hundred years old.

"Hey Nell... There's no reason to sound so disappointed." He chuckles.

"Oh no I'm not disappointed, just surprised! What happened? Are you ok?" I ask.

"Yes, yes I'm fine - I actually came to see how you were. I'm sorry for ditching you last night... That was a really stupid and immature thing to do. Anything could have happened to you. I realised that as I met with a girl who sadly stunk like she bathed in chlorine. I went back to make sure you were ok but you had already gone, and Zander messaged to say he had already taken you home." Rylan reveals looking guilty.

"Oh don't worry at all; I'm sorry for giving you blue balls." I tease.

"Hey do you want to come in?" I ask as he hangs around awkwardly in the hallway.

"Yeah sure and it's quite alright Nell, I'm sorry if I put you in an awkward position. I don't think clearly when intoxicated." He winces as I shut the door behind him.

"Don't be silly it's perfectly alright. Would you like a drink?" I ask.

"Just some water please. So... have you done the reading and essay for tomorrow yet?" He asks.

"I'm halfway through the reading; I'm putting off the essay." I groan as I fetch him a water bottle.

"Me too. Hey, I don't have anything planned - do you want to study together?" He suggests.

"Ugh yeah sure... although you'll have to excuse my appearance. I'm feeling pretty dead today." I reveal embarrassedly as I untuck my damp blonde hair from behind my ears to hide my atrocious appearance a little.

"You're always stunning Nell." Rylan comments making me blush.

"Thank you... although I don't agree. Anyway, come through to my bedroom and we can see where we have each got to." I suggest before turning and gesturing for him to follow.

He is a good-looking sweetheart, I can't deny that.

The next day...

"Hey Nell!" I look up from my phone to see Roxie standing there with a certain glow about her.

"Oh, hey!" I exclaim with a yawn, exhausted as I have to get up at five thirty this morning.

I am currently waiting outside of my class, having arrived fifteen minutes early as I came straight from work.

"How was your weekend?" She asks, bouncing on her toes so that her sleekly straightened hair shines in the natural light seeping in from the large bay window I am leaning against.

"Fine thanks. I didn't see you yesterday... did you get home alright?" I ask.

"Oh I didn't return home until this morning." She reveals with a cryptic smile.

Oh. Oh. Now I remember where I last saw her... Snogging the pants of my brother, quite literally.

"I see." I murmur, adjusting my bag strap and scratching my head awkwardly.

"I spent the weekend with Isaac!" She suddenly bursts out as if she can't contain herself, making me groan in disgust.

"Eww! That's so gross!" I grimace, but she only laughs care-freely.

Well, she definitely had a good time this weekend, which makes me want to vomit.

"Oh it was anything but..." She sighs dreamily with a sated look in her big brown eyes, which is very disturbing to witness.

Who is this and where has tough-nut Roxanne gone?

"I hope you're not expecting a relationship with him... Isaac is infamous for sleeping with girls once then dumping them." I warn, not wanting Roxanne to be hurt.

"I know." She snaps, her blissful expression suddenly replaced with a defensive one.

"Oh I wasn't trying to..." I stammer.

"I know what you were trying to do Nell, and I'm not stupid. I know it was only two nights, I'm not expecting anything more." She insists, attracting the attention of two boys' nerding out over Harry Potter across from us.

"Ok, sorry I said anything." I reply with a frown, not sure why she seems to have problem with me now.

"Whatever, see you later Nell." She replies with a roll of her eyes before storming off.

Ok... Is it just me or did she turn bipolar real quick? She hasn't caught feelings for Isaac, right? I hope not otherwise she's in store for heartbreak. He can't commit to anything!

Soon enough the lecturer arrives and our students start to fill up the airy corridor. Rylan and I proudly hand our essays in, which we slaved over last night. He ended up staying all day, which was surprising but nice. He is easy company.

"God I feel like my brain is going to explode." I moan as the lesson ends and we pack away our belongings.

"Me too. It's all very interesting." Rylan comments.

"Yeah... I don't know how I'm ever going to pass though!" I fret.

"Don't worry, with me as your study buddy we'll pass with flying colours." Rylan winks.

"True." I reply, knowing he is very intelligent and has a good business brain.

Me on the other hand struggles to find motivation. I just wanna dance.

"Hey do you want to sit with me at lunch today?" I ask as we follow the crowd of loud students out the room.

"Sure." Rylan shrugs with an easy smile and his hands buried in his grey joggers.

"Yay!" I reply as I link my arm with his.

We continue walking along through the college to the lunch hall, and I am aware of many eyes summing us up, probably wanting to see if we are in a relationship or not. People can't seem to mind their own business these days. Still girls wink and give Rylan bedroom eyes, unable to resist his deep chocolate skin and impressive height.

Suddenly a hand reaches out and lightly grabs my arm, causing me to stumble and whip my head around. As Rylan and I stop walking a couple of people behind us moan, but I ignore them, shocked to see Zander stood there sullenly. His eyes flicker to Rylan's and he scowls for a moment before darting back down to mine with a pained expression.

"Can I speak to you please Nell? Privately?" He pleads.

"Whatever you want to say to my girlfriend you can say to me too." Rylan replies with a cocky smirk making Zander's jaw tick and sharpen with anger.

"Girlfriend?" Zander spits, drawing the attention of everyone around us. "Nell is this true?" He asks, his emerald eyes boring into mine helplessly.

How can I refute Rylan's words? That would mean admitting our whole relationship is fake and only to make Zander jealous! He just looks so sad, and dark rings have gathered under his eyes... But he has a girlfriend, so what does it matter if I have a boyfriend?

"Yes it is." I reply, stepping further into Rylan who pulls me into his arms.

Zander's pale skin has a flushed, angry tint to it as he stumbles back slightly, not caring that he nearly bumps into someone.

"Forget it then." He spits before turning and fighting against the line of traffic, storming off.

I wonder what he wants, and I feel a little bad that he feels he isn't able to talk to me. Embarrassment sweeps over me as I notice people pointing, judging and whispering about Rylan and me. Great, now the whole college is going to know!

"We got him so bad! Did you see his face?" Rylan grins, pulling me off down the corridor with him, the opposite way to Zander.

"Yeah... so bad." I murmur, feeling a little numb.

Well at least he is jealous. Now he's got a taste of his own medicine, but I can't help but feel like I've made a terrible mistake, as my heart throbs angrily in my chest.

**Edited**

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