## **Twenty-Four - Kitchen Make Out**

Productive is one word to describe the past week I've had. I have been so busy I have had barely any time to think about Zander. Of course that is a complete lie, as the thought of him is always hovering in the back of my mind like a ghost of despair. But I have been trying to focus on my studies and spending time with Waverly instead.

I have met her friends Nina, who is a voluptuous ginger, and River, who has a straight black bob with a thick fringe framing her cat-like grey eyes. They are both nice girls, and Nina is very talkative and friendly (I feel like I know her whole life story just from one two hour meeting), and River took a little longer to open up, but is very intelligent and studious. Waverly and I have been sitting with them at lunch as I am staying away from Zander.

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He has actually called me a few times, and I have received various text messages asking me to meet with him, but I have steadfastly ignored all of his attempts of contact. Waverly opened the door to him on Tuesday, and luckily, I was working. I cannot face him and I do not want to know what he wants to tell me. Just the thought of him makes my heart throb, and I need to heal.

I don't know how I will ever stop loving him, although I have accepted that he doesn't want me, meaning we are simply not meant to be.

It is Friday night, and I have come out for dinner with Waverly, Nina and River. We decided to just go for a Nando's before going to see a chic flick at our local cinema, which is actually a converted theatre, so it has beautifully painted high ceilings.

"Did you hear that apparently Zander and Viv have broken up?" Nina comments as she digs into her chicken, making me tense.

I have heard rumours, but I am trying not to read into it – it doesn't meant anything. They might still be together, and it doesn't automatically mean that Zander broke up with her for me, however much I wish that was true.

"No, and frankly I don't care, it's just meaningless gossip." River shrugs as she finishes her wrap.

One thing for sure is she is very dierent to a typical girl, hating gossip, and not actually an emo but that way inclined with her thick black eyeliner and punk rock outfit.

"True, but I thought they were cute together." Nina comments making me roll my eyes at my meal.

They are about as cute as a filled diaper.

Waverly reaches under the table to give my hand a comforting squeeze, as I focus on swallowing my tender chicken. I don't want to think about them together, but every waking moment is a painful reminder that I am not his.

We spend another twenty minutes in the restaurant talking about other random things before we ask for the bill, when suddenly I feel my phone vibrating in my jean pocket. Not wanting to be rude but curious as to who it is, I reach for my phone and read the message under the table, as River animatedly talks about perfect numbers, and how there are only three under ten thousand or something. Surprisingly the message is from Owen, asking if Waverly and I want to spend time with him, Isaac and a few others this evening.

"So can you tell me what the first perfect number is Nell?" River asks as if she is my teacher.

"Erm... two?" I guess, looking up from my phone to meet her disapproving frown.

"Nope. It's six, as its three integers add up to equal six." She corrects me, and I nod unsurely in response, wondering what an integer is. "What happened? Why are you on your phone?" She asks.

"Sorry, I wasn't trying to be rude, but I just got a message from my brother asking if I will go over to his tonight, but obviously I'll cancel as I'm with you guys." I explain.

"Your brother as in Isaac or Owen? They are simply dreamy... I would love to meet them properly." Nina sighs.

"Erm Owen, just go up to them and say hello, I'm sure they won't mind." I reply.

"Owen invited you around?" Waverly asks casually, but her eyes dart away from mine and pink rises to her sculpted cheeks.

"Well, me and you."

"Oh ok." Waverly murmurs as she locks eyes with Nina.

They are both silent for a minute before they start talking at the same time.

"Do you actually want to watch the film?" Waverly asks, trying to play it cool, but I can tell she really wants to see Owen instead.

"Can we go to your brother's house?" Nina asks cheekily.

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"I have to admit I have no desire in me to watch a romcom. I would rather choke on my own sick." River announces making me giggle.

"Well... I guess I can ask if we can all go, if that's what you guys really want to do." I say as I scratch my head anxiously, and they all annoyingly agree.

"Yes I don't think any of us are that fussed about the movie, it was just something to do." Waverly shrugs and I have to agree.

I haven't been to my brother's apartment all week out of fear of seeing Zander, and to be honest I'm quite worried about going over now. How can I act normal around him with all of our dirty laundry out in the air? Still... I can't let Zander stop me from seeing my family. What kind of sister would that make me? And my friend's have all outvoted me, so I guess I don't really have a choice.

A er asking Owen if it is ok for all of us to come back, and receiving a positive response, we all start to head over, but my anxiety levels are through the roof. I will just ignore him if he is there... Hopefully he will be out at the gym, or out with... Viv.

We take a brisk ten-minute walk to Owen and Isaac's apartment, and I am really dragging my heels to the front door. As usual, the loud haze of a video game and carefree laughter echoes down the corridor - the boys always have something going on!

"Come on Nell!" Nina giggles as the three girls wait outside the door looking excited, whilst I'm trying to walk as slow as possible.

"Coming!" I exclaim with as much energy as I can muster.

Pu ing out my cheeks, I rap on the door whilst the girls giggle eagerly behind me. Owen opens the door literally seconds later, his eyes skimming over me with a polite smile before settling on Waverly, causing his features to widen happily. Whipped.

"Ah hey guys, come on in. It's a bit crowded but there should be some seats available."

"Oh that's fine Owen... I'm Nina." She giggles flirtily.

"Hi Nina, good to meet you, come on in." He nods as he steps aside.

Nina sashays in first with River rolling her eyes behind her, and I follow them in leaving Waverly and Owen to continue their 'secret' love a air. Steeling my courage I walk into the lounge with my head held high, not surprised to see a load of boys sat around drinking with the odd hot girl. Everyone is just chilling whilst Ethan and Logan battle it out on the PlayStation. Surprisingly there are drinks and snacks out on the brown co ee table, which is odd of my brothers to have thought about.

Roxie is sat in between Isaac's legs whilst he plays with her wildly curly hair and talks to Ethan. They look like a proper couple, although sadly that isn't the case. Roxie explained to me earlier in the week that they are strictly friends with benefits with no feelings involved. However, I am not sure this is true as she is basically living in their apartment now, meaning that there cannot be time for them to be sleeping with anyone else. The reason she was two hours late to work last Sunday was because Isaac 'distracted' her, which is incredibly gross.

Thankfully Viv isn't here, but it feels like my heart jumps in my chest when I lock eyes with Zander. The connection between us is still so strong, and I feel like there is electricity pulling us closer. His green eyes bore into mine and refuse to let me go, but when I nearly trip over Isaac's football mate Chase, I have to look away. Nina takes the seat next to Chase with a flirtatious wave as I steady myself on my feet, and sadly the only chair le is right next to Zander. Ah, what should I do? I don't want to sit next to him - how awkward will that be? But I can't just ignore him and leave a space... Then everyone will know that we have a problem! Deciding just to bite the bullet, I step forward with a deep breath, trying to avoid eye contact with Zander as I slowly sit next to him. I am acutely aware of his presence so tauntingly close to me.

"Hello Nell." He murmurs in a gru voice as if he had just woken up, which is insanely hot.

"Hey." I squeak without looking at him, feeling incredibly awkward on the so grey sofa.

"Hey girl, how's your day been?" Roxie asks with a relaxed smile, raising her eyebrows at Zander and I.

I guess my rigid posture is showing how awkward I feel.

"Good thanks." I nod, shu ling a little to get comfy.

I feel overwhelmed sitting so close to Zander but unable to actually

talk to or touch him. I feel cold and sweaty all over, the meaningless conversations blurring out in my head. Suddenly I feel Zander's pinkie wrap around my own, making me jolt and move closer to Isaac on the other side, placing my hands firmly in my own lap. We had a pitiful amount of contact, yet I feel shaky all over and my little finger is tingling. Why did I think I could do this? He's not mine and he never will be, yet I am still desperate for his love. It's actually torture to be so close to him, feeling his bodily heat and having his rich pine cologne wrap around my senses.

Abruptly I stand up and scurry into the kitchen, which is just around the corner, mumbling that I am going to get a drink on the way. Tears burn in my eyes and I'm desperate not to let them fall as I lean forwards onto the granite counter. Taking in a few deep breaths, a couple drops of sadness drip down my cheeks, but I refuse to actually cry. I feel like sneaking home... I doubt anyone will actually miss me. I'm just not strong enough to be in the same room with Zander.

Suddenly someone clears their throat behind me, causing me to freeze and sni , hurriedly wiping the evidence of my sadness away. I turn around, feeling my heart fall out of my chest when I see it is Zander standing glumly in the entrance, with his hands shoved deep in his pockets. I quickly turn away from him and keep my eyes squeezed shut, not wanting to show him how weak he frustratingly makes me.

"Nell..." He whispers in a tortured voice, coming up close behind me and pulling me back into his chest. "I'm so sorry... for everything. I don't want to fight this anymore." He murmurs, and in a moment of weakness, I let my head fall back onto his chest, his words sounding like a dream.

He turns me around with my eyes still tightly shut, kissing my tears away and just at the edge of my trembling lips. His loving actions are all too much for my foolish heart, which is at war with my brain, fighting over whether to give in and let him love me, or to put up a fight, knowing how much pain we have put each other through. Can you ever truly mend the past with the future? And what about my brothers?

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"I'm so sorry... Nell I love you, it's always been you. I was trying to get over you with Viv, but she doesn't compare in anyway. It is completely over between her and me as I've realised the truth... I just can't live without you." He murmurs as he squeezes my hands, and my eyes flutter open, flicking away the dewdrops in my lashes with the action.

"Zander... we can't... You were right... it's not going to work. Isaac and Owen are going to hate you, and then you'll lose Kai and Ethan as well and I just don't want you to end up hating me for ruining your life." I ramble emotionally.

"Nell I could never feel anything but love for you... And we'll make it work. I love you, and I'm not going to stop fighting for you." He promises as he brushes some of my blonde hair out the way.

"But... But we've hurt each other so much. I don't want to get hurt again." I mumble, trying to express all of my vulnerabilities.

"I will try my hardest not to hurt you. Nell I love you so much, and I'll sacrifice anything to be with you. Tell me you still love me... Please." Zander begs, his emerald eyes looking so scared and lost.

I sni le feeling undecided. Of course I still love him, I'm sure I always will, but I know it's better not to have him at all then to have him and then lose him.

"I love you so much..." He murmurs as he leans down to kiss my le cheek.

"I love your sunshine smile." He utters as he moves to kiss my other cheek.

"Your radiant hair." He whispers with a ghostly touch to my forehead.

"Loving personality." He kisses my nose so ly.

"And I love you because you make my heart smile, and whenever I'm with you all the badness disappears. You are my sun, and I can't live life without you Nell. I just can't. I will love you for the rest of my life, if you'll let me." He proclaims, his eyes staring into mine passionately and ringing truth with his words.

"Oh Zander..." I gasp, feeling choked. at Please don't let this be a dream... Please.

"Shh... it's ok Nelly." He murmurs with a crooked smile before leaning in closer.

His eyes are gazing into mine like he is looking far beyond my hair and makeup. I stand and stare back at his radiant green eyes that glimmer like the stars in the sky. He looks at my lips, and I know what he's about to do. My hands get sweaty and shaky, and I can hear my heartbeat thumping in my ears like a drum. Although his eyes are so , I notice the feeling behind them, as if he is longing for something. He touches his forehead to mine, and I feel a warmth, one that I've never experienced before. It fills my body from head to toe, invigorating me and filling me with a passion and hope that is

powerful. He pushes closer to me, and with gentle love, his lips meet mine. My eyes fall closed, and all I can feel is him. His warmth, his touch, his being.

So but passionate, he presses his lips more firmly into mine. The world around us slows and my heart flutters, as I reach up to pull him as close as can be to me, and he curls his arms around my waist bringing me flat against his muscled body. I kiss back, cherishing the moment and Zander. I get lost in the kiss as electricity shoots from his lips into mine, making me feel alive and warm down to the tips of my toes. As his tongue peeks out to stroke at my lower lip, I moan lightly in satisfaction, but when he grabs the back of my head and pulls me impossibly closer, my hazy mind starts to wonder how he became so good at this, which leads me down a very dark path.

"Mmm wait!" I exclaim as I pull back from his kiss, both of our chests rising and falling rapidly.

His lips are swollen and cheeks pink, and he looks so ethereally handsome there is nothing I'd rather do then make out with him some more, but the thought of Viv and any other girl he's been with makes me want to predominantly throw him (and them) o a bridge.

"Have you slept with Viv?" I ask through laboured breaths. "What?" I snap as he begins to chuckle.

Tears well in my eyes as I wonder if he's going to tell me of course he's been with her and many others. What did I expect?

"No Nell wait, let me speak." He rushes out as I start to turn away from him.

"Nell... I haven't slept... with anyone. I've kissed... three girls, which I'm not proud of, but I've never done anything more. I would never have been able to bring myself to do it, as your face always flashes in my mind, even when I would try to settle for someone else." He reveals awkwardly.

"Really?" I ask breathlessly, feeling euphoric.

"I promise you." He assures me, and that is all that it takes for me to jump into his arms and pull him into another demanding kiss.

We are united together, my plump, velvety lips compelling against his slimmer, warm ones, dancing a passionate tango and bonding together. It's so hot, and I feel a fire start with me, as with a groan he li s me and places me on the kitchen counter behind, and I pull him in closer with my legs. I raise my le hand to trail down the smooth le side of his face as he angles my own and our tongues explore each other's mouths, mine shyly at first. I am just getting used to the surprisingly hot sensation when a sudden voice behind us makes us jump apart like kids with their hands in the cookie jar.

with deer's-in-the-headlight expressions, still wrapped intimately	
together on the counter.	a
"Oh crap." Zander murmurs.	a

Oh crap indeed...

I hope you enjoy this chapter guys! There is only one more and an epilogue le now! xoxo

Edited

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