

## Six - Friend Date

Currently I have a free period, and I've decided to use my time wisely by studying in the library. There is row after row of neatly lined up books with their spines facing outward, and around twenty tables for people to read or study at. There is a kind of muted stillness inside, and it isn't very busy apart from a couple of tutors teaching quietly and a girl with her earphones in clacking away at one of the computers, probably searching for the location of the books she needs. The coarse, cheap carpet on the floor should have been replaced years ago, and the off-white walls are bland apart from a few posters about bullying, tutoring, and a book club. Suddenly the swinging doors squeak open causing a horrendous amount of noise, and making the bitchy librarian frown. She is very precious about her library. I heard her scold a boy for breathing 'too loud' yesterday.

Looking up I do a double take as I notice Zander heading in with a pleasant smile, always looking so approachable and friendly. Why is he so freaking gorgeous? His black hair is messily scraped back in an 'I-just-rolled-out-of-bed' kind of way, and his eyes are as bright as gems radiating warmth. He is wearing a desirable leather jacket, which I cannot help but swoon at, and actually have to check my mouth to make sure I haven't drooled. He is every girl's dream guy, inside and out. I even notice the librarian - the cantankerous Miss Lucas - perk up as he enters and flashes her a heart-stopping smile.

His eyes glaze over the library until he notices me unceremoniously staring at him, pen poised in the air and eyes open wide in wonder. His lips crack into a genuine smile as he makes his way over to me, making my heart soar.

"Hey is this seat taken?" He asks as he looms above me, never failing to impress with his height.

"Erm n-no." I murmur, welcoming him to sit next to me although hating my rosy cheeks - a symptom I always get when he is near.

He takes his backpack off his back and fiddles around in it, pulling out a couple of sizable books. I try to act natural and focus on the words in front of me, but they are all blurred out and I am trying not to scream aloud at the fact he is so close to me. I am hyperaware of his every movement, and am glad to see his awkwardness from yesterday seems to have been forgotten about.

"So how is college going?" He asks quietly when he is all set up.

Like me, it looks like he is having trouble focusing.

"Yes... ok. I think so anyway." I reply as I tuck my now curled blonde hair behind my ear.

"Are you sure? I'm always here if you need to talk to anyone." He insists causing a smile to curl at my lips.

Ah, he is just so sweet and genuine! If he weren't so darn perfect then maybe I wouldn't be so in love with him. Remembering that he isn't mine and probably never will be is like a bullet to the chest. If only he would view me as more than just his best friend's little sister.

"Thank you Zander, I'll bear that in mind. And how is your course going?" I ask.

"Yes fine, there's quite a lot of work but I'm keeping up. It's crazy to think that I'll be qualified soon, and will have to find a good job to pay my mountain of debt off." He chuckles, referring to his architecture degree.

"I'm sure you'll be designing world-famous houses, bridges and whatever you want soon." I smile, and for a moment I am pulled into his electric green eyes, when a haughty voice clears above us.

"You know this is a library not a coffee shop. You should be able to show this place some respect at your age, as well as your fellow students who are trying to study in the peace of the library. Be quiet or get out." Miss Lucas snaps, her glasses slipping to the end of her pointy nose and eyes glaring at us hatefully.

I raise my eyebrows and try not to make a sassy remark at her saltiness and probable jealousy that Zander is talking to me and not her.

"Oh I'm sorry Miss Lucas, it won't happen again." Zander apologises with a sheepish smile.

"I should hope not!" She exclaims sternly with her arms crossed over her chest.

As she walks away, I share a glance with Zander and whisper: "We weren't even talking that loud!"

"I know... She just loves her library; I think it's like a child to her." Zander shrugs in a low gravelly voice, causing shivers to run down my spine.

"I am not going to ask you again!" She suddenly snaps with an outraged glare, making more noise than we ever were.

"Hey do you want to go get a drink? I get the feeling we are not welcome here." Zander chuckles.

"Erm yeah sure." I exclaim, immediately cringing at my squeaky voice.

Did Zander just ask me out on a date?

We hurriedly pack our books away under the watchful eye of Miss Lucas who stands there grumbling to herself. If she has a husband, I feel sorry for him having to put up with the likes of her! As we walk out I can't resist giving Miss Lucas a cheeky wink and mock wave causing her to gasp and go red in the face, but before steam explodes from her ears, I hurry outside and the door swings shut, serving as a necessary barrier.

"She might not let us in again! Sorry for distracting you and getting you into trouble Nell." Zander apologises as he scratches his neck, a cute nervous habit he has.

"Oh don't worry; you certainly livened up my afternoon!" I giggle.

I feel like I am dreaming, walking next to Zander on our way to a little coffee date. Can I call it that though? He didn't confirm or deny that it was a date... We settle on going to a local coffee shop (luckily not Ruby's as I would feel awkward being served by a colleague), which is just around the corner, and I love the way conversation flows so easily between us. It's like we're just meant to be...

"Hey blonde! Come over here baby, I'll show you a real good time." A guy smoking by the bus stop calls out making me feel mildly sick as he and his friend practically eye rape me.

"Just ignore them Nell, they won't touch you." Zander promises as he flips the guys off and pulls me in closer to him, slinging his arm possessively around my small shoulders.

Cue internal fainting and heart melting.

I stumble a little as suddenly I am pressed against his side, his cologne doing things to my poor teenage heart, and warmth from his body causing goose bumps to appear on mine. We are exactly the right height for each other, and I have never felt as safe as I do now, being held close to him. Then suddenly I remember Viv who clings to him like a limpet, causing my bashful blush to fade away quickly.

"What would Viv say if she saw us?" I ask sourly.

"She wouldn't be happy but I don't care. I can't stand the girl." Zander insists without missing a beat, and I duck my head as a victorious smile stretches onto my so pink lips.

I relax into him further with his words, feeling blissful and free snuggled with him as if I'm his girlfriend. We arrive at the café shortly after, and he holds the door open for me of course. Inside the café looks like a renovated church, light and airy with ghostly echoes and tall renaissance painted ceilings. It is quite busy inside with a group of young mothers, a loved up couple and a few lone businessmen drinking cups of coffee. A tired-looking barista is ready to greet us at the till, hair scraped back and a pleasant smile upon her face.

"Hello, welcome to Café Grace. What can I get you two?" She asks kindly as I survey the array of cakes, the apple Danish and chocolate slice calling out for my attention.

"I'll have an espresso please, and a cinnamon roll." Zander asks before turning to me. "What do you want Nell?"

"Erm, I'll have a hot chocolate with cream and marshmallows, and... hmm, an apple Danish please." I request with a smile.

"Of course, your order will be right up. You two are so cute, you remind me of my husband and I when we first started dating." The woman with 'Clara' on her name badge winks, causing Zander and I to blush.

"Oh no, we aren't..." I begin but Clara has already moved on to make our drinks.

Zander and I stand there awkwardly for a moment before he lets out a low chuckle calming the embarrassing atmosphere.

"I'll pay today." He says.

"Oh no, I can't let you do that. I can pay."

"Oh no, I insist. I invited you, so it's my treat. You can pay for us next time." He shrugs, but my heartbeat pounds in my chest.

"You want to go out just the two of us again?" I ask, unable to keep the smile from my face.

"Of course, you're one of my oldest friends." He replies surely, causing my heart to drop.

"Oh yeah... right, of course." I chuckle half-heartedly, turning away from him to hide the hurt in my eyes.

'Of course he only views me as a friend, think bitterly. What did I expect? Carla is now at the counter with our drinks, and obviously overheard our little exchange as she gives me a pitiful look that makes me burn an even darker shade of red. I avert my eyes from hers as she rings up the total and Zander swipes his card before I can stop him. I pray to God that he didn't see my crestfallen expression - I don't want him knowing how much I like him, considering it will never enter into any fruition and will only make things awkward. I take the white plastic tray and we head over to a little table in the window, which is very cute and has a single red rose in a vase, but the atmosphere is tense and awkward between us. We make small talk on the weather and Zander leads the conversation whilst I murmur in agreement. The drink is sweet and delicious, but I only manage to pick at my cake half-heartedly. The guy you like basically friend zoning you could diminish any girl's appetite. Once we have done and I feel like I can't stand the unspoken between us anymore, he orders to walk me back to my dorm. He asks me what is wrong, but I flash him a toothy fake smile under the pretence that everything is fine. It hurts to be so close to him yet to feel so far away.

We arrive quickly as we walk briskly, and I am eager to leave him and wallow in the reality of my life. The elevator ride is so awkward, and we stand still side by side like strangers making me wish he had just let me in the lobby.

"Thank you for coming with me Nell. I had a really nice time, I hope you did too." He murmurs as we arrive outside my door, with his hands buried deep in his pockets.

"Oh yeah it was great, next time it's on me!" I exclaim, although my voice sounds a little hoarse.

Stilling herself forward, placing his hands on my shoulders and kissing me on the forehead as always, however he lingers for longer than usual, making my eyes flutter shut and my skin tingle. As he pulls back, he stays close to me with his arms on my shoulders rubbing my bare skin. Well, this is new. It feels really intimate as our eyes bore into each other, green on blue.

"You know Nell, if you weren't..." Zander begins in a hushed tone, when suddenly the door flies open causing us to jump apart.

"Hey why are you lingering out...? Oh hello, sorry go back to whatever you were doing!" Waverly squeaks as realisation dawns on her, but the moment is already ruined.

"Oh no it's ok Waverly... I, I was just leaving." Zander reveals awkwardly.

No! What the hell was he going to say?

"Oh, ok. Bye Zander." I sigh as I swallow the lump in my throat.

"Bye both of you." He waves before turning and striding back out of the corridor without a glance back.

"Oh my gosh I'm so sorry! Were you having a moment? You were weren't you, and I completely ruined it! Oh I'm so sorry Nell." Waverly apologises reverently as I lean against the door with a sigh.

"It's fine, don't worry about it. I doubt anything would have happened anyway." I shrug, although Zander's words keep plaguing my mind.

What was he going to say?

Edited

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