

THE QUARRY

Eva Lo

Please Leave a Message

Hey, this is Oliver. I'm not here right now but leave a message and I'll get back to you.

BEEP

Guess what? The product launch went really well last night. Vivian was really happy with it. Isn't that great? Love you.

Jazz gripped her earpiece, making sure that those connected could hear her voice. 'Five, four, three, two, one, go.'

She bit her lip as the lights dimmed. This second always seemed to drag. There were so many things that could go wrong at this crucial point; the performers weren't in place, the lights wouldn't work. She's dealt with these issues before but it's better if she doesn't have to.

She's rewarded as a hush fell over the crowd. Soft lighting slowly lit up the stage and the silhouettes of the six dancers on stage entranced the audience. Their movements were smooth, flowing from pointed toes to stretched arms, the dance choreographed to fit the 'graceful' requirement of the brief. She counted the seconds until they pulled off the cloth covering the pedestal in the middle of the stage, smiling when their timing was precise. There sat a new line of perfume.

She relaxed. She'd helped start the product launch. Now it was up to the company to sell it. As an event manager, her part of the job was done.

'They liked that.' Kelly, her best friend and co-worker, came sauntering in. 'I didn't think, with Oliver gone, you'd be able to do it. Glad I didn't bet on it. Maybe the rumour was true.'

'What rumour?'

'That Vivian likes your work. And that she might be getting promoted soon.'

Jazz blinked. Their boss only made backhanded compliments, not direct ones. 'You think she would?'

‘Only if you keep up this standard.’ Vivian said as she passed behind them, making them jump.

There was a pause as the friends glanced at each other. Kelly buried her face into her shoulder to muffle her laughter as Jazz bit her fist to stop herself from squealing in excitement.

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BEEP

Sorry if I sound funny. I’m not feeling well. I guess...I wanted to say I miss you. I wish you were here.

As Oliver reached for another tissue, he cursed his love for the medieval period that had brought him to Wales. He sneezed violently before huddling further into the blanket wrapped around him. He glared at his window where rain spattered against the glass. His ears were filled with the soft hum from his heater, the dullness sending him into a stupor.

Back home, whenever he or Jazz got sick, they’d huddle together in front of the telly and watch trashy movie sequels. He’d tried one earlier but turned it off ten minutes in, reminding him that his girlfriend was halfway across the world. It simply made his heart ache, as well as his head.

Oliver could hear her response. She’d tease him about being a secret poet. She would say he was suffering from man flu, and she’d argue back when he pointed out that she was just as bad when she was sick.

The doorbell rang and he stumbled to the door, wondering who it could be. He’d only been here a week and hadn’t really made any friends yet.

Natalie, his fellow intern, stood there. ‘You sounded terrible yesterday so I brought you this.’ She held up a small pot. ‘It’s chicken soup, my mum’s old recipe.’

Oliver stared at the pot. She shook it lightly. ‘Can I come in?’

Chicken soup wasn’t trashy movie sequels but perhaps it would do. He stepped aside to let her in.

Hey, this is Oliver. I’m not here right now but leave a message and I’ll get back to you.

BEEP

Why do people think roses are such a great gift idea?

Jazz looked at some daisies as she waited for the florist, Peter, to finish with his current customer. She tried not to breathe in too deeply. While a bouquet of flowers could smell nice, she found that a whole shop was overwhelming.

‘And what event are you planning today, Jasmine?’

‘It’s a dinner-trivia night between several publishing houses.’

‘And you need table pieces, of course.’ He nodded. ‘What’s the theme?’

‘I’m thinking sunrise. Something light. I was thinking some daisies as part of the pieces. What do you think?’ She valued his opinion; she had been coming to him for flowers for years.

They debated for a while until they had agreed on a setting. As she filled in the paper work he looked at her curiously. ‘How are things between you and Oliver?’

She smiled. ‘Fine. He’s still struggling to settle in but work’s keeping him busy.’

‘But how are you?’

‘I’m good. I miss him sometimes, but that’s natural.’ Jazz paused in her writing. ‘What’s with the questions?’

‘I’m just worried. I’ve been in a long distance relationship before Jasmine. I thought I could handle it.’ Peter ran a hand through his hair. ‘It ended three months in.’

She crossed her arms. ‘Well, Oliver and I are different.’

‘Of course, of course.’

She frowned at him and the rest of the order form was filled out in thick silence. As she turned to leave, Peter called for her to wait. ‘If you ever need to talk, well, just call.’ He handed her a white rose.

Jazz walked out of the store, slowly twirling the flower in her hands. She’d never liked roses; people tended to like their smell but she always found it too pungent. She tried to think of what was next on the agenda but the scent seemed to be infecting her nose. It was why her eyes were watering, not because of Peter’s words. She took a deep breath, swiped at her eyes and at the next bin, threw out the flower, hopefully throwing out any doubt with it.

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BEEP

This site is amazing! Not just the ruins but surrounding countryside. You would love it. Wish you were here. Missing you.

Oliver admired the view as he waited for the site's head archaeologist to give him instructions, fiddling with his watch as he stood there. The flowing hillsides and green fields were dotted with old sandstone buildings. It was the sort of picturesque scene that Jazz loved.

'Could you hold the watch still?' Nat's voice broke his reverie. Her head was tilted as she tried to read the time.

He covered the face for a moment, suddenly reluctant to let her see it. It had been a gift from Jazz, before he had left. He gritted his teeth and made himself hold out his wrist.

'Oliver? Are you alright?'

He forced a smile at Nat. She squeezed his hand in comfort, eyes filled with concern.

'I'm fine. Really.' He looked up and saw the archaeologist coming back. 'Time to get to work.' He stepped away, determined not to focus on Jazz anymore.

Hey, this is Oliver. I'm not here right now but leave a message and I'll get back to you.

BEEP

Horrible day at work. Call me when you get this. Love you.

She was not hiding.

The fact that she was sitting in a toilet cubicle without actually using the toilet did not mean she was hiding. Sure, it was embarrassing that she'd forgotten the meeting with the client but everyone made mistakes. The fact that it had never happened before meant it was bound to happen sooner or later.

She was angry at herself for forgetting. She'd been brooding over what Oliver was doing and had lost track of time. She slapped herself on the cheeks. Right, she just needed to focus again.

Jazz went back to her desk, determined to make up for her earlier mistake. As she sat down, she glanced at the photo sitting to the side. It was of her and Oliver on their first anniversary. Their third anniversary was coming up in a month, meaning Oliver had been in Britain for five months.

‘Jazz!’

She jumped and glared at Kelly. ‘What?’

Kelly was frowning. ‘Is everything ok between you and Oliver?’

‘What? Yes. Everything’s fine. Why wouldn’t it be?’ Jazz snapped.

‘You’ve been jittery and spacey all day. And you were zoning out while staring at the photo.’ She hesitated. ‘You do know you can tell me anything, right?’

‘Well, there’s nothing to tell. Now, what did you need me for?’

Kelly sighed, handing her a slip of paper. ‘Well, here are the options for venues...’

You’ve just tried calling Jazz. I can’t get to my phone right now so leave a message and I’ll get back to you!

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Sorry I missed your call before. It was Nat’s birthday so I took her out. I’ll call you again later. Love you.

Oliver waited for the computer to turn off, watching as it slowly turned black. He and Nat had been cataloguing pottery all day and he couldn’t wait to get away from the screen. The soft whirring hum of the computer finally went silent.

Nat stretched. ‘Well that’s everything.’

As she turned to leave her wallet fell on the floor. Oliver picked it up, raising his eyebrows when he saw her I.D. ‘Nat?’

‘Yes?’

‘Is it your birthday today?’

She turned in confusion. Seeing him holding her wallet, she took it back. ‘It’s not important.’

He rolled his eyes. ‘Of course it is. Did you have any plans?’ When she didn’t answer he clapped his hands together. ‘Right, well, I’m taking you out for dinner then. My treat.’

After much protesting, she finally relented. It wasn't until the next day that Oliver realised it had been the first day that he hadn't thought about Jazz. He wasn't sure how he felt about that.

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BEEP

I miss you

Jazz stared at the ceiling. She lay in bed, unable to sleep. She was stressed out from her job; her mistakes had increased in the last few months.

She didn't realise how hard this would be, how much she would miss him. She hoped it would get easier in the future; as Oliver was studying to be an archaeologist, his work would take him away for months at a time. It was why, when the internship came up, she had pushed him to take it. He had always been a little dependent on her and they had to learn to be apart. And from the phone calls, she could tell the trip had been good for him.

For her, it was a slap in the face. She had always thought of herself as the more independent one in the relationship but here she was, unravelling as the year passed.

And who was Nat? The way Oliver told it, she was just his friend but she couldn't be entirely sure. Which was stupid. Oliver was the last person in the world she could think of who would cheat. But then again, she thought she would be the last person to be breaking down over a long distance relationship. She hated this suspicious, clingy person she'd become but she couldn't push it out of her mind.

Jazz sighed, turning over, hoping to get some sleep in the knowledge he'd be back in three months.

You've just tried calling Jazz. I can't get to my phone right now so leave a message and I'll get back to you!

BEEP

Just calling to say I love you. I'm going to miss Britain when I leave but I can't wait to see you again. We should come together next time.

They were on the floor of Nat's apartment, playing the board game Pandemic and laughing their heads off. In fact, they were laughing so hard he hadn't heard the doorbell, though she had. She was chortling as she went to answer it. He stretched out, lying on his back, grinning to himself until he heard Nat shriek then cut off. Leaping up, he turned to the door expecting to see thieves or murderers. Instead, he saw her wrapped around a guy, kissing him as if her life depended on it.

Nat pulled back. 'I can't believe you're here!'

The man laughed. 'Well, I did want to surprise you.' He looked at Oliver. 'I see you've got company.'

Nat pulled him in. 'James, this is Oliver. Oliver, James.'

Oliver shook his hand. 'The backpacking boyfriend, yes? Nat's told me about you.' Nat had mentioned that since she'd taken this internship, her boyfriend had taken the opportunity to travel through Europe.

James laughed. 'That's right. And you're the fellow intern.'

He dumped the rucksack on the ground and stretched. Nat tugged at his wrinkled clothes as James wrapped an arm around her. She made a face at the stench of his sweat but didn't pull away, even as he laughed at her.

Oliver headed towards the door. 'I'll give you two some privacy.'

'Don't be silly.' Nat waved her hand. 'You don't have to leave.'

'No, really...'

James clapped him on the back. 'You should stay. You can tell me the stories Nat won't.'

'Are you sure?'

'Of course!' Nat said.

Oliver had a great time talking with James and Nat, though he made a note to leave earlier than normal. Seeing the two reunited made him think of Jazz. He sneaked off to leave her a quick voicemail before coming back to share stories with his friends.

Hey, this is Oliver. I'm not here right now but leave a message and I'll get back to you.

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Oliver, please pick up.

The loud throbbing music vibrated inside her bones. The club was dark and Jazz watched Kelly get picked up. She wasn't in the partying mood, glaring at the drink sitting on the table in front of her. She had been given an official warning today; if she didn't pick up her game she would be fired. Kelly had dragged her out, saying that it would help her relax. Instead, she stared blankly at the mass of gyrating bodies.

'Hi there.' She was startled out of her stewing as a man sat down next to her. She couldn't help noticing he looked a little like Oliver and for a moment, it was her boyfriend smiling down at her. 'I was wondering what a beautiful girl was doing sitting by herself.'

She should tell him she was taken. She should tell him to go away. She should turn this man down. She really should.

BEEP

You have one voicemail.

Oliver frowned as he listened to Jazz's last message. He immediately called her, sighing in relief when she picked up. 'Hey Jazz. What's-are you crying?'