

The Whimsy Bakehouse

It's been six months since Zane left me.

At first, I didn't take it well. He kicked me out, and I had nowhere to go until Tessa, my best friend, booked me the first flight to NYC and forced me to stay with her.

I spent nights crashing on her couch, crying in the bathroom when she was at work.

I ignored the little bakery - Tessa and I named it The Whimsy Bakehouse after getting smashingly drunk one night in college and having what she called a crazy epiphany - Zane had opened for me after he got his first NHL paycheck for weeks. I couldn't bring myself to step inside. 1

Then Tessa got fed up. She called me a couch potato, said I was wasting my tears on an 'asshole jerk,' and dragged me back to work.

Unlearning ten years of habits hasn't been easy.

Some nights, I still catch myself staring at my phone, waiting for a message that will never come. Waiting for Zane to say he made a mistake. That he wants me back.

But he never does. Not even in my dreams.

It's Friday and I'm at the bakery. The regular season is about to start. I know because I memorised Zane's schedule months ago. Back then, I planned my days around his, making sure we had time together.

Now, the only reason I keep up with hockey is Tessa. She's been extra busy lately.

She's a PR manager for the New York Titans. It was Zane's favourite team. He had always dreamed of being drafted there. Instead, he ended up with the Chicago Blackhawks.

That was a rough time for us. He was so angry about it, and I was the one he took it out on. It took everything I had to keep our relationship from falling apart.


I push the memory away and pull the second batch of cookies from the oven. Just as I set them down, the bell above the door jingles, making me smile.


The Becketts live across the street. They stop by every morning for cookies, and I always make sure to have something extra for them.

"Good morning, Miss Carter!" Angel, their little girl, grins up at me, two front teeth missing. She holds her father's hand, swinging it back and forth.

My heart melts. "Good morning, Angel. Mr Beckett. Just the two of you today?"

Mr Beckett nods, smiling. "My wife gave birth yesterday. We're here to pick up some treats for her. She specifically asked for your doughnuts."

Mrs. Beckett had been pregnant forever, or at least, that's how it felt. In reality, she had been pregnant for about twelve months now. 

She used to sit in my bakery, watching me bake, complaining about how heavy and tired she was. All she wanted was a healthy, happy baby. The doctors said the long pregnancy was unusual but nothing to worry about. 

Hearing the news now, I couldn't contain my excitement. I let out a squeal, and Angel giggled.

"Congratulations! I'm so happy for you!" I beamed. "I'll grab the doughnuts right away. I also made some cupcakes! It's almost like I knew something good was coming!"

Angel nodded enthusiastically. "I have a little brother now! He's really red and not very pretty, but Mummy says all babies look like that."

"That's not a very nice thing to say, Angel," Mr. Beckett scolds gently as I quickly pack up the cupcakes, doughnuts, and a few fresh cookies for Mrs. Beckett.


"But it's true!" Angel pouts, crossing her arms. She turns to me for backup. "Miss Carter, tell Daddy it's true!"

I hand the treats to Mr. Beckett, then place a hand on my hip as I ruffle Angel's hair. "I agree with your dad. He might be a little red, but he's still your brother. And as his big sister, it's your job now to protect him. Especially from people who talk about how red he is."

Angel lets out an exaggerated huff. "That's going to be so hard."

Mr. Beckett chuckles. "Welcome to being a big sister." 

I smile, watching the two of them. Moments like these remind me that not all relationships fall apart. Some families actually stay happy.

But for some reason, none of my relationships ever last. No matter how much I give, it's never enough. 

I wave at the Becketts as they leave, their happiness lingering in the air like the scent of freshly baked cookies. I wanted what they had, a family that cared for each other.

But after what I did seven years ago, I knew I didn't have a family to go

back to. My parents haven't called in months. My sister barely acknowledges my existence.

It used to hurt less when I told myself I deserved it. That this was just the price of my mistakes. And no matter how much I lost, I thought I'd always have Zane.

But I even failed at that.

I was pathetic. I couldn't even be the kind of woman Zane wanted to marry. Everything I touched fell apart, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

My phone rings, and a quick glance at the screen tells me it's Tess. The tight feeling in my chest eases the moment I hear her voice.

"You're not on my couch, are you?" she asks, her tone is so skeptical that I burst out laughing.

"No, Tess. I'm at the bakery. I even made you some cookies."

Right then, the bell above the door jingles, and in walks Tessa, holding up her phone with a triumphant grin. "Well, thank God for small mercies."

Tessa and I have been best friends since our freshman year of college.

It was a rough time for me, I had followed Zane to college in New York because he asked me to, but I struggled to fit in.

He never liked when I had too many friends, so I wasn't used to having someone that wasn't him to lean on. Then I met Tess in an art history class. 1

She couldn't stand Zane, and I used to hate that about her. But for some reason, she stuck around anyway.

She's drop dead gorgeous with platinum blonde hair, forest green eyes, and long legs that make heads turn. She's the exact opposite of me in every way. 1

Her skin is freakishly pale, mine is warm brown. Her hair is pin-straight, mine is a mess of curls. She has curves in all the right places, while I've always been insecure about my nonexistent ones. Her eyes are striking, while mine are just... brown. 1

Compared to her, I'm a plain Jane.

And not just in looks, but in personality too. When she told Zane she was going to be a PR manager for a hockey club, he laughed in her face and said she was wasting her time.

Now she's doing exactly what she loves, while I'm still stuck wondering what direction my life is going.

Before Zane and I started dating, I dreamed of owning an art gallery, but he thought that wasn't good enough.

I love baking and this bakery, but sometimes I can't help but feel like he only bought it for me to make sure I did exactly what he wanted.

Tess walks up, wraps her arms around me, and showers me with kisses, making me giggle. She's always been so affectionate. It's endearing.

Then I feel her slump against my back with a sigh. "You'll never believe what happened."