

NELL - F, 16 - Pragmatic; loyal

Scene 1. Raine, Nell, and Finley sit in a noisy cafeteria, chatting.

RAINE

OK, but think about this: if I dropped out of high school and really practiced my art, I could do some sweet back-alley tattoos for, like, a year and some change. Then, when I turn 18, I'll be old enough to meet a handsome sugar daddy on Tik Tok that could fund my lifestyle until he kicks it and I can live off his life insurance. It's brilliant.

NELL

It's a horrible idea.

FINLEY

Like, I know you're joking, but I still kind of need you to confirm you're joking.

RAINE

(sighs)

You never let me have any fun.

NELL

It just seems like a lot to get out of a math test, Raine.

FINLEY

I thought the storm last night was going to get all of us out of the math test, honestly. Did you guys hear the wind? It was wild.

Raine hits Fin on the arm.

FINLEY (CONT'D.)

Ow, Raine! What was that for?

RAINE

Gender-exclusive term, no punchbacks! Come on, Finley. You know the rules.

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FINLEY

Sorry. Stupid habit. Did you...
friends...hear the storm last night?

NELL

We'll work on it. But yes. The wind hit
60 miles-per-hour. That's why you heard
it. It was zooming past all the houses,
cars, and fences so quickly that it
caused them to vibrate really fast.
Resulting in weird, high-pitched
noises.

RAINE

Huh. I never knew that.

(beat)

Don't you dare make the my-name-is-
Raine-and-Nell-knows-more-about-weather
comment, Finley Cosgrave. I'm getting
real tired of the dad jokes.

NELL

She's getting way too predictable.

FINLEY

Hey! Am not.

NELL

I like predictable. That's one of the
things I love about weird weather. It's
predictable until it's not. But even
when it's not predictable, it's
explainable. Most of the time.

RAINE

Well, I think I have an explanation on
why Miss Predictable's face is getting
red right now. Tyler sighting?

FINLEY

Shut up, he's coming over here. 3
o'clock.

RAINE

You know how to read a clock?

Tyler approaches.

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TYLER

Hey ladies. How's it going?

FINLEY

Wood. Uh, I mean. Good. Or well.
Whichever is grammatically correct.

RAINE / NELL

(giggle)

TYLER

(smiling)

Awesome. Hey, what are you doing
Saturday?

RAINE

She's free!

(whispers)

Ow. You're wearing pointy-toed shoes.

TYLER

Well, I was hoping all of you might be!
I'm trying to get a group together to
clean up Ash Grove over on Plover St.

NELL

The one we went to for that bio field
trip?

TYLER

Yeah, I guess it got pretty beat up
with the storm last night, so I thought
if we got a big enough group together,
we could get the school to bring out a
bus for us, and people could use the
trip for their service hours.

FINLEY

That's, um, really sweet.

RAINE

Totally. We'll be there.

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Scene 2. Nell and Finley get in the car and start driving to school.

FINLEY

It happened again!

NELL

What? When? Like, getting in the car?

FINLEY

No, when I was brushing my teeth. Can I not maintain normal hygiene anymore?

NELL

Hold on, Fin. Let's not assume a causal relationship before we assess the data.

FINLEY

You're right. Let's use a scientific approach...for this completely fantastical situation.

NELL

We'll figure this out; don't worry. Let's just start from the beginning.

FINLEY

Okay, okay. We were in that woodsy area and it started to storm, except only just in that area, I guess? Lightning struck a tree and it started to fall towards Raine. Then, everything froze right before my eyes. Totally stopped. So, I came up with a plan to get Raine out of the way. As soon as I knew what to do, everything started going again. The tree started falling again.

NELL

And you pushed her out of the way. I saw that part.

FINLEY

Oddly fortunate timing for the universe to hit the pause button.

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NELL

I have a feeling the universe didn't have anything to do with it. Seems like you somehow willed it.

FINLEY

I wish I could will it a little more intentionally. Since yesterday, this thing happened seven times, and I really have no idea what's causing it.

NELL

But it's probably not teeth brushing.

FINLEY

Yeah, I'm not thinking a flash storm and dental care have any common denominators.

NELL

Maybe it happens when you've got something to think about.

(lightbulb)

How do you feel when it's happening? Are you able to smell or hear when everything is frozen? Assuming your body is frozen, I wouldn't think that you could.

FINLEY

Exactly. The physical world just stops, but my mind just keeps going and going. So, yeah, no smelling, hearing, moving, breathing. Nothing. Just infinite thinking. Plenty of time to spiral into an anxiety vortex.

NELL

We just need to figure out the mechanics of this. No need to spiral.

FINLEY

You're right; you're right. Speaking of anxiety, I tried a grounding exercise that I think helped me snap out of it. Basically, you list five things you can see, four things you can smell, three

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things you can hear, and so on until you feel calmer.

NELL

And that worked.

FINLEY

It just forced me to slow down and connect to the present moment.

NELL

"To slow down." So you were going too fast.

FINLEY

No, my thoughts were just racing. I get all anxious when everything freezes, so I needed to calm my thoughts.

NELL

Finley, this isn't everything freezing. Nothing is freezing.

FINLEY

Uh, trust me: everything freezes.

NELL

Only from your perspective. Not from anyone else's. I don't get time to think when you experience this freeze.

FINLEY

I guess that's true. So what does it mean?

NELL

It means that time isn't freezing; you're just thinking fast.

FINLEY

So fast that it seems like everything around me freezes?

NELL

Exactly.

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FINLEY

So we crossed into a weird parallel dimension forest where a magical lightning storm gave me the power to...think really fast?

NELL

Parallel dimensions are college-level physics, so I can't help you there. But the thinking fast part is almost assuredly what is happening to you.

FINLEY

Well, we still have to figure out how and why it's happening to me, too. I need to control it so I don't get stuck somewhere awful for an hour.

NELL

Like when you're blinking and can't even see anything.

FINLEY

I was thinking like during a Mrs. Montgomery lecture.