

Chapter Seven

Ayla

As I drove back to the city, my heart twisted painfully in my chest. I should have stayed to say goodbye to Nate, but I don't think I would have been strong enough to say no to him if he had asked me to stay. I'm not sure what it is about him. He gives me butterflies, but he also calms me. When I am around him, I feel more happy than I have ever been. I met him two days ago. I shouldn't be feeling like this already.

My phone ringing through the speakers of my SUV pulled me from my thoughts. I answered without looking at the ID and that was a big mistake.

"Hello?"

"Ayla, where have you been?" Jordan rushed out.

"I've been out of the city. Why?" I asked him.

"Xander called me. Your house burned down." He said.

"I know. He called me. I'll be heading there when I get back into the city." I told him.

"And who was that guy you were with?" He asked me angrily.

"What guy?" I asked him.

"Don't play stupid, Ayla. Xander told me you were holding hands with some guy." He yelled out.

"He was the one that helped me in the bear attack. Not that it's any of your business." I huffed.

"What bear attack?" He rushed out.

"Exactly, you care more about the guy I was with and Xander didn't even mention a bear attacked me." I said.

"Are you okay?" He sighed.

"I'm ne." I told him.

"Ayla, you know I care about you. Why did you end things?" He asked me, sounding desperate.

"Because you don't love me and I need more than just a good time," I answered him.

"It's not that I don't. I'm not ready to take that step." He said, and I sighed.

"And that's okay. I'm not forcing you. But I'm ready for more," I said.

"So you found someone else?" He huffed.

"Jordan, A bear attacked me and my house burned down. I have more important things to worry about, like where am I going to live." I told him, rolling my eyes. He wasn't able to see them, but he was getting on my nerves.

I was so thankful when the line beeped, and Xander was trying to call me.

"Jordan, I have to go." I said before ending the call with him and answering Xander.

"Xander, what's up?" I asked him.

"Ayla, where are you? Are you okay?" He rushed out.

"I'm on my way back to the city. And I'm okay." I told him.

"Good. I could get into your house. The reproof lock box was safe." He said and my stomach was in knots, waiting to see if he found my necklace.

"And?" I asked him.

"And the necklace was in the bathroom, like you said. I found it." He said, and I let out a breath.

"Thank you so much, Xander." I breathed out, relief washing over me.

"Where are you staying?" He asked me and I sighed.

"I don't know. Could you take Bluey for a few days? I'm just waiting to hear back from a few places," I said.

"Ayla, just come to my house. I have a spare room and I have your things with me. I'm just getting off shift now." He told me.

"Xander, are you sure?" I asked him.

"Ayla, it's ne, and I insist. You can stay with me as long as you need," he said.

"Thank you. I really appreciate it. I just need to get a few things and then I'll be there." I told him.

"Drive safe." He said before ending the call.

Sighing, I looked over at Bluey, who was sleeping in the passenger seat. Tomorrow I have so much to do, besides work. I need to call the insurance company to see what they will cover. I'm sure Xander will ll me in on what they found when I get to his place. And I still had to nish my article. I'll go through some of my older pictures tonight and hopefully I can nd one to use. I could really use the payout.

My heart was still in knots when I pulled into the city. I missed him, and I've known him for two days. I didn't even miss Jordan and I've known him for a year. What the hell was going on? I should be missing my grandparents, but all I can think about is him. And the way he made me feel like I was home. The last time I felt like home was before my mother died.

After shopping, I nally pulled up outside Xander's house. Guilt churned my stomach, but I didn't understand why. I missed Nate. Maybe it was because I wish it was him I was seeing and not Xander. Does that make me a horrible friend?

Xander must have been watching for me. He came out before I had even got out of my vehicle. He opened my vehicle door before I could and wrapped his arms around me. Xander and I have been friends since his father hired me to work for him. He was a few years older than me and he introduced me to Jordan.

"Ayla, how are you feeling?" He asked me, still holding me against his chest.

"I'm okay. Overwhelmed," I mumbled. Bluey interrupted the moment by climbing over me and licking Xander's face.

"Thanks Bluey," I groaned as her paws dug into my thighs.

Xander moved and Bluey jumped out of the driver's side. I shut off my vehicle, grabbed my purse, and hopped out, closing my door behind me. I headed to the back to get all my bags and my pack before heading inside. Xander helped me carry everything inside his place, and then he led me to his spare bedroom.

Xander's house was beautiful and you could tell he came from money. My house was a little one-story shack compared to his mansion. Everything here was new and modern. Two stories with a basement.

The room was simple with an ensuite. I tossed my bags on the bed and Xander placed my pack beside the bed. I was glad that I didn't have to make a second trip. Bluey followed behind us and jumped on the bed, making herself comfortable.

"Hungry?" He asked me and I nodded.

"Starving." I told him.

"Pizza?" He asked.

"I can order us something. I would just like to shower rst," I told him.

"I'll order us pizza while you shower." He said, sitting on the bed. He pulled out his phone. Not wanting to argue with him, I grabbed the toiletries I bought and headed into the bathroom.

Stripping off my clothes, I pulled back the still clean bandages to see that it was all scabbed over and it was healing well. It looks so much better than it did just yesterday and the pain was minimal. Getting in the shower, something felt off. I couldn't wrap my head around it as I showered. I'm not sure what was going on with me. Maybe it was being attacked or my house burning down. Or all of the above and the trauma of everything has nally settled in.

Finally done in the shower, I wrapped a towel around my hair and body and wandered into my room. Xander was gone, and Bluey was still sleeping on the bed. My necklace and lockbox were on the nightstand. I forgot my unknown feelings as I rushed over to pick up my necklace. It was a cameo pendant of a wolf howling at the moon.

My mother loved wolves and full moons, and I never understood why. Whenever I asked her, she would always say that I would understand one day. I wish she had the chance to tell me before her death.

Signing, I put the necklace on, holding it in my hand. I'm so thankful that the re didn't destroy the only item I have from my mother. I have photos and documents, but this is the only item I have left that was hers.

"Bluey, at least we didn't lose everything," I told her.

There was a knock at my door while I was drying off.

"Pizza's here whenever you're ready." Xander called out.

"Thank you. I'll be right down." I told him.

Going through the bags of stuff that I bought, I nally found a pair of pajamas. I had to buy everything; clothes for a few days of work, makeup, lounge clothes. And then there were things for Bluey. And I wasn't even done. I was just too exhausted to shop anymore.

When I was done getting dressed, I brushed my hair, leaving it down. I got the food dishes for Bluey and the bag of food for her and headed down to the kitchen. Xander was sitting at the kitchen island. Putting the food down, I then wrapped my arms around his neck.

"Thank you so much." I whispered, kissing his cheek.

"Nice pj's." He smirked as I pulled away.

"I know, right? Aren't they adorable?" I said over the top, and he chuckled.

After I put down some food and water for Bluey, Xander and I went into the living room to eat and watch a movie. I took the love seat because I was feeling weird about being near Xander. His scent was soothing me, which was weird since he usually smells delicious. Xander was extremely good looking with his light brown hair and green eyes. He's tall and built. And he was a regther. Everything a girl could want. Too bad he is my boss's son, but now, I don't know, he doesn't excite me like he did before.

Bluey nally came in to lie with me while we watched a movie. My mind wandered to Nate and I couldn't shake the feeling of missing him. I wish I was with him instead of Xander.

Six days later.

To say I've been busy would have been an understatement. If I wasn't at work, I went shopping. I secured a place that allowed dogs and had a yard. And it was close to work. The rent was more than I wanted to pay but the bank put my mortgage on hold until my house was rebuilt. My boss also gave me a raise, which helped. I got the keys a few days ago, so now I'm just waiting for everything to get delivered.

My lawyer, aka boss, also applied to have my insurance payout on rent and expenses until my house can be rebuilt. The re had started at the neighbor's house and was my fault, but the paperwork was still going to take some time. The re chief concluded my not work would have to be torn down and rebuilt because of structural damage.

And then there was work and a fresh case my boss had taken on. They classied me under receptionist, but I was more like his assistant. I helped him with all the paperwork and I even talked with the client. So I have been working overtime and trying to make sure that someone was home to let the delivery person in.

My bed and bedroom furniture were delivered yesterday and today my living room set will be delivered. I have already bought a TV and a new laptop. But I've been exhausted and overworked. I didn't even get to nish my article, so I lost out on the payout and the exposure I was hoping for.

It was Saturday, and I was working at the oce today. I usually only work during the week but this case was huge, and it was all hands on deck.

I was on break, heading to my new place so I could let the delivery person in and let Bluey out for a walk. I didn't expect to be so busy, plus everything else that was going on. I also thought some time and distance would help me forget about Nate, but I only missed him more. Thinking about him every moment I wasn't working.

Sitting with Bluey on the deck, I nally broke down and texted Jim.

Me: Jim, do you have Nate's number?

My stomach was in knots, waiting for him to reply.

"Miss, we are all nished." A mover called out.

"Thank you," I said, entering the house. I signed all the paperwork, and they left.

I called Bluey inside before I fed her. I needed to head back to the oce to get more work done. It was going to be another long night for me, but hopefully that means that I won't have to work tomorrow.

Parking in my spot, I let out a sigh before heading inside to my oce. The perks of working for a partner in a rm. Sitting at my desk, I got to work going over phone records and highlighting the ones that pertained to the case we were working on.

Lost in my work, I didn't realize the time until my phone chimed in my purse. Pulling it out, I found a new text from Jim.

Jim: I'm surprised he hasn't texted or called you. I don't know if he has his phone, but he's in the city. He and some friends went to howl at the moon club.

Me: thanks Jim, I haven't heard from him.

If Nate had my number, why didn't he reach out? Maybe he didn't feel the same way I did about him. But how did I feel about him?

Packing up my stuff, I locked up everything before heading out to my vehicle. It was getting late, and I was feeling overwhelmed and anxious. Jim must have called me a number, but then he didn't even bother to get a hold of me. I was busy, but I would have noticed a text or a call from an unknown number.

Sitting in my vehicle, I was trying to decide what I should do. Do I go to the club to nd him, or do I wait until Monday to ask Jim for his number again?

"f**k," I said out loud. I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep, knowing he was so close to me.

The entire drive to the club, I was cursing myself. I'm not a chaser. I don't chase men. But here I was on my way to nd someone who could have reached out, but didn't. I hesitated before exiting my vehicle, when I pulled up outside the club. There was a line wrapped around the building and I was wondering how I was going to get in until I saw the bouncer. He was one of our clients and he always irted with me when he came into the oce. As soon as he noticed me walking towards the door, he gave me a smile.

"Miss. Waters, what can I do for you?" He asked me. Not dressed for the club, I was dressed for the oce.

"Mr. Bane, always a pleasure." I told him with a smile as I walked closer to him.

"Did you just come from work?" He asked me, and I nodded.

"I did. I'm actually looking for someone. Would I be able to get inside and see if he's here?" I asked him.

"I'm not sure if you can nd anyone in there, but be my guest." He said, opening the door for me.

"Thank you. I really appreciate it." I told him before entering the club.

Walking inside, Mr. Bane was right about not being able to nd him. The place was packed as I tried to make out Nate. The music was loud and the strobe lights were giving me a headache as I moved through the crowd of people. There were people dancing and drinking, and the entire place smelt like s*x and alcohol as I moved to the back where the tables were located.

It wasn't until I found him did I know I made a mistake. He was sitting in a booth with a beautiful half-naked woman and they were kissing, his hands all over her bare skin. My heart twisted painfully in my chest as I watched them.

Turning around, I rushed out of the club as quickly as I could, willing myself not to break down. We weren't together, and he had no obligation to me, but seeing him with another woman broke my heart in a way I'd never felt before. I never felt like this with anyone else before and I doubt I ever will again.