

Fated out Chapter 69

69 A kiss, reunion and rain...

Lyla

I wouldn't say I liked it when it rains though it had been raining more often than usual and the weather forecast hadn't mentioned anything about rain and I'd left my umbrella at home.

I stood at the entrance of my company's building, debating whether to wait it out or make a run for it to the bus stop two blocks away.

I pulled my coat tighter around me, feeling the mist from the rain kiss my cheeks. The streetlights reflected off the wet pavements. I sighed as I stared at the sky, it wasn't showing any signs of stopping soon.

The street was growing emptier and soon there would be no bus to my place. The last time I had missed the last bus, I had to sleep in my office and all I wanted to do more than anything after a long day at work was to go home to my warm apartment, with a cup of tea and bury myself in layers of blankets.

As I stood there contemplating, the glass doors behind me swooshed open. I turned and to my surprise, it was Paul, one of the marketing managers. His short brown hair was a little messy, as though he had run his hand through it one too many times during the day.

He smiled awkwardly, his dark-rimmed glasses slightly fogging from the temperature difference inside and outside the building. He was holding out a raincoat to me.

"Hey Lyla," he greeted, looking at his feet.

"Hey Paul," I replied returning his smile. He was always so polite to me, and so considerate. Over the past few months, I'd caught him stealing glances at me during company meetings and I couldn't deny the warm flutter in my chest whenever our paths crossed in the break room. He seemed harmless... but Xander had been that do.

So, I had to caution myself – these days, I stay away from humans especially. I've had three years. and six months of my life without any drama and I intend to keep it that way.

"Here," he said in a shy voice pointing at the raincoat. "You can use this. I saw you standing out here and thought you might need it. You'll get soaked otherwise."

I blinked in surprise. "Oh, no, I couldn't..."

"Please!" He insisted, already pushing it inside my hand. "I'm staying late anyway and I have the company car and driver." He pushed his glasses up his nose. "So, I insist."

"Oh, Paul, that's so thoughtful of you," I said, my smile deepening. Thank you so much.

He nodded. Pushing his glasses up his nose, a nervous gesture I'd come to find endearing. "Actually, I... um..."

I waited patiently, as he gathered courage, a faint blush crept across his cheeks, and I felt my own face warming in response too.

"The thing is tomorrow is my birthday," he finally managed, looking somewhere between my

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eyes and the floor. "And I'm new to the city, I don't really know many people outside of work yet. And I was wondering, he paused, scratching his head nervously.

"I'm having a small gathering tomorrow for my birthday. I didn't really plan much... I mean, I've asked some people and I was wondering..." He took a deep breath, his gaze meeting mine for a

moment.

"If you're not busy... would you like to come? There'll be some people from marketing too. I know it's a bother and you might probably want to spend your weekend resting but I'd really like it if you came."

My heart fluttered at the sincerity in his voice. Here was this successful, kind man, asking me out with all the nervousness of a teenager at his first school dance. Though we've only met up a couple of times within the company, there has always been a warmth in his presence that I appreciated.

He was not like the other managers who carried their titles on their heads. Paul was humbler and I knew he liked me. He was always looking at me and now, this invitation and the sweet way he asked. How could I refuse him?

Also, he could be Xander – in another form. My suspicion was the only defence mechanism I had. To me, every man was a Xander and Mr Dupree until proven otherwise.

"I'd love to," I said softly.

His eyes lit up and he grinned, looking more relieved than anything.

"Really? That's that's great." Then he glanced at this watch and his eyes widened. "Oh shoot, I have a meeting with the board in two minutes and I've got to run. But may I text you the details of you know, where we're meeting and all?" he was already backing toward the door, nearly tripping over his own feet in his haste.

"Sure," I laughed. "Go before you're late!"

"Right, yes. Tomorrow then!" he disappeared back into the building, leaving me staying there with his raincoat and a grin I couldn't suppress if I tried.

I looked down at his raincoat, suspiciously... Xander had been using spells on me according to Nanny at some point, and that was what explained all of my erratic behaviours. I brought out a small vial from my purse... I didn't know what it was but Nanny always sent it to me.

She said whenever I was unsure about anything, I should sprinkle it. After sprinkling the dark liquid on it, I slipped the coat on, inhaling the scent of his cologne. The raincoat was slightly too big for me, but it made it even more endearing and it was warm and comfortable.

Just like a hug, I thought and immediately felt silly for such a romantic notion.

I

Taking a deep breath, I stepped out into the rain. The rain however intensified and despite the coat, the wind whipped at my face, sending cold droplets into my eyes.

I raised my hand to shield my eyes, thinking maybe I should've waited for the storm to pass $\mathbb{W}w\mathbb{W}.n\mathcal{O}v\mathbb{E}(\imath)\mathbb{O},r\mathfrak{m}.c\mathbb{O}m$

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all.

Suddenly, it stopped raining, or rather, the rain stopped falling on me. I blinked in confusion and

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looked up. An umbrella had appeared above my head, large enough to shield me completely from the downpour.

Relieved, I looked up to thank whoever it was for their kindness but the words froze in my throat and the world stopped spinning.

My bag slipped from my fingers landing with a wet splash on the sidewalk but I barely noticed. I was too busy staring into a pair of eyes I never thought I'd see again.

Standing beside me, holding the umbrella was Nathan.

My breath caught in my chest, my heart stopped beating. The world seemed to blur around me as I locked eyes with his. It couldn't be him. Not here. Not now.

The Nathan I knew couldn't have known I work here now. He didn't know where I lived, I already moved out from the old address I gave him four years ago. So, this couldn't possibly be him.

Maybe it was my grief deceiving me with his face.

"Thank you!" I said, "You didn't have to, I'll take it from here, I told the man.

The man bent down and picked up my bag, when he straightened, his eyes bored into mine gently. He looked exactly like Nathan and completely different at the same time.

"Lyla!" he said gently. "It's me... Nathan." $\mathfrak{w}w\mathbb{W}.\mathbf{NO}(\nu)\acute{e}\mathbb{O}\mathbb{W}o\mathbb{R}m.c\acute{o}\mathbb{M}$

"Nathan!" I whispered, shaking my head. "That's that's not possible. The Nathan. I know he's... this is a mistake"

I tried to move away from the Umbrella but he reached for my wrist, tugging me gently towards him.

"It's really me, Nathan Tanner!" he sighed softly. "It's been years. You look beautiful as always. I'm sorry, I didn't reach out..."

"It's truly you!" I said with disbelief in my voice as I turned to him. "What are you doing here?" I managed to ask proud that my voice remained steady despite the chaos inside me.

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gaze travelled over my face. "I needed to see you," he said simply. "It's been a while."

"It's been four years!" I retorted. "You can't just... you can't just show up like this, Nathan."

"I know" His free hand twitched at his side as if he wanted to reach for me but thought better of it. "But things have changed. There's something you need to know." $\mathfrak{w}w\mathbb{W}.\mathbb{O}\mathfrak{o}v\mathbb{E}(\imath\mathfrak{w}\mathfrak{o}r(\mathfrak{m}).c(\mathfrak{o})\mathfrak{m}$

A crack of thunder made me jump and Nathan stepped closer instinctively, adjusting the umbrella to shield me better from the pouring rain.

"Whatever it is," I said taking a deliberate step back. "I don't want to hear it. I'm just glad you're alive." I dragged out my bag from his grasp, hiding the trembling of my hands and forcing myself to meet his gaze.

"I have a life now, Nathan. A good one. You can't just walk back into it and expect..."

"I missed you, Lyla..." he said suddenly, making the words in my mouth dry. A tear rolled down his cheek as he drew closer to me again, running a finger on my cheeks. "Every day, I prayed to

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the Moon Goddess to allow me to see you again... even if it was for the last time..." His voice shook as he let his hands drop at his side..

Without warning, he gently cupped my cheek, tilting my face towards his. I saw it in his eyes before he leaned forward but I barely had time to protest what he was about to do before his lips came crashing on mine, 040