



Chapter Fifteen

And that's how we spent the rest of the week. Our touches and kisses were far more innocent than anything we shared at my little trailer the Monday previous, but I couldn't complain. I was enjoying myself with Edward. He was easy to be with and talk to. He was a homebody, but with a house like his, I couldn't blame him. He finally gave me the full tour, showing me his fantastic library. It's where he worked from home, and books lined the walls like something out of a Disney movie.

"Why does this have to suck so much?" I asked Alice as we went to our fifth store in about two hours, looking for a gown the following Monday. I was shoved into my best shapewear and being squeezed so tight it was making me cranky.

"Oh, come on! This is so much fun! Bella, you're going to a masquerade ball. How many people can say that? And you're going with a hot guy that's obviously into you. We've already got the masks! We just have to find the perfect dress."

I had gotten us two different black ones. Mine was more detailed, but still black, so I figured it would go with whatever I got. Edward's was far more simple, but I knew the dark matte would be flattering against his pale white skin and light green eyes.

I thought about how he was coming over after work that day, so I could take him out to dinner. He said I couldn't spend over twenty dollars, to be fair, so that limited my options greatly. I had no idea what we would eat.

"You know, it would be easier to find it if you were actually looking," my friend smirked, pushing a gown in my direction. "You should try this one on."

I held it out in front of me and frowned. "No. It looks like someone threw up Jell-O shots all over it."

Alice did her why-are-you-being-such-a-pain-in-the-ass sigh, the one she gave Jasper all the time, and snatched it back from my grip before putting it onto the rack. "You know what? Go to the dressing room. I'll pick you out several things since you either don't care or have no sense of style."

"Hey!" I wanted to argue but decided against it. I really had no idea what I would be looking for anyway, and my mind was in other places. I stalked over to the fitting rooms, plunking down into one of the chairs to wait.

"You look like a sulking teenager," she complained as she put several dresses into the room. There was so much tulle I wasn't sure I would be able to fit myself in there. "Start with the red one."

"I don't look good in red." I handed it back to her.

"You look amazing in red." She pushed it in my direction. "Bella, you're not taking an active part in the picking, so I'm doing it for you. You only have a couple of days to shop for one, and don't you have a date in oh, three hours? Now, try it on. Then the green one."

"Fine." I heaved myself into the room. "This is the reason I didn't go to prom."

"You didn't go because you didn't think you were good enough to go. If a hottie like Edward asked you then, you would have."

I pulled off my sweats and threw them down on the bench after kicking off my slip-on shoes. The red had a ton of tulle, which I did not approve of in the least. It made me feel like a tool. And it crammed my breasts so tightly upward I could sniff them.

"No," I said as I came out and did a little spin.

"Why?" She demanded. "Give me a good reason. You look hot."

I shoved my face into my boobs. "Mmm, smells like my lunch."

Alice laughed and pointed to the dressing room. "Fine. Next."

I tried on the entire color wheel before I finally came to one I approved of. It was sleek, a deep shiny blue with black edging around the halter top. Black and white crystals ran up the flowing skirt up to my breasts, making me look slimmer.

"Here we go," I declared as I came out and did a spin. "It would even go with my mask."

"But that's the least fluffy of the bunch!" She complained like a seven-year-old girl.

"That settles it. I'm buying this one," I said to spite her at that point. Normally I would have moved on to something else, but I really liked it, and the fact that it bothered her girlishness made it even better.

"Get some silk gloves with it then, at least," my friend begged as she came over to the accessories. Searching the hair decorations, she found one with the same black and white crystals. It had feathers flaring out the back, too. "Wear your hair up with this. That would be fun."

"That's kind of out there," I countered as I looked at my backside in the mirror before lifting my curls and puckering my lips at the reflection.

"It's a masquerade ball," Alice drawled as if I were mentally challenged. "You're supposed to be out there."

I shrugged as I went back into the dressing room, removing the gown carefully. I was glad to have my sweatpants back on. "I guess so. Grab it. I've already got some sexy shoes. You'd be proud of me. They're stilettos."

"Aw, my Bells is growing up," she teased. "I can't believe you get to do this. It's just so awesome."

"It's not something I expected to do... ever," I told her truthfully. "I've had a few firsts this month."

"With Mr. Masen?"

"You're not getting details."

She smirked. "That's cruel."

“Too bad,” I retorted as I paid. I didn’t listen to the amount and didn’t look at the receipt as I stuffed it into the bag.

“Can you tell me what you’re doing on your date tonight? That’s not work.”

“I don’t know,” I sighed as I carefully hung the dress in the backseat of Alice’s car. I rested the sack with the accessories in my lap, playing with one of the handles as I sat in the passenger seat.

Starting the vehicle, she glanced at me. “Y’all haven’t made any plans?”

“Well, I’ve already cooked for him all week, so I figured we could eat out, but he gave me a twenty-dollar limit on where I could take him. So... yeah.”

“Twenty dollar limit? And you’re paying?” She asked in confusion.

“Long story.” I shook my head. “Trust me, I want to spend more to thank him for what he did, but I haven’t been able to think of anything.”

“Order Chinese,” she suggested. “China Bear is good. You get a ton of food for cheap too.”

“He eats like a horse,” I laughed, “so that would be perfect.”

Her face scrunched. “Really? He’s thin, though.”

“He’s active,” I replied with a shrug.

“That’s what she said,” Alice said in a suggestive voice before snorting and laughing wildly.

“You’re an idiot,” I told her dryly, but it was hard not to giggle at her amused expression. I rolled my eyes. “Really, you are.”

I took a pleasantly hot shower before getting ready for my ‘date’ with Edward. I did my hair, nervously curling it into submission. I don’t think I styled it as much for our first meeting. I also did my makeup, making my lips as red as possible. I wasn’t sure what to wear, so I just put on a pair of tight jeans and a black turtleneck along with a cheap but cute pair of silver hoop earrings. I even put on the shoes I was telling Alice about. I had to practice walking in them, anyway. I figured my outfit was nice enough to go out in but not overly so.

I was a nervous wreck, and I didn’t understand why. It wasn’t like I hadn’t spent nearly my entire week with Edward. I had gotten to know him, and he was a great guy.

Maybe that was the reason.

I wasn't able to sit still long enough for a game, a book, or even a TV show. Straightening my belongings was the only thing that seemed to calm me down, even though the place was already practically spotless. I hadn't been around to make a mess.

When I heard the knock, I nearly danced to my door. Edward must have changed at work before he came over because he was wearing a nicer long-sleeved blue shirt with dark jeans, and a leather racing jacket topping it all off. He smiled when he saw me, holding out a lovely bunch of flowers.

"You are gorgeous," he said instead of hello.

"Hardly," I blushed, taking the bouquet. The lilies smelled delightful, a beautiful purple and gold color. "Thank you. Come on in."

"Have you thought about what you'd like to eat?" He asked, following behind me as I went to get a vase from my kitchen. The only one I had was too small, so I pulled out my grandmother's old tea pitcher. I filled it with water and put them in, placing it in the middle of my tiny island.

"Chinese, if you'd like. We could go somewhere else if I didn't have a limit," I reminded him.

Edward tilted his head to the side, peering at me with interest. "I want to be a cheap date."

"I have a feeling you're never a cheap date," I smirked to myself as I washed my hands.

"Bella, there is a reason I don't drink often. I am a very cheap date. But hopefully, you won't ever find out for yourself."

"Why?" I asked, looking at him curiously.

"I'm an asshole when I'm drunk. I haven't had more than a glass since... well, let's just say in a long time," he said, his eyes becoming cloudy for a moment before they rolled away as quickly as they came in. I had a feeling it wasn't the right time to ask him about it, so I came around and placed my hands on his hips.

"You could never be an asshole. I don't think it's in your DNA."

"I hope you always feel that way." He pulled me in so my chin was resting on his chest as I gazed up at him. "So, Chinese. That's what you want?"

"Is it what you want? This is your dinner."

"Fine with me," he remarked. "Just point me in the right direction."

Humming to myself, I ran my hands down his sides to feel where his keys were resting. Biting my lip in a sultry manner as I batted my eyelashes at him, I distracted him from my real mission. "Edward," I spoke in a seductive voice, "I adore you, but I won't be pointing you in any direction."

"Huh?" He uttered in confusion. Then I tugged the keys from his pocket and hung them in front of his face.

"I'm driving."

"Damn, you're a sneaky woman," he snarked, not displeased in the least. "I need to hide those in a better place."

"You're just a dirty perv that wants me to dig in his pockets," I told him as I yanked him towards the door. Chuckling, he came along happily.

"Yes, the thought crossed my mind. Can you blame me?"

"Yes. Yes, I can," I replied as we walked to his car. It was a sweet hardtop roadster from the fifties in a beautiful shade of red. "You dirty, filthy, sick, twisted bastard."

"Hm, I might as well earn that title and shove them down the front of my jeans," he snorted with amusement.

"Are those your keys, or are you just happy to see me?" I flirted as I shimmied. Edward threw his head back in laughter, his nose turning pink.

"Isabella, I am always happy to see you," he spoke in a deep and sensual voice. A shiver ran down the entirety of my spine before finding its way back up.

"You know," I started with a slight smirk. I knew I was calling his bluff, and I wanted to see exactly how it played out. "We could just skip dinner, and you can take me inside and show me how happy you are."

Edward gazed at me for a long moment, lust tugging at his every feature. "Damn you, woman. I'm not good at this. Don't tease me like that."

I opened the door for him, giggling as I did. "What if I wasn't teasing?"

"Chinese," was all he said as he sat down. He mumbled it like a frustrated child. All I could do was laugh as I shut it behind him. His expression was thoughtful as I pulled out, and he played with the ends of his jackets. Edward's question was rather abrupt. "What if I had said yes?"

"Hm?"

"What if I said yes to skipping dinner?"

"Well," I drew out slowly, turning onto the busy highway. "Then we would be inside right now. Doing... well." I smiled wickedly. "That's up to you. You are the happy one."

"Damn," he muttered to himself, and I chuckled, amused with his slight annoyance. "Really?"

I nodded before flicking on the radio. "Yup."

"Damn."

"The night is young, though. You never know, you may still be able to show me," I told him suggestively.

I felt rather than saw Edward's hand rest on my thigh, giving it a gentle squeeze. The warmth that spread from that spot was amazing. "I'd love to, but it's too soon."

He kept saying that, and I wondered, only briefly, why he hired me. He wanted a sexual relationship, and I was glad he didn't rush into anything, but honestly... I didn't mind the idea of it. At all. He hadn't even attempted to steal second base. But I wasn't on the job at that moment. We were on a date. Maybe it was a whole different ball game.

It's something I would have to ponder at a later time.

We ordered some wontons and lo mien to share, along with egg drop soup. Sitting alone in the restaurant, we talked and laughed a lot. We were both reluctant to leave, but the owner was getting annoyed with us. I was the first to open my fortune cookie, giggling at what it said.

"What?"

"You will have a great experience with a new acquaintance... in bed," I laughed out loud. "Nice."

“What?” He asked again with a laugh. He took the slip from my hands, reading it to himself.

“Add ‘in bed’ to all your fortunes. It always makes them better,” I replied, popping half of it into my mouth. “What does yours say?”

“Hm...” He tore open the plastic, nearly ripping the paper as he forced it out of the hard cookie. Edward frowned to himself. “Ignore your last fortune cookie... in bed.”

Snorting, I covered my mouth so the crumbs wouldn’t fall out. “Okay, it makes most of them better. Does it really say that?”

He passed me the tiny strip. “What a lame fortune.”

“I think it’s awesome,” I countered, standing up and fishing the keys out of my pocket. Edward glanced at his watch and frowned again. He placed his hand on the small of my back as we walked out, his lips pursing and relaxing as he thought something out.

“Want to get dessert?” He offered as we got into the car.

“I thought I had a twenty-dollar limit,” I reminded him, glancing over in his direction. “Though I would be more than pleased to get us some.”

“No. I want to get it. There are like three new yogurt places, and I’d love to try them with you. But, I’d feel like a loser if you bought us both dinner and dessert.”

“Why?” I rolled my eyes, going into the general direction of the yogurt places. They were all a mere quarter mile away from each other.

“Manly ego stuff,” he shrugged me off vaguely.

“Men buy women dinner and dessert all the time.”

“That’s different.”

“How?” I questioned. Since he didn’t say which one he wanted to go to, I went to the one by the Sake we had visited. A bunch of new restaurants had opened up within the last month, the yogurt place being one of them.

“You cooked me dinner all week,” Edward retorted, trying to push the argument in a better direction for him.

“You’re paying me for that.”

He pursed his lips again, biting the bottom one into his mouth as he tried to think of better logic. Finally, he sighed, “Bella, let me buy dessert. Please.”

I turned off the car as we parked in front of the tiny white and orange yogurt bar. “Does it mean that much to you?” I asked, looking over at him. He just nodded, his big innocent green eyes peering back. “Fine. But next time you buy dinner, I get dessert.”

He thought about it for a moment. “Okay. Just dessert, though.”

I laughed. “You’re strange sometimes, you know that?”

“Sometimes? I’m pretty strange all the time,” he smiled at me, proud for some reason he had won the argument. I wonder if he knew how hard it was to resist his sad eyes and plump lips. I doubted it.

“Yeah, but I like that,” I told him truthfully. “And if you’re strange, I’m stranger.”

“Don’t we make quite the pair?” He chuckled, putting his arm around my waist. It stayed there the entire time we enjoyed our frozen yogurt together. We sat on a bench, not an inch of space between us. We stayed there talking long after our treats were gone. It was nearly closing time when we finally left.

Neither of us spoke on the ride home. Instead, we just listened to music, letting our thoughts keep us company. I don’t think either of us wanted the evening to end. I was the first one to voice that as he walked me up to my porch. Unlike the first time he did, I didn’t feel a bit embarrassed.

“Do you want to come in for a nightcap? A cup of tea?” I asked, playing with my keys as I looked up at him.

Edward’s cheeks flushed as he sighed, looking down at his feet before peeking back at me. “I’d love to, but I shouldn’t. I work in the morning.”

“Of course.” I shook my head, feeling a little flustered that he had told me no. I had hoped he would come in, even if it wasn’t sexual and just for a drink.

“Bella... I want to, I really do...” he whispered, his eyes meeting mine. He sighed again heavily, shoving his hands into his pockets. “I was wondering... um... do you have any plans? I mean, for next Monday.”

“Oh, I have a date,” I blurted out, thinking about Charlie.

“Oh,” he appeared instantly deflated and more than a little upset by the whole idea. It took me a moment to realize how he took it, which was, of course, the wrong way. I hadn’t thought about how I worded it. “Fine. Okay.”

“Edward, wait…” I stopped him, placing my hand on his arm. “With my dad. I’m going to dinner with my father. I haven’t spent any time with him since my birthday, and I promised him a couple weeks ago that I’d treat him. Sorry, that didn’t come out right. I was just calling it what he does.”

The relief on his face was palpable. “You scared me there for a minute. That’s nice, though. I haven’t seen mine in a while myself,” he said awkwardly like he didn’t know where to send the conversation. That was my fault.

“Well, my Monday is full, but, you know, my Tuesday is wide open. I happen to have that day off… Would you like to go out then?”

“Are you asking me on a date, Ms. Swan?” Edward asked teasingly, pleased with himself. He brought his hands out of his pockets and placed them on my waist. I just nodded, a soft blush covering my cheeks. “I think we can arrange something. I’m buying dinner, though.”

“As long as I can get dessert,” I said before pushing myself upwards on my tiptoes so I could press a kiss onto his beautiful lips. He returned it eagerly, backing me up against my glass door. I brought my leg up to his hip, and Edward grabbed it with his large hand. His warm palm slid up my thigh up to my ass. The sensation that coursed through my system was electric, making me practically melt against him.

“Are you sure you don’t want that nightcap?” I inquired breathlessly as his lips traveled over my ear. When he finally pulled away, he gently tugged on my earring with his lips. The action made me want to rip his shirt off with my teeth.

“As I said, I have work in the morning. Maybe another time?” He offered smoothly as he pulled away. I just nodded, not trusting myself with words. He pressed a gentle kiss to my cheek. “Goodnight, Bella.”

I ended my night with a voluntarily cold shower, something that didn’t help to quell the hunger I was feeling. It was a desire that had nothing to do with food.