



Chapter Fifteen: In an Office

Another month passed. We took a second overnight trip to New York City, but this time I got us a room in a cute bed-and-breakfast outside Manhattan. Jasper took me to a play and a nice dinner, though. He tried his best to give me any romance he could when we got the time.

He came home on a Monday, not long after, and it was clear he was distracted as soon as he walked in the door. But it was a late evening, almost ten. Purple circles were under his bright blue eyes. Jasper plopped his briefcase onto the dresser, removing his gun holster as well without saying anything.

“Hey, baby,” I called from the bed where I was working on editing. It was the sixth time I had gone over the whole cop story, and I felt it was the best I could do on my own. I also spent part of the afternoon looking at stuff about Bree Tanner. But I did that a lot. I couldn’t stop thinking about her. Every evening, I hoped he would come home and tell me they found her. “How was your day?”

“Long,” he mumbled as he pulled off his tie. Leaning his head back, he rolled it from one side to the other. “Tomorrow, you’ll need to go with me up to the station.”

“Oh, um, okay. Why?” I questioned, closing my laptop to give him my full attention.

Jasper sighed softly, finally looking at me. He forced an awkward smile. "The DA's are ready to ask you some questions. They also want to prepare you for what will happen in the trial."

I took a deep breath, my chest tightening slightly. "Are they really going to call me to the stand?" I already knew the answer, but I still needed to say the words out loud. He nodded his head. "I didn't do anything."

"You gave us what we lacked. A connection. That's enough. The jury will want to know how and why you figured it out. If we don't, they will. Either way, you will be questioned."

I shrugged. "I'm a boring nerd who likes research and was trying to learn about my boyfriend's case. I don't know how many more ways I'll have to explain it."

"Which is exactly what they will want you to articulate, just probably not like that." He sat at the end of the bed, kicking off his shoes as he did so.

"As a writer, I often research, which I enjoy. In doing so for my latest novel, I came across a cold case that was eerily similar to the one my romantic partner was working on. I merely informed him of my interesting findings, and he made the connection himself because he is a brilliant doctor and detective," I spoke in my best professional voice as I crawled up behind him and wrapped my arms around his neck.

"Mm, yeah. That's a little better," he murmured, turning his head to the side to kiss my cheek lightly. "They know about your stories, though."

"Okay. I kind of figured," I laughed gently. "They're the FBI. Don't y'all know everything?"

"They'll ask you questions about it." I just shrugged. "I only want to warn you, it might be uncomfortable."

I squeezed his shoulders. "Is that what happened at work today?"

"Mmhmm," he grumbled quietly. "There isn't anything wrong with it. I don't want to hurt anyone. I just had to discuss that sometimes my companion and I engage in violent sex. And yes, we both enjoy it."

In answer, I made a face. "We're not that crazy. We're not even into weird BDSM stuff. We're only into the standard kinks."

He chuckled. "I agree." He leaned his head against my shoulder. "I had to explain a lot of terms to my boss I didn't want to. All while Sam was trying not to laugh like a child."

Grimacing, I ran my fingers through his hair. “He knows about us, though. He saw the toys when he brought your stuff back, I’m sure.”

Jasper nodded. “He does. And he thinks it’s the funniest thing because I’m so straight-laced, and you’re literally pure sugar.” I giggled at his words. “He’s been quietly giving me shit for months. He asked if you called me ‘Daddy’ today.”

I cackled. “Not yet,” I teased. “Oh, Daddy! I’ve been such a bad girl,” I began in his ear in the sweetest, most innocent voice I could. He laughed, turning so he could throw me onto the mattress. “Yay!”

“Well, you are my little girl,” he flirted, leaning forward to kiss my lips. I scratched my nails down the back of his neck. “You should have seen their faces when I had to explain that I enjoy being dominated, too.”

I rolled my eyes. “I think you’re just humoring me and enjoy a little pain.”

Smoothing his thumb over my bottom lip, he moved it over my cheek. “No. I love serving my Goddess. But only you.” He kissed my forehead. “I trust you.”

Closing my eyes, I grinned. He didn’t have to say anything else. I understood. “Honestly, I don’t care what they ask me. I’m not ashamed of what we do, and I’m not embarrassed.”

“Neither am I,” Jasper promised.

The next morning, I got dressed and had breakfast with him. We picked up a quick meal, eating in the parking lot as we watched the sun come up. I clipped his badge onto his blazer, his guns already in their holster underneath. I think he was more nervous than I was about the whole thing, but I couldn’t understand why. Perhaps he was just overprotective.

I signed in and was given a temporary badge. Jasper held my hand until we got to the office I needed to go to. Lightly, he kissed my forehead. “Text me when you get a break, and I’ll take you to lunch.”

“Do you think I’ll be here that long?” I asked in surprise.

“If not tomorrow, too.”

Somehow, I kept myself from pouting. “How many questions can they have?”

“All of them,” he responded before knocking on the door for me. A woman with light strawberry blond hair that I recognized from the bar answered the door with a smile. It was the

lady that Jasper described as boring. “Ms. Rachelle, nice to see you again. Have a nice day, darlin,” he said to me before kissing my cheek. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“Don’t worry, Dr. Hale. I’ll take good care of her,” she remarked with a chuckle. “Ms. Swan, thank you for coming in. Can I get you something to drink?”

Ducking my head, I smiled politely in return. “No, thanks.”

She led me into a room with a table and two sets of chairs. They set a camera up to record what we were doing. There was a stack of papers an inch thick waiting for us. “So, my name is Bryce Rachelle. To let you know a little about myself, I’m the Assistant District Attorney working on this case, one of many. I’ve been dealing with this since the beginning. I’ve even been on some others in Rochester, but I didn’t realize that at the time.”

“Oh, wow. The missing girl’s cases?” I inquired curiously. She nodded in an answer as we sat down at the table. She turned on the camera. “Did you work on the Bree Tanner case?” She nodded again, not saying anything as she shuffled some files around. “I wish I could ask you questions about that.”

“Why?” She looked up at me in surprise.

“I’m just so curious about what happened to her. It’s like a novel without an ending. And I want to write the conclusion, you know? And it would be nice to give her mom some peace. Can you imagine her pain?”

She smiled understandingly. “Yeah. I can’t... Poor woman.” Ms. Rachelle shook her head as if it pained her before giving me another smile. “I really can’t talk about that. But hopefully one day we’ll be able to complete the ending, to use your analogy. Anyway, let’s get started. We’ll begin with just asking you some basic questions.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Can you state your full name and date of birth for the record, please?”

That kind of interrogation took up most of our morning. At noon, Ms. Rachelle stood up from the table to turn off the camera. “We’ll take an hour for lunch.”

The first thing I did when I walked out of her office was send a message to my boyfriend. I realized then that I had a missed call from my publisher. I returned it while I waited for Jasper.

“Hello!” Eric began cheerfully.

“Hi, this is Isabella Swan.”

“Yes! Thank you for getting back to me so quickly. I just wanted to update you on a few things,” he said in a rush. I could hear traffic in the background. It definitely sounded like New York City.

“Okay,” I drawled.

“First, our editors have gone over your novel and have got some corrections for you to approve. It’s mainly typos, but we still want your say-so on everything. Also, would you like to do a dedication page?”

Jasper walked down the hall, smiling at me as he did. My answer was simple. “Yes. I’d love to do one. I have something in mind, actually.”

“Great. Just email it to me, and I’ll put it in there. Plus, I wanted to let you know I’ve got your advance ready. It should pop up in your account in the next day or two!” He informed me brightly, excited to let me know. “I don’t know how fast your bank is. But keep an eye out.”

“Oh, wow!” I stated for the second time in a day for a wildly different reason. “That’s awesome. Thank you.”

“Also, well, there was something else I wished to discuss with you. I’d rather do it in person, but since I have you right now.”

My boyfriend curiously looked at me. I mouthed the word ‘Yorkie,’ and he nodded in understanding. He leaned against the wall, giving me the time I needed. “Okay. What’s up?”

“I just finished reading everything on that flash drive you gave me, and I agree with your man. Your unnamed novel needs to be your next book. It is the perfect follow-up.”

“I’m so glad you liked it,” I whispered.

“Bella, I love it! So much, in fact, that I showed it to my bosses. We’d like to expand your contract. Another three books, twenty-five a piece advance upon completion of the editing process, same royalties as before.”

My hand flew to mouth, and I tried to keep myself from crying, but it was hard not to. A big fat tear rolled down my cheek. I had to close my eyes. Swiftly, I wiped it away. “Oh... that’s-” I let out a shaky breath. “Are you just interested in that one on the flash drive?”

He chuckled. “Oh, no. But we want that one next. Your teen novels are entertaining, but we think we’d like to publish those under a different name. Maybe don’t want to have murder and kid’s books linked.”

I laughed. "Yeah, that's understandable. That's what I do."

"Good. So it won't be a problem. That will be later, though. Next year. We'll split up your publishing to get the most coverage. Anyway, this is why I wanted to discuss this in person. There is a lot to go over. Questions on both sides, I'm sure. I just wanted to see if that's something you would be interested in."

"Yes, it is," I responded right away. Everything was going so well, and I couldn't turn down that much money.

"Great! So, I'm busy for the next couple of days, but I can head to Albany this weekend for a meeting unless you'd like to come to me."

I pushed off the wall and took Jasper's hand so we could walk towards the canteen. "Actually, I'm doing stuff for the Tracker trial. I don't know how long I'll be unavailable, so this weekend might be better."

"Oh! How fascinating! You'll have to tell me about it... Saturday?"

"Yeah, that works. I'll see you then."

"Until then," he declared before he hung up.

I turned off my phone and stuck it in my purse before I looked at my boyfriend. I flung myself at himself. "They want to sign me for another three books!"

His expression lit up. Jasper spun me around once, kissing me as he did. He didn't care that we were in the middle of the FBI office. "YES! I am so proud of you! I told you!"

"They want to buy your book next. It's so good because of you. Thank you for helping me so much," I confessed as I buried my face in his neck.

"You really need to name that," he chuckled happily.

"Ugh, it's the hardest part. You do it."

Jasper laughed a little louder. "I'll think about it." Finally, he put me down to my feet. "Um..." He scratched the back of his head, almost timidly. "So, ready to have some government food?"

"How bad is it?"

“Not terrible. Better than hospital fare. They’ve got a decent pie. No good cakes, though.”

I pretended to clutch my pearls. “For shame! We should get some tonight. And some champagne to celebrate. I’m buying.”

“We’ll definitely celebrate,” he agreed. “Why don’t I take you out? We hardly ever go anywhere.”

“Oh, Daddy’s gonna take me out to-” Jasper poked my rib, making me dissolve into giggles. “You want to go out and get cheese fries and drinks?”

“I’ll take you anywhere, and you wanna go to a cop bar?” he questioned with a disappointed sigh. He would have liked a four-star restaurant better. I grinned at him innocently. “Yeah, okay. You know how much I like cheese fries.”

After our quick lunch, he walked me back to the DA’s office. She was waiting for me with the door open at her desk with a sandwich. Ms. Rachelle smiled at me pleasantly.

“Right on time,” she beamed. She dusted her hands off and put her food away.

“I’ll see you this evening. I’ll sneak out when you’re done, and we’ll go celebrate,” he whispered before giving me a quick kiss on the lips. He looked at the attorney. “Have a good day, ladies.”

“You too, Dr. Hale!” She called. “He seems like a great boyfriend,” she said to me more softly after I shut the door behind me.

“The best I’ve ever had.”

We walked back into the room with the camera, and she turned it on. She sat down in front of me, flipping his hair over her shoulder as she looked at her notes. “Okay. So I would like to talk to you now about your career.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“It seems you distribute a lot of work under many names.”

“I do.”

She flipped a page and picked up a pen. “I’d like to discuss your work published under the pseudonym ‘Maria Bell.’ This is a name you self-publish under, correct?” The woman looked at me seriously.

Quickly, I nodded. "Yes, it is."

"Can you describe the nature of the novels printed under this name?" She wrote something down and crossed out another before looking up at me expectantly.

"Erotic romance," I stated plainly.

The DA scribbled something else down. "And how many of these books have you written?"

"Uh..." I drew out and laughed. "I'm not honestly sure. A lot. I also publish short stories and novellas on my website." I smiled at her. "I'm sorry. I can get a list and give you a definite answer tomorrow. I didn't realize this would be a question. Would you like one of all of my self-published works?" I offered. I wanted to be as helpful as possible.

She returned my smile. "Yes, please. Thank you. Um, I'd like to talk more about the genre in which you describe as 'erotic romance.' Some stories involve elements of bondage and other sexual acts that some may consider 'violent.' Would you agree with this statement?"

I straightened up in my chair, holding my chin high as I did. "Yes, I would. I agree some may deem it violent. That's because they don't understand what's going on between two consenting adults, though."