



Chapter Fifteen: In the Engine

Unsurprisingly, it took a little while to put a check that large into the bank. When Jasper saw the exact balances in my checking and savings, his eyes got gigantic. I had reached eight figures in about four months. And it was still coming, every new paycheck more than the last.

“We need to get you a financial advisor and an accountant, too,” he stated as he waved a hand towards the screen once the woman helping us got up to do something. “I’m sure Dad could probably help you with that,” he whispered while we sat in one of the cubicles. It was a quiet Tuesday, though. No one was paying attention to us.

She returned, a big smile on her face. “I’m sorry this is taking so long. We just need to make a call. It’ll only be a few more moments.”

“We’re in no rush,” I promised with a reassuring grin.

Several minutes later, the manager, an old fat white man with no hair, came out with her following behind. She was holding a receipt and some papers for me to sign.

“Mrs. Hale, is there anything else you’d like us to help you with today?” He said eagerly after we finished up with the rest of the paperwork. It only took a couple of signatures. “Any services?”

"I'd like to add my husband to my account, get him a card, and order new checks, too, please."

"Bella," Jasper remarked in surprise. His eyes were wide as he looked down at his lap.

"What? What is mine is yours. It's your money now too. You helped me."

He quickly shook his head. "No, it's not. That is yours. You worked very hard for it. I did nothing."

I rolled my eyes. "You know we didn't sign a prenup, right?" He blinked for a couple of seconds, his mouth hanging open. "So, it's yours too."

The poor woman didn't know what to say. "We just need your ID and your Social Security number to get that started," the manager who was still supervising our interaction interrupted our minor spat. I glared at Jasper until he huffed and pulled out his wallet. She took it from him slowly. "We'll get that set up. Would you like a drink while you wait?"

"No, thank you," I said politely. They left us alone again.

"We need to put you on my account then, too," he stated quickly in a low tone.

Nodding, I adjusted my sweater. "That's fine. I won't ever use it, of course. But it might be wise to have me on it, anyway. Oh, we should start a retirement account together," I replied unbothered. "Eh, I don't know if we need it, but that's what the accountant is for."

"We're getting a postnup," he added.

"Nah," I laughed. "We're not getting divorced, and if I ever do anything to piss you off enough to leave me, I want you to take half of everything. None of it will matter without you. I don't think I could live without you at this point, anyway. I'd die of a broken heart. It would be worse than that month."

"Yes, exactly. That month. What if I screw up, hm?" He countered. Rolling my eyes again, I shook my head. "Isabella- Bella, be smart. I'm trying to protect you."

"No," I declared. He puffed again, his arms crossed over his chest. "Okay, you know what? We'll get one, but only if it says you'll get seventy-five percent of everything."

Jasper scoffed at my dramatics, smirking as he looked out the window. "I'm somewhere between totally annoyed and overjoyed that you feel so strongly about me."

“Are you just now realizing that I like you?” I teased. “Jeez, honey. I thought I was coming on pretty strong.”

Laughing, he took my hand before giving it a gentle squeeze. “At least think about it.”

“Nope,” I repeated, smiling at him. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” he muttered like he was mad at me, but he wasn’t, really. He didn’t understand why I wouldn’t do it, especially if we weren’t ever getting divorced, but it was more than that. I knew I didn’t need that piece of paper. It was an act of submission I couldn’t even voice, though he wouldn’t see it that way. I was in every way at his mercy, and I trusted him with my whole heart to do what was right for us.

The main lot Jasper was talking about just wasn’t one, but several connecting over a literal mile. Hale/McCarty was above almost every kind of vehicle you could think of, each with their own massive mechanic’s bay. They even owned a tire shop, an oil change, a gas station, and the detailing place mixed among them. Rose’s shop was behind one of the biggest buildings, beside one that sold motorcycles exclusively. Fantastic vintage vehicles sat in the parking lot, waiting to be serviced.

He led the way since I had no idea where I was going. All the ladies at the front desk smiled at us as we went. They sent out a weekly newsletter, and they often spoke about what was happening in the family. My father-in-law even shared the news about my books and claimed that everyone loved it. He knocked on the door with ‘Justin Hale’ on a plaque. There were only two offices on the floor we were on, which was the third.

Emmett opened the door for us. He was in pressed slacks and a blue polo shirt. McCarty was sewn onto the breast. “Yo! There’s my favorite sister.” He picked me up to give me a tight hug. It made me giggle as my feet dragged the ground. “It’s so fun to shop when it’s family. It’s so much easier. I can just tell you what’s shit.”

“Oh, thank you. That’s helpful,” I laughed.

His dad chuckled. “So, what are you thinking about getting?”

My brother-in-law put me down. “Mm, I don’t know, honestly. A car, I think. Four-door. I need a bigger backseat, so if I want to take my friends out, I can. But I definitely don’t want a truck or an SUV. Preferably a hybrid.” Then I shrugged because that’s all I really had.

“That’s a very good start,” he reassured me as he gave me a quick hug. “And what are you looking to spend?”

We walked towards the elevators after he locked up his office. “Well, the check from my insurance was just under eight hundred thousand, but I am not spending all that on a vehicle. I’d like to keep it under a hundred thousand for sure. I don’t know how much environmentally friendly cars are.”

“They’re definitely in that range.”

“If you wanted two-door, I have a hybrid Porsche and a Tesla about that. But I’m guessing you mean that with all the bells and whistles,” Emmett added. “That Tesla would just be standard, but it’s still nice. It’s at the very upper end of your scale.”

I nodded. “And I was thinking about getting a custom paint job, too. But I don’t know how much that is. Not that price is a real issue.”

“What color do you want?” Justin continued. He was making a mental list for me. “We can have that done here, too.”

“I’d have to see my options, but a purple maybe. Something iridescent. Not like sparkly, but- I don’t know how to explain it. I just like that sheen.” He nodded his head as if he understood my babbling. I felt my cheeks blush.

“Girl, we can hook you up,” my brother-in-law promised in a loud voice. “You sure you don’t want another super nice Jag, though? That beast was sexy.”

I laughed. “No. It was cursed. Now it’s time to get something a little more humble and practical. I want this to last me at least a decade, and I intend to get my money’s worth. I don’t know how you talked Eric into all of that.”

“It wasn’t his money, so it makes it easier,” he chuckled. “We gave him a good deal, too. I actually wondered what it was appraised at. We tricked it out in every way possible.”

“And we’ll have the same done to your new one, whatever you pick.” He shook his head. “It is such a shame,” my father-in-law sighed. “Have you found out anything about it?”

Jasper shook his too, pursing his lips as his arms crossed over his chest. “No. We can’t get an unobstructed view of their face, and it’s definitely not one of our neighbors. And none of them have kids. I’m positive it’s a short woman, but that’s not much to go on. It’s got to be one of the groupies close to him or at the trial.”

“Eh, at least it’s a little chick,” Emmett offered. He winked at one of the old secretaries as we walked past her desk. She grinned at him.

“A small female with a gun can kill as many people as a man. It’s one of those great equalizers. I won’t let my guard down because of it. It just makes me more paranoid of everyone now.”

“I think I could take her,” I joked to ease his tension. He rolled his eyes. “What? I hit hard.”

“I know you do, darlin,” he cooed at me playfully. It was sarcastic. I pushed him gently, making him laugh. “You do, but I don’t think that would matter. You’d be surprised how strong crazy is.”

“Sometimes, a good smack just solves problems,” I declared. “I’m bigger. Maybe if I rattled her brains, it would make her right again. Because we all know she ain’t now.”

Justin turned his head to look over his shoulder at me. “I agree with you. Whoever this person is, they need a swift kick in the seat of their pants.”

Snorting, I bit my lip to keep in my laughter. “I was thinking more like a two-by-four to the back of the skull, but sure. Kicking asses works, too.”

“I’ll keep my gun, thanks,” my husband mumbled anxiously. “I’ll have to get a new handgun once I turn in my service weapons. I should get you a taser.”

“But I’d tase myself!” I laughed. “You keep the weaponry. I’ll stick to my words. You have the training. Actually, you are my weapon.” He rolled his eyes dramatically.

We went around the different lots for two hours in the back of a fancy black golf cart. I saw features in some of them I liked, but I was waiting for one to speak to me. We were looking at a BMW when I was hit by a stomach cramp. It made me wince, sulking at the gurgling that followed it. I leaned against the car to catch my breath.

Jasper noticed. “What’s the matter?”

I waved him off. “Ugh, I’m just getting really hungry, and it’s making my tummy upset,” I pouted. “I’ll be fine.”

He looked at his watch. “Well, let’s see. You only ate a banana and had a cup of coffee this morning... six hours ago?”

“I wasn’t hungry then!” I complained.

Emmett grinned. “Let’s go get Rosie and get some lunch. Want cheesecake? There’s a Cheesecake Factory around here.”

Shrugging in response, I glanced at Jasper. "Sounds good. I'm not picky."

Everyone lit up when we walked into the shop, greeting us loudly over the noises of the machines grinding. I recognized some of them from her birthday party. The bay doors were open, so we could see inside. Rosalie was in a blue jumpsuit, her entire body inside the engine of a truck from maybe the forties. Only her butt was hanging out, one leg higher than the other. She had grease all over them.

Her husband slowly snuck up behind her. "HEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!" He shouted at her. It made her jump and smack her head into the hood with a loud thud. She instantly looked furious. "Oops! Shit! Are you okay?"

She whacked him several times about the chest. "How many times have I told you not to do that to me?!" Then my sister-in-law noticed me. It immediately changed her mood. "Hey! There you are! How's the car shopping going?"

"I think I need your help," I admitted. The men were more about facts I didn't care about, and I needed a female opinion. "We were going to go to lunch. Would you like to join us?"

"Yes! Let me go take this off and wash up. I'll be right out." She sent her husband a nasty look before she turned to do that. "I'll get you later." She pointed two fingers at her eyes and then one squarely at his nose. He looked terrified. It was a genuine threat.

Justin was laughing to himself as he walked back out of the bay. "You know better."

"I do, but I'm stupid, though," he said with a southern drawl, then blew out a raspberry from his thick lips. "One day, she's going to sew me up in the sheets and beat me with a frying pan."

"Do you own a frying pan?" Jasper dryly asked.

"Ha, I don't know," he smirked. "But I bet she doesn't know either."

The place was busy for lunch, so we had to wait. Since they were the bosses, they could take as long as they wanted to, though. We chatted pleasantly about what I preferred in a vehicle the entire time. After about fifteen minutes, Rose pushed herself off the wall. It seemed like a sudden surprise, her eyes getting bigger. "I'm going to the bathroom."

"I'll go with you," I responded, grabbing my purse.

I only had to pee and wash my hands. It took less than a minute. I was in and out before Rosalie wiggled her skin tight blue jeans to her ankles.

There was a sharp intake of breath. “Dammit,” she whimpered.

“What’s the matter?”

“Oh... Um, I just started my period.”

I wrinkled my nose. That would explain the suddenness. “Oh, that sucks. I’m sorry, I don’t think I have anything on me.” Quickly, I looked in my bag to check. “I haven’t had one in months. I’ve been on the shot for over a year now.”

“No, I have something.” I heard the wrapper coming undone after she fished it from her purse. It was just a couple of moments later that she came out. Her eyes were red, and there were tears sliding down her cheeks. She was trying to pretend they weren’t there.

Touching her arm, I took a step closer. “Are you okay?”

She drew in a ragged, painful breath. “Yeah.”

“I do have some aspirin if you’re hurting that bad,” I offered. But she shook her head. She washed her hands. “What’s going on?”

She looked at her reflection for a moment. Her nose was pink, and snot was trying to come out of one nostril. She swiped it away. “I was just... hoping to not start, you know?” She smoothed her lips together as she soaked a towel and wiped her eyes. “I was a few days late this time, and I got my hopes up, which is stupid.”

Gently, I rubbed her back. “I’m sorry. You’re young, though. You’ve got plenty of time.”

“We’ve been trying for a literal decade.” She held onto the edge of the sink. “It’s not going to happen. Even with the shots and the pills and the fucking doctors.” She began to cry openly, bringing her fists up to her forehead. “I want a baby so damn bad. I can feel them in my arms when I dream about them every night. I want to look into his little face and kiss his nose,” she wept.

Bringing her into my arms, I held her to my chest. She rested her head on my shoulder as she let it out. Soothingly, I caressed comforting circles over her spine. “Okay. So, there are other options. If you can’t get pregnant yourself, maybe we can get some of your eggs, and I can be your surrogate. That way, it’ll be yours, even if you can’t carry it to term yourself.”

Rosalie pulled back in shock to look at me. “You would do that for us?”

“Yes, of course! I want to be an aunt, too! We were thinking in a few years we’d start trying ourselves. I can practice being pregnant.” I shrugged as if it was nothing. There were very few people in the world I would do this for, but she was at the top of the list.

Laughing, she rubbed her eyes. “We’ve actually been talking about that or adoption. I really do want a baby that looks like Emmett, though. I want a boy. With those dimples and curly hair. God, what would Jasper say about that?”

Again, I shrugged. “He’d understand why I want to help my sister, even if he doesn’t want his brother-in-law to knock me up.”

Rose cackled, giving me the reaction I wanted. Her arms wrapped tightly around my neck. “I love you. I don’t know if I’ll take you up on it. I need to try a little longer, but thank you so much for offering. You honestly don’t know what it means to me.”