

Chapter Sixteen

Edward requested I grill these gigantic nearly two-inch-thick steaks for dinner, so I really didn't have much to do when I arrived at his house the following Wednesday. I would make a twice baked potato casserole to go with them, along with some roasted veggies, but I wouldn't have to start them for at least an hour.

I even had a dessert for us, a pint of homemade ice cream to share, which I made at my place the day before. It was a thick, rich dark chocolate fudge. It wasn't good for my hips, but it sure tasted great.

Puttering around for a little while, I thought of what I needed to do. Finally, I decided to come up with a menu for the next couple of weeks, along with a grocery list. I would have to go shopping again soon. I wasn't certain if Edward would want to go back or not, but either way, it had to be done.

I pulled out my Mac and sat down at the kitchen island after getting myself a glass of water to nurse. When I brought up my screen, an email warning flashed at the bottom. I clicked on it right away just to make the annoying 'shake' stop.

It was from Edward's assistant, and it was entitled, 'First paycheck.' I tapped on it, reading its simple message.

"Hi! I hope your day is going well. Your check should be deposited today. Please check with your bank to make sure it's right, and if there are any problems, let me know. ~Angela."

"Yay," I said to myself quietly, typing in the address to my banking website in the search bar. It took it's sweet time to load, and I made a mental note to look at his internet connection later. I figured Edward would have the fastest speed around, and I knew my computer was just fine, so it wasn't me.

The cup of water slipped from my fingers and dropped to the floor with a loud crack. The glass shattered and skittered in every single direction.

"No way," I gasped, clicking on my checking to look at the details. It stated that I had over two thousand dollars. "No way," I repeated.

“No way what?” Edward’s familiar voice questioned as he came into the kitchen. He stopped as soon as his shoe crunched some glass. “What happened here?”

“I just dropped a cup,” I answered, hopping up from my stool. “What are you doing home?”

“My meeting got canceled, so I shoved off a little early. Are you okay?” He looked around like he was searching around for the reason I did.

“Yeah,” I mumbled, going into the pantry to get a broom to sweep the entire kitchen floor. I knew how Edward loved to walk around barefoot, and I didn’t want him to hurt himself.

“You don’t look it,” he countered as he removed his jacket and tie. Then he bent down to pick up some larger pieces.

“I... um... I think my check is wrong,” I blushed, embarrassed. “I was just looking at my bank because I got my first one today, and it’s too much.” I pointed at the computer.

“What?” he blurted out in annoyance, throwing them into the trash before going to wash his hands. “May I?”

“Go ahead,” I breathed, sweeping the wet fragments into a little pile. I would also have to mop the floor.

He sat down at the island, adjusting the screen so he could look at it better. “Oh, I see the problem. Yeah, I get why you’re confused. Your 410K won’t start coming out until the beginning of November. You still wanted two hundred taken out of each check for that, right?”

“Um, yes, but... wow. Edward, that’s a lot of money. That’s more than what I made in a month when I was on unemployment. And I’m supposed to get paid nearly this much a week?” I exclaimed, coming over to him after I dumped the glass into the trash can. “Are you sure?”

“You didn’t do the math, did you?” He raised an eyebrow in my direction. I blushed slightly and shook my head slowly in embarrassment.

“I guess not. I just never expected... that.”

“Well, a salary of one-hundred-thousand a year is a little less than two thousand a week. Minus taxes, so around seventeen hundred. Fifteen when your 401k comes out. Is that not acceptable?” He inquired, a small frown morphing his soft lips.

“That’s too much,” I argued.

"It's what we settled upon." He shut my computer with a decisive click.

"I feel guilty," I told him quietly. He sighed heavily and placed his fingers underneath my chin so I would look into his eyes. "I don't want to use you."

"I'll have no more of this. It's what we agreed. That won't change now. So, don't. I'm the one that offered that amount. Honestly, you could have asked for higher, and I would have given it to you. So, no more talk about this. It is what it is, and you've already signed the contract."

"Okay," I breathed, wanting to change the subject. "I need to mop the floor to get the water up."

"I'll get the maid." He got up from the stool and picked up his jacket and tie. "I'll go find her when I go change. Are we still having steaks for dinner?"

"Yes." For the first time, I felt like I was an employee, and I didn't like it at all.

When Edward left the room, I went over to the refrigerator to retrieve the meat. Traitorous tears welled up at the corner of my eyes, and I wasn't sure why. I sniffled quietly, trying to rub them away. Snatching up the potatoes, I got the cutting board and knife.

"Stop it," I mumbled to myself, leaning against the counter with both hands keeping me up against the edge. I took in a deep, snotty breath through my nose and shook my head, but it didn't keep the tears from leaking down my cheeks. "Dammit." I ran a hand over my red hot skin, feeling frustrated. I didn't know why I was so upset or even worse, why I was crying.

"Bella?" Edward came up behind me in the kitchen. I hadn't even heard him come in. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I murmured, twisting my face away quickly as I wiped it again. "I'm going to get dinner started."

"No, you're not. You're going to talk to me," he declared, taking the knife from my grip and putting it out of my reach before turning me around so I could look at him. But I couldn't. I glanced away, ashamed. "Why are you crying?"

Hearing the question out loud opened the floodgates. "I don't know," I wailed, leaning my face against his chest. My fingers gripped the sides of his shirt, trying to keep myself up. "I don't know," I repeated against his pec.

"Shh..." Edward muttered into my hair, his cheek resting against the top of my head. "It'll be okay. Tell me what to do to make it better."

"I don't know," I admitted for the third time in a soft moan.

"Pardon me," the maid mumbled from the doorway of the room. "The floor?"

"Uh... yeah, one minute," Edward grumbled. "Come on. Let's go talk in the den."

He put his arm around me supportively, like he was worried the ground would drop from underneath me at any moment. It made me feel all that much more embarrassed because it wasn't that bad, which caused me to cry harder.

"What is this about?" He turned me towards him with his hands on my shoulders as soon as we were in his geek room. "Did I say something wrong? If I did, I'm so sorry."

Shaking my head, I rubbed my sleeved hand across my nose. "No. I don't know why I am. I'm sorry."

"Why are you apologizing?" He touched my forehead like he was checking for a fever.

"For being bat shit crazy."

He scoffed and tenderly placed his palms on either side of my face. "You aren't. What's wrong?"

A cramp tugged at my right side from crying, and I leaned against him for much-needed support. "I just don't feel very well. Give me a minute, and I'll be okay."

"Let's go sit down." He led me over to the couch and wrapped both of his arms around me.

I felt tired suddenly, my face buried in his neck. Edward's body was warm and soothing, exactly what I needed. When finally all the tears stopped, and I had calmed my crazy moment down, I pulled away. "I'll go start dinner now."

"No, ma'am. You're not. We'll go out. Or I can order a pizza."

"It's part of the reason you're paying me." I tried to get off the couch, but he grabbed my hand and tugged me down to him. "Edward, I already feel like I'm stealing from you. Let me cook."

"Is that what this is about?"

“No. Maybe. I don’t know,” I told him truthfully. I looked away from him, but he was having none of it. Taking me by surprise, he kissed me hard. Moaning, I leaned into his passion. His perfectly straight nose brushed against mine, my top lip between his.

“Thank you,” he breathed against my mouth.

“Why?” I asked. “What for?”

“For being you,” he said, pecking my bottom lip. “How about we make dinner together?”

“No.” I shook my head.

“I want to,” Edward begged softly. “Come on, Bella. Show me how to cook.”

“Okay,” I whispered, gazing into his big green eyes. “But you’re not touching those steaks. I won’t let you ruin a hundred dollars worth of meat. They’re too beautiful for that.”

“Wow,” he laughed at my sudden outburst. “That’s harsh. Smart, but harsh.”

I didn’t feel like worrying about the grill, or the casserole, so I pulled out a skillet while he boiled some corn. It was one thing I was sure he couldn’t screw up. I wasn’t really in the teaching mood.

I heated the pan so it was sizzling before just salting the steaks. I threw them into it with a violent hiss, along with an entire knob of Irish butter.

“Wow,” he muttered as he watched from behind. I quickly spooned the melted sauce over both pieces. “That’s a lot of butter.”

“It’ll taste good,” I assured him.

“Of that, I have no doubt. I’ll go set the table.”

“Get the salad out, too,” I called to him. “How do you like your steak cooked?”

“I want the cow to have a conversation with me before I eat it,” he said as he walked out of the kitchen with a chuckle. “Mooooo...” Edward’s animal noise came echoing from the dining room. Laughing to myself, I rolled my eyes.

“Rare it is,” I responded, flipping over both steaks. “Pink and cold in the center, or warm?”

"Mmm... warm," he stated, coming back for the bowl of salad in the fridge along with the dressings he knew I liked. "Some crusty bread sounds good, don't you think?"

"Got to have something for all the juices," I smirked.

"Yum, blood," he commented dryly.

"It's not blood that comes from a rare steak, it's-" I stopped myself from explaining. "I'm a nerd." I shook my head at myself. "I shouldn't know these things."

"I like that you are." Edward's hand brushed against my spine. As he did, a sharp pain poked me in the side. I hissed loudly, bending over with the intense feeling. "What's wrong?" He asked quickly.

"Cramp," I muttered. "I'm fine. It just surprised me. It's gone now. I guess from stressing out like that earlier."

He gave me a small understanding smile, rubbing my back again gently. "Want me to get you a glass of wine?"

"Red, please."

After dinner, he helped me do the dishes because I refused to leave them for the maid to wash in the morning. We shared the pint of ice cream in his game room. He chose a television show for us to watch since I wasn't in the mood to pick. I could tell he didn't like the fact I was quiet, but the words were just not there for me to give him. About halfway into the hour-long program, I fell asleep.

I wasn't sure exactly how long I slept, but I felt Edward's hand gently squeezing my arm. I was warm and uncomfortable, my head and back aching slightly. I put my forearm over my face, the light painful.

"Come, my love. Get up. I'll take you home," his heavenly voice called to me.

"No, you don't have to," I mumbled as I rubbed my eyes roughly.

"I'm not putting you in the car alone when you're like this."

"I'm fine," I complained as I finally sat up, resting my elbows on my knees as I scrubbed my face hard.

“No, you’re not. You kept tossing in your sleep. Let’s get you home and into a real bed.” Edward gingerly stroked my shoulder. I nodded after a moment, standing up with a loud pop coming from my spine.

When I imagined falling asleep on his couch before, I figured it would be a lot more comfortable.

He grimaced at the sound, but he didn’t say anything. Instead, he just held my hand as we walked to his car. He picked the Camero I had driven before, opening the passenger side door and making sure I was completely buckled up before he got in. I could feel myself drooping, my eyes closing with the weight of the world on them.

When it came to life, soft classical music filled the space. It made my desire to sleep impossible to resist, and I felt myself drop back again into a dreamless rest.

“Isabella, we’re here,” he whispered in my ear just a second later as he pressed a kiss to my neck. I hummed in pleasure, bringing my hand up to the back of his head, all the while refusing to open my eyes. My face lolled to the side, giving him more access. I heard, not saw, his seat belt come undone as he continued to peck and suck on my throat lovingly.

“That feels amazing,” I breathed. “Don’t stop.”

“We should get you inside,” he whispered as his nose brushed against my earlobe.

“Take me inside,” I mumbled. “I want you.”

He sighed heavily as he pulled away. “Bella, come on. Let’s get you to bed.”

“Yay,” I smirked to myself, finally opening my eyes. Edward was already out of the car and pulling my door open. He helped me to my feet, grabbing my purse I had almost forgotten. He tugged my keys from it, unlocking the front door after two tries.

Wordlessly, he led me to my room. I sat down on the mattress, kicking off my shoes before I fell back against the pillows. There was a small look of pain in Edward’s eyes, and I frowned, wishing it away. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t want to be tempted by you right now. You’re obviously not feeling well, but I am. And I feel horrible about it.”

Shaking my head the entire time he spoke, my frown grew deeper. “Lay down with me?”

“Bella-”

“Hold me,” I finally whimpered. I felt as if I was pleading with him, and it was pathetic, but I didn’t care. It’s exactly what I needed. “Just for a little while.”

He removed his leather jacket, laying it on my dresser before pushing off his shoes with the tip of each foot. I moved my way under the covers, the softness of my bed calling me back to sleep. Before I could drift off, I lifted the sheets for Edward. He slipped underneath them, adjusting them around us carefully. I snuggled against him, resting my cheek against his chest. I could hear his heart beating, lulling me into a deep and peaceful slumber.