



## **Chapter Sixteen:** **A Couple More Steps**

It took me two weeks to pick out what I wanted. My sister-in-law was far more helpful than all the men combined. I eventually went with a car that was custom built for me, picking out each element until it was just so. It would take about a month to get to me from the factory, and then Rosalie would make some modifications of her own as well as getting a new flashy paint job. I was excited and pleased that it all came in under seventy-five thousand. It had every safety feature and would be the most comfortable ride ever while looking more my style. It was nice, but it didn't stand out.

Once I paid it off in full, I donated the rest of the insurance money to the NAACP anonymously in Bree Tanner's honor. I felt I finally ran out of new information about her, and I knew Jasper was doing his own quiet work without talking about it. It wasn't like he could do anything while he was still on a leave of absence, though. I didn't know what else to do.

I knew without her, I wouldn't have the world I was living in. It made me feel guilty I was somehow benefiting from her death. It wasn't my intention in the least. I didn't want it like that, and it wasn't how I figured my career would start. If I couldn't thank her, even if it wasn't on purpose, I would send something good out into the cosmos. If they had taken her seriously

when it first happened, Royce wouldn't have killed so many others. They didn't listen because of her skin color, though. That wasn't a universe I longed to live in.

As Valentine's Day approached, Jasper and I began to plan. We knew we wanted to do a scene, and there was no way we were going to a restaurant the week of the holiday. The problem was we couldn't determine who would be in charge.

So, we decided the old-fashioned way- with rock, paper, scissors.

He had such a cocky smile when he won. It wasn't like there would be any losers in this game, though. That's why we were having a hard time choosing. "Mm, I think I'll have you serve me a nice home-cooked meal," he began playfully as he adjusted his sleeves at his wrists. "And you'll be wearing something special the entire evening."

"Color me surprised," I joked. "Do you have something in mind?"

Nodding, he smirked a little. "You'll see, darlin."

Luckily, he didn't force me to cook in pleather. Jasper allowed me to spend the afternoon in the kitchen unbothered while he worked on things in the bedroom for later. As it got closer to dark, he leaned against the doorway quietly to watch me work with his arms crossed. He was wearing a tight black shirt stretched over his muscled chest, a pair of snug Wranglers, and my favorite soft brown leather belt. "How much longer does that have?"

"Ten minutes," I replied as I wiped off the countertop. I was keeping everything tidy. It would cook just a couple more moments before resting, then plating. Everything was going to be perfect.

"When you're done, go get changed before you serve me. There is something waiting for you on the bed. Put your hair up and no makeup."

"Yes, sir."

Grinning, he curled his finger to beckon me closer. When I came to him, he gave me a deep kiss. He pulled me to his chest with his hand on the small of my back. "I'm going to have so much fun with you tonight." He rubbed his nose against mine.

Breathless and horny, my husband left me to finish up our meal.

I set the table before I went into our room. Inside, it was dim, but there were flameless candles everywhere as well as roses. In the center was a sturdy wooden chair with my favorite wand tied in a very certain position. It left nothing to the imagination.

“Good god, I’m going to make a mess,” I complained to myself as I looked at it.

Moving to our bed, I went to see what he had left for me. In the middle were thigh-high fishnet stockings in white and a baby blue latex mini dress that would barely cover my ass. I picked it up and laughed. There was nothing else.

I brushed my teeth and braided my hair, putting on my outfit as quickly as I could. It was a feat of determination. I was as squeezed in as I could be, my breasts popping out so much that my nipples were a sneeze away from bursting free.

When I came down the stairs, Jasper was waiting for me with my new fancy collar in his hands. His smile grew wide as his cheeks went scarlet. His tongue darted out to moisten his lips as his eyes moved over my body, over and over again. A bulge was visible through his jeans.

“Damn,” he sighed. “Turn around and let me see the back.” When I did, he rubbed his hand over my ass and gave it a good smack. It sounded like a cheap plastic kids drum. It made him chuckle to himself. “Hell yeah.”

He turned me around, taking a step closer so he could lift my chin. We gazed into each other’s eyes for a long moment. There was nothing but love in them. “Are you ready to start the scene for real, Isabella?”

“Yes, sir,” I grinned.

Slowly, he put my collar into place around my neck. It was much tighter to my throat than my necklace. My lock and key sat between my high breasts. Jasper ran his finger over the links before peeking at me from underneath his thick eyelashes. “If dinner didn’t smell so delicious, I would eat you first.”

I giggled as I blushed. “I’d suggest enjoying the food first. It’s really good. And I even have a martini waiting for you, sir. With extra olives and everything.”

“Well, we don’t want that to get warm, at least,” he teased, taking my hand. Jasper made sure I walked ahead of him so he could look at my ass. “Go get it ready for us, darlin.” He swatted it again.

Bringing the covered plate to the table first, he was already sitting down. I left his drink in the freezer to keep it icy cold. I didn’t like how it tasted, but hopefully, he did. There was also a bottle of wine for us to share. A chocolate cake with fresh strawberries was waiting on the island for dessert.

I lifted the dome, and steam billowed from the meal. Underneath was a perfect filet mignon on a bed of pommes aligot and baked garlic sugar snap peas, drizzled with thick brown

mushroom gravy. Beside it was four of the biggest scallops I had ever seen. They had been seared in butter and finished in the oven.

“Your dinner, sir.”

He genuinely gasped. “Oh, my god. You have somehow outdone yourself again, Isabella,” he cooed as his hand rubbed my ass. “You are always so good to me.” He pulled up the back of my dress over it, exposing my bare skin. “Come, have a seat and enjoy this incredible feast with me.”

He was so hard against my thighs. First, he took a sip of his drink and hummed in pleasure. His eyes fluttered closed as his chin tilted back. I had never made one for him before. “Perfect.”

“There is plenty to make you more, too, sir,” I promised. “I even have more glasses in the freezer chilling.”

“Don’t you just think of everything,” he purred as his hand moved between my legs to spread them a little. “Such a good girl.”

Dinner felt like an hour of foreplay. He only touched my ass and thighs, but it was also filled with tender kisses and dirty promises.

When we were done, he began to lead me to our room before stopping in the living room. I realized there was a riding crop on the table. He was prepared, too. “Get on your hands and knees.” I did so instantly. The dress had been pulled back down, but it still exposed so much. He walked around me to get a better look. He moved the bit between my thighs. “That’s exactly what I wanted to see. So wet already. I plan to test how far I can take it tonight. I want to see how many orgasms you can give me.” He smacked my ass with it. “They’re mine, and you won’t hold back. Now crawl to our bedroom.”

I got about as far as the stairs before I looked at them and then him. I sat back on my bottom. “Um... yellow? I don’t think I can do it.”

He laughed in surprise. “Why?”

“I just don’t...” I smirked. “And I don’t wanna.”

“Get your ass upstairs,” he ordered. I stood up. “On your knees, Isabella.”

“Ha, no. Red. I’m walking,” I said with a challenging giggle. “I’m not going to bust my nose because you want to see me struggle up the stairs in this too tight thing.”

Laughing loudly, he was a little tipsy, and it showed on his features. "Fine." He shook his head, playfully swatting my ass. It wasn't a punishment. He pointed with the riding crop. "Go, but know that you're not making things easier on yourself."

"Good. I don't want them to be easy," I sassed and took the first step.

Someone knocked on the door as soon as it touched.

"No!" He growled at it, nearly shouting the word. I dashed up the stairs to the landing where no one could see me. Jasper threw the crop on the couch before stomping to it. He looked through the window. His head fell back. "Noooo," he whined. He swung it open. "What the hell do you want?"

Edward was on the other side. I realized his face was bright red and stained with tears. I took a couple of steps down to get a better look. He was shaking, either with his emotions or the cold. "Uh, I'm sorry to be disturbing you—"

"No, you're not," he interrupted. "Why are you here? Why are you bothering us? Don't you have a very beautiful girlfriend you should be with right now?"

"No, I don't," he sniffled. His hand roughly rubbed over his mouth. "Can I talk to Bella? Is she here?"

Jasper looked offended that he would even ask. "Why?" He took in a deep breath, sniffing the air. He cocked his head to the side. "Are you drunk?"

"Yeah, actually. I am. Very. Very," he slurred.

He leaned through the door to look at the driveway. "And you drove here? Seriously? What the fuck is wrong with you?"

His eyes were half-lidded. "I just need to talk to Bella for a minute, then I'll go."

"What could you possibly wish to communicate to my wife on Valentine's Day?" He growled in his face. "Trashed out of your mind. You're not in college anymore!"

"Look, I know. But I broke up with Tanya tonight, and she'll be the only one that'll understand why." His eyes were unseeing as he blinked away tears. He leaned against the doorway. "I was going to propose, but she wasn't—" He stopped himself. I took a couple more steps, not even thinking about it. I was just so surprised. Finally, he noticed. "Oh, my."

I held onto the banister to keep my balance. "Why did you break up with her?"

“Because she wasn’t you.”

“I don’t want you!” I threw my hands up, stomping one of my feet. “And I don’t know why you’d want me. I’m not special.”

Both men scoffed because they wanted to argue. “Look, I know you don’t. Those words are burned into my soul at this point. But it’s more what you represent and, and, and-” he stuttered.

“And what does she, huh? Because I have theories as a doctor of psychology,” Jasper snapped.

“My shallowness. My hollow, plastic, fake existence.” He pointed at me, babbling. “Because she didn’t fit into the idea of my world, I didn’t even bother to get to know her as a friend. For two years! Years! Can you imagine if I had pulled my head out of my ass for even a second and asked about your life or interests? Your writing. But my first reaction to finding out you’re into this is the desire to use you like a fucking object. I was a predator and a creep. And because of that, I lost the opportunity to be in your world. As a friend or a lover. I hate it and myself. And I didn’t deserve you. And Tanya doesn’t deserve to be strung along anymore. I’ve been trying to fight it for a long time, but I’m not my entire real self with her. But I could have been with you. I don’t want to pretend. I want someone to love me for all of what I am, not this well-kept shell.”

Sighing, I rubbed my hand over my face. “Come in. It’s cold. We can talk in the sunroom,” I mumbled as I pointed towards the back. I blew a raspberry through my lips, avoiding my husband’s annoyed gaze. “He can’t drive in this condition. Just give me a few minutes, okay?” He huffed. “He’s not going to hurt me.”

Jasper rolled his eyes. “I know, but he’s still a fucking prick for interrupting us on Valentine’s Day,” he shouted the last two words at the back of his head. “This shit couldn’t have waited until tomorrow?”

“Obviously, I’m not thinking clearly,” Edward garbled, not turning around.

“Obviously,” he repeated back in an insolent tone. “I’ll be in here if you need me.”

I led him into the sunroom. He plopped onto the chaise lounge. At least if he vomited, everything in the room was washable. “This is nice,” he grumbled to himself as he slouched down onto it. “I bet this is an excellent place to write in.” He put his feet up like he was on a therapist’s couch.

Sitting across from him, I shrugged. I made sure my knees were tight together, my arms crossed over my stomach. "It is. I've been working on my screenplay here a lot recently. I'm almost done with the first draft," I over-explained anxiously.

"Oh, yeah," he briefly smiled. "That's great about the movie. T told me about that. Good for you." He nodded. For several seconds, he was quiet. "Bella, what am I doing with my life?"

"Pulling the wrong tiger's tail if you keep showing up here unannounced," I said sarcastically. "That man has the gentle soul of an artist, but he will wring your neck like a chicken if you come here again. Especially to tell me you've just broken up with my very good friend because of me."

"It's absolutely not you. I get that. I don't know why I'm so hung up on you." He looked at me longingly, his eyes moving over my legs. "Actually, I do." He took his jacket off and handed it to me. "You should cover yourself up." He waved his hand over his chest, looking away as he blinked. "You're clearly cold."

I pulled it over my shoulders. "Yeah, that might be because I'm in lingerie. You know, we worked all day to make tonight perfect. That was our gift to each other."

"I'm sorry," he sighed, pushing his palms into his eyes. "What am I going to do?"

"Stop drinking, go to a therapist, and date women into BDSM," I started sardonically with a shrug. "I don't know what you want from me."

"I don't know either." He looked up at the ceiling. "All the girls I know who are into it aren't into dating or not exactly wife material. I don't suppose you know anyone?"

Snorting, I shook my head. "Only Alice." He scoffed. "Really? Isn't 'shallow' what you're trying not to be anymore?"

Edward hastily bowed his head. He could barely keep it up. "No, she's gorgeous. She's just weird."

Rolling my eyes, I threw his jacket at him as I stood. "Yeah, but so are you. I'm not putting you in a cab while in this condition. Sleep it off in here." I pulled the throw blanket from the back of the sofa and grabbed one of the pillows. I passed them to him. "If I hear you've driven while drunk again, I'll let Jasper have at you. It's not okay. You could have hurt yourself or someone else. You gave me shit for it, too."

He accepted the cushion and laid his head on it. His eyes were already closed. "I know. I'm stupid, but I wasn't thinking." He threw the blanket over his shoulder. "I won't do it again, I promise."

