



Chapter Seventeen: On the Sunroom

I woke up at dawn before Jasper. He was still out like a light, but he had several martinis once we retired to our room. He was ready to tear Edward to shreds for so many reasons. I believed him when he said it wouldn't happen again, though. He just had to hit his rock bottom to make a change that had been needed for a while. Neither he nor Tanya was satisfied, even if they weren't unhappy.

Going into the kitchen, I started some coffee. I brought it to the sleeping idiot in my favorite writing chair. I jabbed his shoulder with my other hand as I placed the cup on the table beside him. He groaned softly.

When his eyes opened, they went wide with shock. "Oh, shit. Where am I?"

"My sunroom," I replied as I pointed at the mug. I wanted to make sure he was fully sober and awake before I shoved him out of my front door. It wouldn't do if he crashed because he was half asleep. I needed to make up the previous night to my husband in a big way. The chair with the toy still sat in the corner, unused. It teased me as I walked out of my room just a few minutes before. "Do you remember anything?"

Sitting up, he rubbed his palm over his face. He blinked for a couple of seconds. "Oh, fuck."

“Your head or what you can recall?” I asked dryly, taking a sip of my drink.

“Both,” Edward smirked at my attitude. “Shit. I am so sorry. Jesus, I need help.”

“Yeah. Driving drunk wasn’t your finest decision, but I think what happened with Tanya was for the best. She wanted to convince herself she could marry you for the money and love you in her own way, but it wouldn’t have been good for either of you in the long run.” I sat on the couch, crossing my legs. “Was I brought up when you broke up?” I questioned. I needed to know for when I talked to my friend.

“Yeah. You definitely were, but I wasn’t the first,” he sighed as he stared out the window into my backyard. The birds were starting to chirp loudly, dancing in the dew-covered grass in search of a morning meal. “Don’t worry, she doesn’t blame you at all. It’s all me, and she knows it.” He picked up his cup and gazed down into the hot liquid. “We’ve been on the brink since last year. I thought when you left, my crush would go away. But it didn’t, and I don’t know why.”

“You know, I had one on you for a long time, and I never once pushed myself on you or told you I wanted you or anything in front of your partner. Because I have respect for my friend and for myself. Just because you feel something, it doesn’t mean you’re entitled to shove it onto other people. If you broke up with her and I were single, I would have never gone after you. There was never a world where we would end up together because I couldn’t do that to my girl because I would have always felt guilty. Even when she told me I could. What did you think would happen last night? What did you think you would accomplish?”

“I don’t know,” he admitted.

Shaking my head, I laughed. “Man, I am not going to run into your arms,” I bluntly informed him. “I am so happy with Jasper, and I won’t do a damn thing to screw that up. I have a real family. And they love me. They make me feel interesting and fun. They care about me and the things I have to say. And my sister is amazing.” I paused, remembering something. “And you got drunk and bit her!”

Chuckling, he took a sip of his coffee. I knew how he made it. I fixed it enough when I lived with Tanya. “Yeah, I’ve been dumb for years. Rose was pretty great, and I fucked that up, too.”

“Woo, you were barking up the wrong tree going after her like that. You’re lucky she didn’t knock your lights out,” I remarked. “I love her, but she’s way meaner than her brother.”

“She is,” he agreed. “But I would have had it coming. I’m ready to grow up. Thank you for the wake-up call.” He lifted his cup. “I’ve been trying to hold on to something that really wasn’t there in the first place. But three years ago, I didn’t even know a woman like you existed.”

“And what kind am I?”

“The best of both worlds,” he sighed and shrugged. “Honestly, I would have never known if I didn’t go to that hotel room. As mild-mannered as you are. And my parents are still asking me about you. ‘How is your lovely writer friend with the pretty lips and big eyes?’ You are literally the kind of woman you take home to Mother. Marriage and that just never mixed in my head. But damn, if my wife were willing to-” He stopped. His cheeks flushed as he smirked. “If I remember correctly, you looked incredible last night. I want that. A sweet-faced innocent girl who my mom respects and also wants to fulfill my fantasies as much as I wish to indulge in hers. Because I was always eager to do whatever Tanya wanted, but she never even budged. I wish it weren’t the reason. It’s only sex.”

“It’s not. It’s because you’re not compatible. That’s why most couples break up. You were together for a long time. These things are always tough. I’ll check on her today.” I sighed as I gazed out into the yard. The light was starting to streak across it, warming the chilly room. “But seriously, for your own safety, don’t come around anymore. I’m not mad, but I’m done explaining myself. Jasper’s job now is literally to protect me.” He had just gotten his first paycheck from the publisher. The salary they offered him was half of that from the bureau, but he didn’t care in the least. “He will end you if you keep pushing it. Three strikes and he will knock you out.”

“Got it.” Nodding, he finished his drink in a big gulp. Edward cleared his throat. “Um, can I use your restroom? Then I’ll leave.”

“Yeah, it’s under the stairs.” I stood to show him where it was. Putting our cups away, I went to the kitchen to get him a cold bottle of water and some aspirin. He took them with a little surprise when he came out. He forced a smile. “Good luck in the future. I hope you find your person. Just be more open-minded going forward. There are plenty of closeted weirdos out there. I’m sure Alice and I aren’t the only ones you overlooked.”

“You’re probably right,” he muttered before popping them into his mouth. He drank half of it in one go. “I would tell you good luck too, but I think you’ve got this figured out. I’ve already pre-ordered your next book, and I promise I’ll be first in line to see your movie.”

“Thanks,” I smiled as I blushed. “Go home and get some rest. Tomorrow will look better.”

I opened the door to show him out. He took a few steps, stopping on the top stair. Loudly, he gasped in horror as his entire body went stiff. I followed his gaze. When I saw his car, I realized the reason.

It was totaled.

Every window was smashed, all the tires flat. 'Hello, Bella' was carved into every surface. Inside, the seats were spray painted red. It was the same color that had been used on the garage door a month before. I wondered if it was from the same can.

Stumbling a few feet onto the porch, I screamed in pure rage. "NO!"

My husband came running down the stairs, shirtless, and in his sleep pants. He had obviously been listening to our conversation and was ready to jump into action if needed. He nearly fell into me. Skidding to a stop, he gasped too.

Edward said nothing as he stared in complete shock. Finally, he spun around with his whole body. "This is what they did to yours?" He questioned in a low, pained voice.

"Not the paint. But yeah," I nodded as my fists balled up at my sides. "Why did they do that to yours?" I demanded angrily, then turned to look at my husband. "Why?"

Jasper took a couple of steps forward to just the second step. It was too cold to be barefoot on concrete, but he didn't seem to notice. "They probably thought it was your new car."

"What? I would never be stupid enough to park it-" I began before stopping myself. "Oh, I didn't even think about them doing anything to yours." I covered my eyes with my palms. "I'm so sorry."

Edward took a step towards me. "No! You didn't do this!" He waved his arm at the driveway. He glanced back at it and sighed. "Obviously. That's horrifying. No wonder you're nervous. That's not sane."

"No, it's not," Jasper agreed before spinning to go inside. "Both of you in the house. They still might be here." He rushed up the stairs, and we both followed him like ducks in a row. I don't know why Edward did. I think he was just in shock. "Get out of my room!" He snapped at him when he noticed.

"Oh, sorry," he mumbled, turning to leave. He blinked several times when he saw the chair I wasn't ever going to get to use. He put his head down and hurried out to the landing. "What should I do?"

I slipped on my shoes after grabbing a thick pair of socks. "Go get more coffee from the kitchen. This takes a few hours. And you might want to get your car insurance stuff ready too."

Edward nodded as he pouted. "I've only had it for a few months. Dammit! It's an Aston Martin!" He complained.

“I don’t know what that means,” I mumbled as I put my hair up with a clip so that it was out of the way.

Rushing to get dressed, my man was ready for blood. “It means he’s a pretentious prick that likes James Bond too much.”

He frowned. “That’s why you started drinking martinis, so don’t give me that.”

“They taste good, and that is a quarter of a million-dollar-”

I smacked his arm to get his attention. “Not now. It’s his car! Be nice,” I remarked, grabbing my thicker jacket for when we went outside. I was in sweatpants and a hoodie already, but I knew we would have to be out in the cold at least a little while.

Jasper got his service weapon from the safe in the closet. “Stay together and keep the door locked until the police come if I don’t return.” He pulled out his phone and dialed the emergency number.

We watched him go out the front door, locking it behind him. Edward visibly swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing with anxiety.

It felt as if I weighed four hundred extra pounds, and my entire body was being dragged down towards the floor. “He’ll be back in a minute. Would you like another cup of coffee? It’s going to be a hell of a day.”

“Yeah, sure,” he breathed.

We trudged to my kitchen. Popping some cinnamon raisin bread in the toaster, I took out two fresh mugs from the cabinet. I poured our drinks before going to the fridge to get butter and creamer. He put a couple of spoonfuls in his. The utensil clinked annoyingly on the ceramic edge. I pushed my fruit bowl towards him. He picked an apple, so I grabbed it from him and washed it silently before passing it back. When my toast popped, I buttered it and got myself a banana. We ate without saying anything.

It took way longer than I would have liked for Jasper to return. Every minute made my heart pound faster, my stomach beginning to ache with nervousness. It didn’t help that the man across from me was literally vibrating in place with his overwhelming emotions. He had broken up with his girlfriend and lost his pretty car in less than twenty-four hours. It wasn’t his week.

“They left a note on the sunroom,” my husband said in a rush as he came into the room to look for us. He still had his gun in one hand and his phone in the other.

The words didn't make sense at first. I didn't know how I could miss something like that. "What?" I questioned. There was nothing like that on it when we were in there earlier, I was positive. I rushed to go see what he was talking about. Both of the men trailed behind me quickly.

In the middle of the glass pane, in bright red dripping paint, was, 'Hello, Bella.'

"That was not there a few minutes ago," Edward mumbled in shock. He looked at Jasper, his eyes blinking rapidly. "That- they must have-"

"Yeah. It's fresh. It's still wet," he whispered. "That type of paint dries in under twenty minutes."

My gut twisted so hard the food I just put in it instantly came back up in my mouth. I rushed to the half bathroom under the stairs, where I threw up violently. My knees cracked on the tiles, sending pain shooting up my thighs.

"Why are they doing this to me?" I demanded through snot and tears. "I didn't do anything! Leave me alone!" I sank to my rear and leaned my head against the seat.

Jasper rushed after me. He grabbed a towel and wet it to wipe my face before kneeling beside me. When he got down, there was a knock on the door. I took the cloth from him to do it myself. He went to get it while Edward stepped in to check on me. Offering me his hand, he tugged me to my feet.

"I just want it to stop," I whimpered.

"I know." Gently, he hugged me and patted my back. Letting me cry it out, I pushed my face into his peacoat. He pulled the bottle of water I had given him out of his jacket pocket and offered it to me. "I'm sorry."

"Your car," I pouted. I probably looked like a child, but I couldn't control my emotions for a second longer. Everything came pouring out like a flood. "I'm so horrified and embarrassed-"

Placing his hand on my shoulder, he stopped me. "Don't. It's insured, and it's not your fault. I'm just scared for you," he swore as he rubbed my forearm. He went into the bathroom for a brief second to get some toilet paper to wipe my tears. "Let's go sit down, sweetheart."

We both sat on the edge of my sofa, two feet apart. I had the tissue wadded in my trembling fist.

"Edward, you need to talk to them," Jasper called over his shoulder from the doorway after only a minute. "And I have to call Sam."

