

Chapter Eighteen: In my Cup

It was late afternoon by the time we got done with the police and ordered Edward an Uber so he could go home. He refused a ride from either of us, not that Jasper would have left me alone with him. I offered a thousand times to buy him a new car, but he declined that too. It made me feel awful. I had the money to get whatever he wanted. I just needed to make the problem go away.

My husband pulled a card from his wallet and gave it to him. "My dad will, at the very least, give you the best deal possible. I'm sorry for being rude to you earlier and for things not working out with Tanya," he mumbled as he handed it to him. The moment was awkward and tense, silence lingering heavily between them. Neither of them knew how to speak to each other. And as much as he disliked him, he didn't want terrible things to happen to him. Only mildly inconvenient problems like getting stuck in traffic jams and paper cuts. Taking a deep breath, he stared into his green eyes. "Could you just stay away from my wife now? Please?"

"Yeah," he promised, looking at the thick card stock as his cheeks flamed red. "I'm done making a fool of myself."

We watched him leave in silence from the bay window, pushing the curtains to the side to peek outside. There would be a police car parked in front of the house for a while. It was a few homes over, but still in view. Obviously, the person watching us was getting bolder and had done well over a million dollars worth of damage. It was becoming more threatening with every action.

Marching to our bedroom, he flopped back onto the bed with his arms over his head. His long legs dangled off the edge. He scrubbed his palms over his eyes for a moment, scraping them over his rough, unshaven cheeks. Jasper was understandably exhausted, and so was I.

"I'm going to the office to talk to a few people. This has got to stop," he sighed. From the few minutes of video we had gotten of the tiny person, it was the same one. They tripped over their own feet, making him think once again that they were drunk. I could see it more this time than the last. They covered the lens and lights with paint. Their mask, which came fully into view, was like one of those morph suits to make them seem featureless. It was like looking into a black hole. "I'm going to take you to Emmett and Rosalie's, so they can keep an eye on you."

“I don’t need a babysitter,” I automatically complained.

He pushed himself up with his arms on the bed. His expression was grave. He wasn’t going to play around with me. “Darlin, they were watching you this morning. What if you were alone? They’re obviously paying attention to the house. What if they saw me leave without you? No. This isn’t up for discussion. If you don’t want to go over there, then my parents. Pick a place, and I’m taking you there so I can look into something without being terrified the entire time.”

I felt my cheeks heat at the mild scolding. “Okay, fine,” I said with a pout as I marched into the bathroom to take a shower. I knew he was right, but I was in a mood. My stomach was angry because I hadn’t eaten much, but I was afraid to vomit again. My knees were bruised black from hitting the tiles from the time before. I knew it was only because of stress and that it would help if I put something in it, but I couldn’t bring myself to. The taste lingered even after I brushed my teeth and drank water. It was as if it was burned into my nose.

Jasper followed, hugging me from behind when we stepped into the water. “It’ll be okay. I just need to make sure you’re secure for a little while. Emmett would protect you with his life. I know he’ll keep you safe.”

“They should be more afraid of your sister.”

He kissed my cheek. “They should, but clearly, this person isn’t very smart.”

“Smart enough to ruin every special occasion we’ve had in the last three months as expensively as possible,” I sulked like a child. It felt as if they were trying to ruin every milestone of my new marriage.

“Cruelty is usually only intelligent on paper, elegantly designed to cause the most pain with precision cuts. But most of the time, it is running out of a place of animalistic instinct. To go for blood. And organizational skills don’t always mean intelligence. Sometimes, they’re just smart enough. And it might not be at all. They may always be here, waiting for chances, and that’s when they got them. I don’t have enough information to know. But I won’t give them opportunities.”

Leaning back into his grip, I gazed up at him over my shoulder as I wrapped my arms around his. They were curled protectively around my stomach. “Do you really think they’d hurt me if they got an opening?” He said nothing, his soft lips in a hard straight line. I sighed. “I just want to be left alone with you. Why me?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know, but it’s obviously connected to King. Probably because you’re getting so much attention right now, and they crave some of it.”

“Why ‘Hello, Bella’?” I shuddered. “That phrase is so unnerving now. The Silence of the Lambs much?”

“Darlin, I know. I’m sorry.” He pressed another kiss to my temple. Jasper let his lips linger there. “We’ll figure it out.”

Emmett and Rosalie were waiting for us to arrive by their front door. Her arms were anxiously crossed over her chest, rocking back and forth on her heels as she rubbed her forearms. She rushed to give me a hug as soon as I got out of the blue BMW. She was almost as tall as her brother, and her embrace enveloped me. I pushed my face into her shoulder, clinging to her.

“Come on. Let’s get you inside.”

His best friend came to Jasper and brought him into an unexpected one too. He took it, hugging him back closely. “Don’t worry. She’ll be safe here,” he swore.

“I know. Thanks,” he murmured, patting his back. “I don’t know how long I’ll be. Sam and I will look into what information we have. It’s a good thing I keep putting off quitting officially. They wouldn’t let me run around the office otherwise.” He came to me and gave me a kiss on the lips. It was slow and innocent. “Call me if anything happens or you need anything. Stay in the house, don’t go anywhere, and if you do, for the love of God, please tell me first.”

“We won’t go anywhere,” Rose promised, still standing behind me. “Don’t worry. No one will touch my sister.”

“I know,” he grinned and gave her a light kiss on the cheek. It surprised her. She briefly smiled.

She grabbed my hand and led me inside. We went directly to her couch in the middle of her cozy living room. There was already a pleasant fire crackling in the fireplace. Silently, I pouted as I sat. I gazed into the flame, just feeling heavier than I had in years. There was a weight on my shoulders. Sitting across from me, she took my hands. “So, um... What the hell happened last night? Why was Edward at your place?”

Sniffing, I played with the hem of my hoodie. “Yesterday, Jasper and I were doing a quiet Valentine’s at home, and we were about to go to bed when he showed up drunk off his ass. Just smashed. And ugh, crying. He was going to propose to Tanya, but he broke up with her instead because he said she wasn’t me.”

Rose gasped as her eyes got wide, her mouth dropping open in shock as she put her hand on her heart.

“Oh, shit!” Emmett stated in a dramatic voice as he sat in his recliner to listen. “And he let him live? I’d killed that bitch.”

“Poor Tanya,” his wife breathed to herself. She shook her head. “She hasn’t said anything to me yet.”

“Me either. I feel as if I should call her, but I also don’t want to make the situation worse. She probably doesn’t want to see me right now. He said she’s not mad at me, but I’m worried I’m going to lose her as a friend,” my voice became watery and thick with emotion. “I made it clear where I stand and that I was done with this. I don’t think it was ever really about me, but something he learned about himself and didn’t like. We let him sleep in the sunroom. Couldn’t put him in a cab like that. He was seconds from blacking out.” I cleared my throat, trying to force the bile back down as I recounted everything that was taking up a place in my anxious mind. “I woke up early to kick him out because I wanted a do-over of our messed up night. But then his car and the goddamn message,” my words sputtered out as tears slowly rolled down my face. “They watched us and waited. They were right there. What if I just woke up early to write alone?” I sobbed in earnest. My entire body was trembling.

My sister-in-law brought me into her arms again. Gently, she patted my shoulder as she tried to soothe my hysteria. “What can I do to help?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted through my tears, shaking my head wildly. “I’m just so tired and angry. And I’m hungry, and I want my brain to turn off and-”

“It’s okay, honey.” Emmett came to the other side of me and rubbed my back too. “Why don’t we order some dinner and I’ll get you a drink, okay? That’ll help, huh?”

Nodding, I wiped the snot from my nose.

Four hours later, they had me full of food and wasted. He was an amazing bartender. They let me rant and complain as much as I wanted, sitting in the middle of their living room while they nodded or spoke at the right times to make me feel better, but they were each tipsy, too.

“And my car!” My hand gestures were getting bigger with every drink. “I am so scared they’re just going to fuck it up when I get it. It’s so pretty! I was terrified to drive that other one,” I admitted as I put my palm on my chest. “But this one feels like mine. And what am I supposed to do with my truck? I can’t leave it in the streets, and I don’t want it to rot in a storage yard,” I whined, sloshing the draft beer in my cup. I wiped it away from their leather couch with my sleeve.

“No!” Rosalie agreed with me. “It’s too beautiful a machine for that! It’s a classic!”

"It is!" I pounded my fist on my knee. "What am I going to do?" I looked at my sister-in-law. Her full lips were pushed out in a pout as she shrugged. She didn't have a good solution for me, and she loved it as much as I did. "Oh, I know what I'm going to do! I'll give it to you!" I waved my hand in front of me. It was a simple fix. It practically slapped me in the face with its obviousness. "You can keep it, and I'll even pay for you to do a restoration on it so it can be pretty again. At least I know you'd care for it."

Her mouth dropped open again for the second time that night as she put her hand on her heart. "Oh, my god! You'd let me do that?"

"Um, of course!" I shook my head with a soft laugh. "I know you'll make it the truck my father always wanted it to be."

Rosalie whimpered as she clutched my knee. "You offer to have a child for me, and then you literally give me your baby." Tears rolled down her chin. "I love you so much."

"I love you, too." I hugged her tightly.

"Wait, what?" Emmett said in confusion. "Child?"

She peeked at me and then him, almost forgetting he was there. She had been keeping up with me, and it showed. "Uh... Bella offered to be a surrogate for us."

His bottom lip quivered instantly. "You did? That... Aw, sweetie." He looked away as he tried to control his sudden emotions. "You are just an angel. Thank you. That is-" he stopped himself. Then he raised an eyebrow in my direction. "Wait, are we talking the old-fashioned way or what?"

"Or what, idiot," his wife responded dryly.

"I'm kidding," he laughed, wiping his nose. "That's so sweet, though." There was a knock at the door. He stood to get it. "I think that's your ride, kiddo."

"My Uber driver is sexy," I joked, finishing the rest of my drink so it wouldn't go to waste. I put it down on the coffee table. "I'm going to get one of those for the house." I pointed at the cup.

"We've used it so much. It's so good."

"Why are you drunk?" I heard Jasper say loudly from the foyer.

Emmett wasn't going to take it, though. "Man, would you calm the fuck down? Everyone is safe. Your girl needed to de-stress. She's getting cheered up," he retorted right away. "She's leaving better than she arrived."

"She can drink," he snapped. "I asked you to keep an eye on her."

"And I did!"

"I didn't realize I had to specify while sober," he barked as he came into the room to find me.

I stood up from the couch. "Hey! Don't be rude to him. You are in his house, and he has taken great care of me! You can't have people do it your way all the time."

My husband frowned when he saw my appearance. 'Sloppy drunk' was a real state of being. I wiped my eyes with my sleeves. They smelled of strawberry ale.

"Yes, but-"

"No!" I grunted. "I realize you're anxious, but this is not the time to be an asshole to somebody who is helping! Calm down and take a breath. Sit down- have a beer. We aren't in a rush to go back home, I think. I know I'm not."

He rubbed his hand over his jaw. His skin was pink with embarrassment. Everyone was on edge. "Right. I'm sorry. I'm really high-strung right now. Obviously, I wouldn't be pleasant company, and they have to work in the morning, darlin. Let's just go."

Jasper was at least correct about that. I didn't want to keep them up. I sighed. "Fine." I grabbed my purse before I turned to Rosalie. "You two can come by tomorrow, and you can take the truck home with you, okay?"

She smiled. "That sounds good."

"I'll make dinner," I promised, kissing Emmett's cheek. "Thank you for letting me vent and treating me to such a lovely meal. It was just what I needed."

He grinned at me. "We'll see you tomorrow," he replied as he gave me a hug.

They both walked us to the car. My man was silent for the first few minutes.

"Look, I'm sorry I snapped. It's been a stressful twenty-four hours," he said in a quiet voice as his fingers curled around the steering wheel. Every muscle in his body was tense. I could see it in his face. "Between Edward and everything-"

“I know,” I sighed as I glanced out the window. “Why don’t we get a hotel tonight? We’ll go to The Canvas and go to the bar. You can get me drunker and use me all night long. Then we can sleep all day.”

He smirked a little. “I don’t know. It’s probably safer to go home where there’s a cop monitoring the place. And I definitely shouldn’t get drunk. I would never forgive myself if something happened to you while I was intoxicated.”

“No one will bother us at a hotel,” I argued. I made my voice softer and sweeter in the way I knew he liked. “There is security and cameras everywhere. They’re not going to be able to wreck your car in public like that either. There would be way too many people around.”

“Hm, that’s true,” he replied, and I knew I was winning him over. It would only take a little more pleading. I stroked his thigh, my nails scratching towards the center of his legs. “Mm, Isabella...”

“Please, sir,” I begged as I turned my entire body toward him, shifting in my seat. That’s probably why I didn’t see the impact coming.