



Chapter Nineteen

Waking up with a blaring headache, my face hurt from all the drunken crying I had done the night before. It was just after seven, and the sun was far too bright for my tastes. I crawled out of bed and grabbed an aspirin before pouring myself into a shower.

I didn't bother to dry my hair, only putting it up into a clip at the very back of my neck. Comfortable clothing was the only thing that would do. I didn't give a damn about looking pretty. My ribs ached from my uncomfortable corset. Stupid thing.

In a quick call to Seth, I informed him I was driving myself. He asked me several times if I was alright, and I assured him I was. What else was I going to say? I wasn't, but I wouldn't tell him that. I wasn't even sure it was something I wanted to talk to Alice about. Everything was embarrassing and stupid and entirely my fault. I knew that, and I should have handled things better, but I didn't have the ability to at the time. I was just swept up in the passion and drunk. It was a horrid combination.

I let myself into Edward's home, and I could hear the blaring music coming from his gym. It was especially loud and particularly snarly. I made my way to it after throwing my purse on the table by the front door with a crash that made me cringe.

Edward was pounding the hell out of the punching bag, shirtless, with sweat pouring down his body. His hair was slicked back, his eyes bloodshot and red around the rims. His fists weren't covered, and the canvas was chewing up his knuckles. Tiny dots of red marked the fabric, a small amount of blood oozing from his hands. It was not something I wanted to see.

I went to the stereo and turned it down, much to his surprise. "Why are you hurting yourself like that?" I asked with slight annoyance. It didn't take him long to recover from the shock, going back to his abuse.

"It doesn't hurt." He continued to punch without the music. It hadn't even slowed him down.

"I don't believe that. You're bleeding," I pointed out the obvious.

"I'm just toughening my knuckles," he said through clenched teeth, backhanding the bag. It swung back, and he hit it again with a right jab that made it jump violently in the air. The chain holding it groaned in protest.

"We need to talk about last night."

"There isn't anything to talk about," Edward grumbled.

"Yes, there is. You need to let me explain," I told him, coming closer but out of range of his swinging bag. "It's not that I didn't want to, it's that I—"

"There isn't anything you need to explain, Bella. It's fine. Can we not talk about this right now?" He asked without even looking in my direction. It jumped again as he landed several punches all within a few seconds.

"No. We need to now," I declared more forcefully. "Edward, I'm on—"

"Isabella, no," he firmly stated, making my anger flare at being interrupted not once but twice. I had only been upset that I had hurt his feelings the night before, but this was different. Now he was just a stubborn ass.

"Don't you dare speak to me like you're my boss right now! If you haven't noticed, it's nine. It's my time. You know what? Never fucking mind. I don't want to talk to you. You keep hurting yourself," I snapped, sweeping out of the gym and stalking towards the kitchen. If he was going to treat me like an employee, I would act like one. I would just cook his damn meals and leave it at that.

Edward didn't follow. Honestly, I didn't expect him to.

I decided to make food that would take a lot of effort and a personal touch. I didn't feel like spending any time with the man in the gym. The one who wasn't willing to let me even talk. If he didn't want to know, it was his money.

Angrily, I got the things to make a pie and bread to go with lunch. An extra loaf would make bread pudding for dessert the following day. The counter was covered in different foodstuffs when he finally came into the kitchen, still shirtless and in his sweats. A towel was wrapped around his shoulders, his expression dark.

I didn't look at him as I poured flour into a mixer, switching it on before going to the cutting board. Picking up the large chef's knife, I made my way through some onions.

For a long time, he just watched me with a silent frown on his face.

"I'm sorry," he finally said when I turned off the mixer so I could exchange the paddle for the bread hook. Stopping, I gazed at him for an awkward moment. The anger within me was still hot, prickling at the back of my head. "I apologize for the way I spoke to you. I just really... I really want to forget about what happened last night. Like it never happened."

I frowned, and instead of answering, I turned the mixer back on then went to the cutting board once again. This time I took my anger out on a pile of carrots.

"Please, can we-" He asked over the strained sounds of the motor.

"No, you're getting your wish. You don't want to talk about it, we won't. Whatever. That's fine. It's your dime."

"Bella. It's not like that. I'm just hungover, and my head hurts. I told you I was an asshole when I drink."

Snorting, I shook my head. "You were fine when you were drunk. It's more like you're an asshole when you're hungover," I muttered under my breath so he couldn't hear me. I made my way through some celery and herbs, throwing them into a huge stockpot.

"I feel horrible." He came behind me and touched my shoulders, but I pulled back. "Please."

"Will you let me explain about last night?" I asked seriously. I needed to know that we could speak about what happened like adults. It was insulting to be interrupted as if I wasn't important.

I was sorely disappointed at his response.

"Bella, there isn't anything you need to explain. Really, it's fine," he said as he tried to touch my back again. I jerked away quickly and walked over to the sink to wash my hands.

“Have you had breakfast?” I asked without looking. I was in no mood to deal with him at that moment. If he wouldn’t let us have a serious conversation about the previous night, then there was absolutely nothing I wanted to say.

“No,” Edward replied shortly, realizing he wasn’t dealing well with my anger.

“Give me twenty minutes, and I’ll make you something.” I put raw chicken in the pot before pouring in some water and a bit of white wine. I kept myself from picking up the bottle and downing the other half. Though I had to admit, it was tempting. The hair of the dog and all.

“No, thank you. I’m not hungry. What are you making? Do you need some help?”

“Stock for soup tonight. No. I’ve got this,” I muttered, tossing a few peppercorns into it too fiercely. I imagined I looked like a witch throwing something into her cauldron. The image would have only been improved if a puff of steam had billowed from it at the exact right time like a mushroom cloud.

“Okay. I’m going to go take a shower,” Edward breathed, almost too quietly. I could barely hear him over the mixer. “I’ll check on you when I’m done.”

I stayed in the kitchen all day, and he came in and out at random to check on me. He didn’t talk to me again about it, and I wouldn’t bring it up either. I knew it would have been easily explained if he had only let me say a complete sentence, but with how he was acting... it just pissed me off. If he was going to be a child, then he could suffer.

Right after the dishes were in the washer, I left for the night. I did the same thing on Sunday, spending most of the day grocery shopping. Edward and I barely spoke at all. It was upsetting, and it was stupid of me, but I felt so angry. I realized the emotions weren’t just because of the situation and embarrassment, but partially because of my hormones. But pride kept me from bringing it up again. It was dumb, but I didn’t care.

I was so relieved to be finished with it all on Monday. I felt much better about the universe when my period ended. That, and my clothes seemed to fit better, but that might have only been in my head.

“Hi, Daddy,” I whispered as I gently hugged my father’s neck. He wasn’t a tall man, just under five foot ten, but I still had to stretch to wrap my arms around him. Gently, he gave me a squeeze and shoulder pat before pulling me away to have a better look. He always did, like he was checking for wounds.

He nodded in approval. “You look nice,” he commented. I was wearing one of my new outfits, a pair of black slacks and a purple silk blouse.

“Thanks.” I blushed slightly, peeking at my feet before clearing my throat and looking at him once more. “Are you driving, or am I?”

“You know I always drive,” he said, turning to walk out to his old red truck. It was from the fifties, maybe sixties, I wasn’t sure. It was at least twice as old as me. I used to drive it in high school, but I gave it back to him once he retired. He usually drove his police cruiser around. I was glad I didn’t have to sit in that thing anymore.

We were silent on the ride to the casino, but it wasn’t uncomfortable. The oldies station was playing in the background, the announcers talking about the Bulldog’s football game. A Louisiana Tech sticker was still stuck on the back of the truck. My father was so proud I had gone to college. I was the first on his side of the family to do so. Just the idea made me a little sad and angry. What a waste.

He didn’t look too out of place with his flannel shirt and jeans in the nice restaurant. There were quite a few people who were treating themselves after a big win in rattier clothing. At least his clothes didn’t have any holes.

“You’re quiet,” he murmured, and it was almost ironic. He was one to talk, or rather, not. “How was your ‘ball’?”

“I didn’t trip at all, and I even danced,” I said vaguely. “The food was good.” I really didn’t feel like going into the whole thing with him, or anyone.

“That’s nice.” He nodded and pursed his lips before taking a drink of his beer. “Then what’s got you sulking?”

“Nothing.”

He shook his head. He knew me better than that. “Is that boss of yours not being very nice to you already?”

Oh, how observant he could be. It was the cop in him. But he was acting like I was a teenager working at the grocery store again. As if he could go to the manager and have a polite word about not being very kind to his little girl. Almost every place I worked, he did that at least once. Not that I wanted him to. It was embarrassing.

“Dad, it’s not like that.”

“Then what is it?” He raised an eyebrow. “If he isn’t treating you very well, you know you can tell-”

“Charlie!” I laughed in embarrassment, rubbing my forehead roughly as my face turned red. “My boss is fine. He treats me like I’m crystal, as a matter of fact. And I don’t think he’d be scared of a retired sheriff.”

“I don’t like how that sounds, young lady,” he stated gruffly. I rolled my eyes. “What is that supposed to mean? Treat you like ‘crystal?’”

“It means he goes out of his way to make sure I’m comfortable, and it’s annoying. As if he’s worried that I’ll leave if he says or does the wrong thing, which isn’t the case. Everyone makes mistakes.” I rested my chin on my palm, playing with my phone that was sitting on the table. Scooting it around with my finger, I nearly jumped a mile when it went off.

“Are you going to get that?” He asked as I looked at the caller ID. I didn’t know the number, but it was a local one.

“Uh, yes,” I replied, bringing the cell up to my ear. “Um, hello?”

“Bella?” Edward’s quiet voice echoed on the other end. I wondered where he was calling from. It wasn’t a number I had on my phone. I thought I had all of them.

“Yeah. Is everything okay?” I asked, instantly worried. Temporarily, I forgot my frustration from the weekend. I hoped he wasn’t hurt or anything. Fear filled me. What if he was in the hospital?

“Yes, it is. It’s only... Um, I know we had plans tomorrow, though we haven’t talked about it since last week, I assumed... or rather, I hoped- Anyway, it’s not important now. I just wanted to say I won’t be able to come over because I had an emergency meeting come up in Chicago. I’m flying there in a few minutes. But I should be back by tomorrow night.”

“Oh,” I mumbled, my anger remembered again. Was he lying to me? Was he trying to avoid me? I guess it didn’t really matter. “That’s fine. You’ll be here on Wednesday?” I asked, thinking about his early doctor’s appointment that we would both be going to.

“Yes, I will. As I said, I’m flying back tomorrow night. Bella, I’m not doing this on purpose,” he replied so faintly I could barely hear him. I sighed and frowned. My father was displeased right along with me, and he didn’t even know what was going on. It wasn’t like we could talk at the moment, and I wasn’t about to abandon my dad to do so.

“That’s fine. I’ll see you then. Have a safe flight,” I responded with cold politeness. Edward was silent for a long time on the other side. For so long that I almost thought he had hung up on me.

“Thank you. Goodbye, Ms. Swan,” he countered before he did. I clicked the end button and nearly threw my phone down on the table. Dad cocked his head to the side and looked at me in that ‘you will tell me what’s going on’ face.

“I’m not telling you,” I automatically blurted out. “It’s nothing.”

“I didn’t ask anything,” he claimed, sitting back in his chair. They served his massive lump of meat to him, nothing green coming anywhere near his mouth. The waitress brought my shrimp pasta, refilling my glass of water, too.

“You didn’t have to,” I grunted as she walked away. “It’s nothing. I’m just annoyed because I don’t like it when plans change suddenly. You know I don’t like surprises.”

In truth, I hadn’t even thought about our Tuesday night date. But when I did, it made me miserable. I bit the inside of my lip to keep from making any expression, twirling the pasta around my fork.

“Bells, you’re not a very good liar. But, if you don’t want to talk about it, you don’t have to. You’re an adult, and as long as it’s not illegal, I won’t do anything about it,” he finally replied when he realized I wouldn’t say anything else.

“Thanks.” I smiled just a little. Just a bit, though.

We didn’t talk much through the rest of dinner, and even though I promised to pay, the whole point of the date, he tried to foot the bill. There was a literal struggle for the slip of paper. It wasn’t until I told the waitress to put mine on a separate ticket if he didn’t allow me, that he finally let it go. Charlie wasn’t pleased, not in the least.

He would have to get over it.

We made some loose plans about Thanksgiving. Dad was going to have it with his girlfriend and her son, and he wanted me to come. I told him I would be there if that’s what he wanted, but I didn’t know what I would do the whole day. Perhaps I would have to work. Just in case I wanted to get out of it. And partially, it was true. I didn’t know what would happen. Edward and I hadn’t talked about it.

I suppose we would need to soon. About so many things.