



## **Chapter Twenty-one: In a Leather Dress**

For the next three weekends, we went on Saturdays to look at different places around Dallas. Jasper got off at six every single day and didn't have to work a bit of overtime. He was bored out of his mind in his training class and flew through stacks of paperwork daily. But his boss said he was good at it, praising him regularly for his efforts. He claimed it was because she was just pleased she wasn't doing it anymore.

He had lunch with her periodically. Apparently, she had pictures of her goats on her desk. Jasper didn't know how to feel about it. He declared we all needed our weird releases, but felt maybe we should keep them to ourselves. My boyfriend thought he was funny.

Splitting our time between my apartment and his hotel, we tried to find our rhythm again, but it wasn't like it was before. It was uncomfortable. I missed Albany so much. Dreaming about it often, I knew it was only because I wanted our own space again. I knew things would get better once we got it.

The Friday before their birthday, Rosalie threw herself a party. She was handling turning thirty-five much better than her brother. In her own words, she was having a great year. She had made new friends in me, Alice, and Tanya. Emmett was happy to do whatever she wanted, arranging a gathering at a restaurant before going to a club later on a party bus. Most of their buddies were people who worked in the shop or on the lot with them. They were young men coming with their girlfriends or wives. It wouldn't be nearly as big as my roommate's thirtieth.

Since Jasper had to work that morning, I got ready with Tanya at the apartment. She was happy to help me since she had the day off and was man-less, too. Rosalie invited her, too. They had become fast friends and went out together a few times without me. She and Alice had grown exceptionally close over the previous months. It was nice to have a circle of female companions. It was the first time in my life.

That night, I wanted to surprise my boyfriend. We had never gone to a club before. We had only danced on more serious occasions or around his parents. Though we would still be with his sister, it would be different. We would party with our best friends. So, I spiced up my clothing for the evening. I ordered a black leather mini dress months before, but I hadn't had an occasion to wear it. The top was a ribbed corset that exposed my shoulders, my breasts pushed high on my chest, and the bottom was a tight too-short skirt that clung to my thighs and ass. With high-heeled ankle boots, a studded collar with a large silver O ring, hair styled board straight, and my makeup fierce, I felt hot. The outfit was just the last piece of a puzzle I worked to perfect all day long. It was like getting ready for one of our first dates.

It made my heart skip little beats in excitement.

Tanya was still getting ready at six-thirty. It didn't surprise me in the least. Jasper was running to the hotel to get cleaned up quickly. I was only waiting for him to arrive, so we could go together. Edward was already at the apartment and awaiting his girlfriend. He probably had a few more minutes.

We were leaving in separate cars, obviously.

My boyfriend wasn't pleased he had to suffer an awkward evening across from him. But once again, we had gone back to being polite. I didn't hate him. And I understood why he was confused. That's why I knew I had to keep my distance in the future and make it as cordial as possible.

He was sitting on the couch in a black button-down and jeans, his hair slicked back. His head was leaned against the cushion, his eyes shut as he snoozed with the television off. With his arms and legs crossed, he propped his feet up on the coffee table. Edward's lips were pushed out, and his face relaxed in his slumber. He had worked all morning and done a few surgeries. I quietly wandered into the living room to fetch my keys and chapstick from my big purse to slip into my matching clutch. I didn't want to bother him.

When he heard my door shut, he lifted his head and opened his eyes automatically. He rubbed his face, his palm scrubbing over them to get the sleep out. They got much wider as he took in my appearance. His mouth dropped open. "You could have at least warned me you would look like that. I thought I was still dreaming. Holy fuck!"

I tilted my head to the side, looking at him in revulsion. "Do not make me punch you."

“You could. I’m into that,” he responded dryly, trying to be funny. I rolled my eyes. “What? I can’t even make a joke? You look fantastic, by the way.”

“You’re a weirdo,” I replied, continuing to my room. “You best keep your comments to yourself if you want to survive tonight.”

“I was planning on keeping everything to myself, but you’re making it hard,” he continued.

Leaning out of my room, my eyes automatically flicked down to his crotch before raising an eyebrow. “Suffer,” I deadpanned, entirely unimpressed.

Tanya finally came out of the bathroom. She stopped and laughed. “Whoa, Momma. You are SMOKING!” She rushed over to me and felt my dress. “Faux?” I nodded. “This is nice. It’s so soft. I wasn’t expecting that.”

“And the inside is lined, so it’s not sticking to my skin. I like it. I’ll have to order from this website again.” Twisting to look, I smoothed my hands down my sides proudly.

“Turn around,” she commanded. When I did so, she examined the back. “The ribbon is so cute! Ugh. Love, love, love.” She adjusted the bow at the end of the corset. It tied just at the base of my spine.

I beamed. There was a knock at the door. “Thank you.” Going to get it, I practically skipped. I couldn’t wait for Jasper’s reaction. I pulled it open with a gigantic smile on my face.

He was comfortably dressed in his blue jeans, a white button-down, and work boots. It was almost the outfit he wore when we played when he was in control. He must have showered. His hair was still slightly moist around the edges. I could smell his cologne fresh on his clothes. Just like Edward’s, his eyes got massive.

“No,” he started right away in a firm voice.

“What?” I asked, confused by his tone and the shortness of it. I didn’t understand.

Quickly, he shook his head. “You can’t wear that out.”

My breath caught in my throat. I blinked several times. “Excuse me?”

Jasper took a step into the apartment and shut the door behind him so we wouldn’t cause a scene in the hall. He cleared his throat and lowered his voice. “You absolutely cannot wear that out in public.”

I crossed my arms over my chest as my hip cocked to the side. “And why is that exactly?”

The pair behind us was silent, watching what was happening. We hadn’t fought before as a couple, and it was about to occur in the presence of people. It wasn’t ideal. Tanya and Edward argued in front of folks as if it was a sport, but it was because they both liked attention in their own way.

“You look-” Jasper stopped himself, his mouth sealing shut tightly as he kept the words in. They rolled around in his cheeks, angry and ready to come out like flames. I bent my head further to the side, waiting for more.

“I look... what?” I prompted, warming up for the fight. I could spit fire, too. We could burn the building down for all I cared.

Ducking his head, his eyes were intense, and nostrils flared. “Isabella, you know what you look like.”

Ice ran through my veins.

“Oh, no. You don’t get to call me Isabella right now,” I said in a very low and threatening tone.

Edward spoke up for me. “Hey, she looks incredible. What’s your problem?”

I closed my eyes, just wanting him to shut the fuck up. Though I appreciated the thought, he wasn’t helping.

Glaring at him, Jasper’s cheeks were red hot. He balled his fists at his sides as he looked over my head at his former friend. “Thank you for proving my point. Darlin, you don’t need perverts like him staring at you all night.”

“Hey!” I complained in Edward’s defense. This wasn’t about him. I wasn’t sure what it was, but it wasn’t that. “He’s not the problem right now. You are. You said you wanted to see me in something like this,” I defensively countered. “New Year’s Eve, as a matter of fact.”

“Not in front of my sister,” he hissed under his breath. Licking his lips, he whispered. “Please. Just go change.”

I grabbed my purse and walked out the door past him. I heard him groan as he followed behind after angrily slamming it. When I took out my truck keys, he snatched them away from me. “No. I don’t care if you’re pissed at me. You’re not getting in that thing. It’s dangerous.”

“I like a little danger,” I answered sarcastically. “Give them back.”

“I’ll still drive you.”

“Like hell. I’d rather take an Uber.”

“Bella, look-”

Laughing, I shook my head. “I’m Bella now? No. I was so excited, and you fucking ruined it. What the hell is your problem, huh? I have spent hours waxing, scrubbing, and sculpting to be sexy for you. And you- Am I that embarrassing?” I demanded to know, saying the words calmly.

He drew back as if I had slapped him across the face. “NO!” He shouted. “HOW could you EVEN think that?”

“Don’t you dare raise your voice! I think that because you’re acting like I am. But you know what? I think I look fucking good and I want to go party with my friends, so give me my damn keys!” I stomped my foot.

Taking a deep, calming breath, he closed his eyes for a second. “I apologize for raising my voice. Darlin, you are in no way embarrassing. You’re staggeringly gorgeous. Literally. You have to understand that every man in the place will stare at you and be thinking about all the things he could do to you. You look like you’re ready to be sexed up. I can’t-”

“I am, you idiot! That was the fucking point!” I thrust my finger in his face. “I wanted to look ‘sexed up’ in front of my boyfriend and dance the night away. And you destroyed it! And I don’t understand why! I did this for you. I wanted to look good for you. You know what? Fuck you!” I pushed his chest.

He grabbed my arm, but I pulled it away. “Edward will-”

“Let him,” I growled. “Who cares about him? I don’t. He’s a harmless, overconfident trust fund baby. I’m going home with you. Or I would have been if you didn’t have your head shoved so far up your ass. I don’t care about anyone else. I don’t care what they think, or say, or want.” The whole night was going terribly, and I wanted to scream at him. “What happened to ‘she’s a grown woman who-”

“This is different.”

“How?” I questioned. He didn’t have an answer. “Give me my damn keys, Jasper.” I held my hand out.

"It... It just is." He passed them back. "Please allow me to drive you there, or we can get an Uber. Seriously, for my peace of mind, don't get in that thing. Especially since I know there will be liquor tonight. I'll be the designated driver," he begged. Pinching his nose, he tried to calm down. "Please. I love you, and I am sincerely concerned about your safety."

I looked up at the sky. "I'll order an Uber," I mumbled, but he took his phone out right away and did so. Rolling my eyes, I said nothing. We stayed quiet as we waited for it and the ride to the Mexican grill where we were meeting with his twin.

He grabbed my arm to stop me as I walked inside. "Wait—"

"No. I'm not talking to you right now."

Sighing, he didn't let go. His grasp wasn't tight. "Do you just want to go home? We don't have to do this."

I actually laughed. "No. I promised my friend. Your sister, by the way. And I really want to be here. If you wanna leave, though, feel free to go."

His expression got fearsome and dark. He was pulling his breath into his tight chest through his thin lips. "Do you honestly think I'd leave you alone while you look like that?" My mouth hung open in shock at his words. Taking a deep one, he contemplated something for a moment. "Look, I'm sorry I'm such an asshole. I just saw you, and I panicked because it overwhelmed me. And truly, I don't know why. I don't know why I'm acting like this. I really—"

"You cannot call me Isabella when you're angry for real like that. That wasn't a Dom/sub thing. This is a boyfriend being an insecure asshat thing. I think you're just trying to pick a fight to get out of coming here, so you don't have to deal with being uncomfortable around Edward like an adult. Well, the jokes on you. I will close the motherfucker down."

Jasper sighed, looking down at his feet. "Yeah, I kind of figured." He touched my side, taking a step closer. He looked like he was in pain. "I'm sorry. Fuck. I'm sorry," he repeated the words. "Can I say I was so stunned by your beauty it rendered me senseless?"

"Um, no, but you can definitely go fuck yourself." I pulled out of his grip and walked towards the grill.

"I'm really sleeping alone tonight, aren't I?" he said sarcastically to the back of my head.

Cruelly, I laughed. I didn't look behind me. "World-class detective skills, Dr. Hale."

Emmett booked a room for the event. I strolled to the hostess stand, plastering a fake smile on my face. "Hi. The McCarty party."

The host stopped and stared, his Adam's apple visibly bobbing as he blinked wildly. "Yes, Ma'am. This way," the young man replied when he got a handle on himself, smiling brightly in return. He swallowed as he quickly grabbed two thick leather-bound menus, still gawking at me. He was maybe twenty, his cheeks filling with blood as he took in my appearance. My grin became a little more genuine. "How are you this evening?" He tried to make small talk as we followed him.

"Fantastic!" I lied in a bubbly voice. "We're celebrating my friend's birthday."

"Oh, awesome! That should be a lot of fun." He laid down the black book in front of my chair, only looking at me. He didn't move, grinning. I could feel Jasper vibrating behind me with anger. I loved it. Finally, he shook his head as if to get out of the fog. "Have a great night!"

"You too!" I spoke in a purposefully honeyed voice, glancing over my shoulder. I wiggled my fingers at him as I watched him leave.

Emmett was in the room with a handful of young men with girls hanging off of them. They were all talking amongst themselves, some of them with beers in their hands. Rosalie wasn't anywhere to be found. His eyes got huge when he saw us.

"Yo! Look at you! Wow!" he sincerely stated as he plunked down in a chair across the table. "Bella, I know I give you shit. But damn, you are one fine woman."

Sitting, I smirked at him. "Thank you so much. I'm glad you think I look good." I winked at him. He chuckled in return. Jasper wordlessly plopped down beside me, sighing heavily as he did. He huffed and looked away as his arms crossed over his chest.

"You look better than good. Seriously." He fanned himself dramatically as he fluttered his eyelashes. Giggling, I hammed it up a little. "I love it! I knew you had a wild side. It's fun to see it come out. I'd definitely want you to back that ass up on me."

"Would you fucking cut it out? I'll tell Rose," my boyfriend angrily threatened because he felt that way. He was lashing out because he had put himself in a corner. Emmett wasn't bothered by it, though.

He laughed. "Yeah, okay. I'll tell her myself." His brother-in-law waved his hand, lighting up when he saw her behind us in the doorway. We both turned to look. "Baby! Come see your brother's hot ass date. She's built like a brick house."

His flirting and playfulness made Jasper so much more irritated. I knew precisely what I would do the entire night. Emmett was as harmless as he could be while still knowing exactly

how to rile his best friend. Also, my man would never hold a grudge for that long against him. Frankly, he couldn't. It was perfect.

Rosalie came in with a giant margarita from the bar. It was neon green and had a bottle of Jose sticking out of it with several limes. It almost matched her mini dress. Her eyes got wider when she saw me with her mouth hanging open. "Okay! Now. Now, I see. Wow. Okay," she kept repeating herself. I laughed for real for the first time in hours. "You look hot!"

"Oh, my goodness! Thank you!" I grinned back at her. "I don't go all out often, but when I do." I wiggled my shoulders. "Your dress is great!"

"Thanks!"

"What do you see now?" Emmett asked loudly, pulling her chair out for her without standing up.

His wife sat beside him, taking a big sip of her drink. She straight-up ignored him. "Hello, brother. You look like you're wearing your fire ant underpants." She took a long slurp from the straw. "What's crawled up your ass?"

He said nothing. Jasper was somehow the childish one in the conversation.

"So," I began with a cheerful smile. "He tried to forbid me from going out in this."

"I asked you to change," he mumbled under his breath.

I laughed. "Oh. No. You snapped at me as soon as you saw me. 'No! You cannot'," I made fun of his accent. "I think your brother forgot I was an adult there for a minute! It's okay, though. I intend to party, celebrate with you, drink at least three of the same thing you are, and dance the night away."

"You..." Emmett trailed off, looking at Jasper. "You tried to-" He seemed so unimpressed with him.

"Shut up," he murmured in a low tone. "I overreacted, and it just came out."

He wasn't deterred. "That's like standard relationship rule number whatever. Tell her to wear whatever the hell she wants and that her ass looks banging in it. Be honest and polite if your opinion is asked, but if not-"

Sitting up in his chair, he bent forward. "I know. I get it. I've apologized. And I will, again. I am sorry. You're not helping."

It didn't sound apologetic. It seemed pissy.

"What's wrong with her outfit?" Rosalie questioned, confused. "It's a little low cut, but it covers everything." She waved her fingers over her dress. "Mines more risqué."

"He doesn't want to get an erection in front of you," I announced sarcastically. He put his hand on the table hard enough to make the silverware rattle. I meanly laughed again. "You listed it as a reason."

He ducked his head, his cheeks turning red with his anger. "I didn't say it like that. And you know it."

Tipping my head to the side, I smiled at Rosalie. "He hasn't figured out I will have this fight anywhere he wants, and I am shameless. Should we go? I'm sorry. I don't want to ruin your day."

She snickered and took my hand. "Are you kidding me? I love it. This is fun!" Jasper groaned and tilted his chin back. She winked at me before turning her attention to him. "Well, apologize properly and mean it or leave. We'll make sure you have a good time, Bella. We've never needed him for that."

Oh, she would be cruel to him for me. I loved that they were on my side. I was petty, but he ruined my evening, and I would fuck up his in return. I wasn't joking when I said I was shameless.

"I'm not leaving without her," he replied firmly. Both his sister and I gave him a nasty look. "No! I don't care. I just spent four months looking at pictures of bodies of dead girls dressed almost exactly like this. I won't leave her alone, even if she hates me for it."

Emmett sighed, glancing between us. "Okay. So, that's shitty, but Bella ain't one of those teenagers. And she has nothing in common with them other than her style at the moment. If the next case you work on is at Lululemon, you won't freak out if she wears leggings."

"That's an excellent point," I smirked. "Don't worry about it, though. It's fine. We'll talk about this later. I won't ruin your party, I swear." Jasper said nothing. His unhappiness was coming off him in hot waves. He could be mad all he wanted. I had done nothing wrong.

Putting his arm around Rose, he smiled back. "So, you'll dance with me?"

"Absolutely!" I promised.

"Awesome! I can't wait to get down with both the prettiest and second prettiest ladies at the club," he flirted innocently. He knew what he was doing, egging on Jasper's annoyance.

When the waiter came into the room, he lifted his hand. "Hey! Can we order some drinks? We need at least five margaritas."

Not long after, Alice showed up. She giggled happily at my appearance. She said nothing, just wiggling her eyebrows. I laughed as she hugged me with one arm, sitting beside me. She looked over at Jasper, and her smile faded. Peeking back at me, she pushed her lips together.

"Someone's in trouble," she whispered.

"And it isn't me," I replied to her in a big voice, lifting my drink to toast her. "Apparently we're competing for the trashiest couple of the night. I'll explain it to you in the bathroom later," I joked as I rolled my eyes.

Jasper just dejectedly sipped his water. As if on cue, Tanya and Edward walked in. Rosalie popped up from her chair to greet them. They hugged, laughing about something before the blond turned her attention to her boyfriend.

"Hi, Eddie. Nice to see you. It's been since..."

"College," he smirked at her. "You look great. It's good to see you again."

"You and Jazz are still friends, right?" She inquired, looking at us. I just shook my head a little. At least I knew Tanya wasn't gossiping about our weird sex lives to her. "Or not."

"We've kept in touch," he answered politely. "I'd say I'm closer to Bella, but she doesn't like me that much either."

"Oh. So you're still your normal charming self, I see," she stated with a smirk.

He smiled back. "I see you're still a ray of sunshine."

Laughing, I looked over at my best friend. "Tonight, the competition will be tough." She nodded in answer. Someone would cry in a toilet stall by the end of the night.

"Hey! Bella! Why don't I introduce you to some of our friends?" Emmett began loudly to distract from the awkwardness. I chatted with everyone as pleasantly as possible, smiling and batting my eyelashes at them all. Jasper stayed quiet throughout the entire meal, picking at his taco salad. I ate every bite of my enchiladas because I would need something to soak up all the alcohol in my stomach. I had three margaritas, true to my word. Plus, I had a glass of sangria.

There were drinks waiting for us on the bus, the music already blaring. There were maybe fifteen or sixteen people in total. My boyfriend pouted, sitting in the corner as the rest of

us mingled, drank, and danced. I could feel so many eyes on me, but I didn't care. It's exactly what I wanted.

When we got to the club, I bought two shots right away and another drink before going to dance with Alice and Rose. I even did with Tanya, too. Emmett held my hands as we playfully swayed and moved together. He was funny, getting drunker with every passing minute. He felt like a big brother I always wanted.

Since my roommate didn't have any of her normal friends to fight with, she got to dance with Edward. They were glued to each other. He was whispering in her ear the entire time. She was eating up his attention. I was just glad it wasn't on me. She giggled and sighed, kissing his neck and cheeks. They looked happy, and it annoyed me.

I came to sit down to have a break at the table where Jasper was continuing to sulk. He had a bottle of water and was playing with the blue lid on the tabletop. "You're not even going to have a drink? You're going to be like this all night long?"

"I'm not in the mood," he grunted.

"Aw, did everyone point out that you were a dick, and it hurt your feelings?"

"You didn't have to tell everyone."

"I didn't. I told my friend because she asked what your damn problem was. And you're the one that did it in front of Dr. Bitey and the salt queen of all people."

"I just reacted. I'm sorry!" He leaned forward and put his hands on his forehead. "You are a grown woman who can wear what she pleases, and you look fucking incredible. I shouldn't have-" He paused. "I am sorry."

Emmett came to the table, carrying shot glasses and a bottle of liquor. He plopped it down into the middle with a smile. Rosalie was behind him, holding her own cup. She was pink in the cheeks already.

"Look what I got!" he beamed. "Would you ladies care for one or two?"

"Yes, please! Two," I answered. He poured me one, and I put it in front of my boyfriend. "Drink. Relax. We'll talk later."

He looked at it, swallowing back some of his annoyance. Finally, he picked it up and slammed it down. Emmett had already poured another one for me, so I pushed it towards him, too. Jasper drank it as well, grimacing at the burn.

His brother-in-law poured him two more. He glared at them before shooting them in quick order. "Fuck," he moaned.

"Em, come dance with me!" Rosalie said after she had a couple of drinks. She pulled him out of his chair towards the floor. They left the mostly empty bottle with us. Jasper poured two more, but he didn't drink them.

"I wanted to dance with you tonight."

Sighing, he pushed one to me then had the other. "I know."

"I still do."

He looked up in surprise. "Really?"

Taking mine, I filled them for us again. He had a long way to catch up to me, and I was planning on forgetting the whole damn day.

We finished the bottle. He silently stood up from his chair and took my hand, driving us towards the dance floor. We weren't far from our friends in the middle. He pulled me close to him, his hands on my lower back. I could smell his stress in his salty sweat, the liquor on his skin.

His whole body was pressed against mine, our hips moving together. We were good at finding a rhythm. His fingers dragged over the back of the dress, just above my ass. Jasper drew his nose across my neck. "I don't want to share this part of you," he whispered.

"That's not for you to decide."

"I know. I'm sorry. It won't happen again. I swear."

