



Chapter Twenty-one: Three Neighborhoods Over

It was two days before I could get myself out of bed. Between my grief and my pain, I slept for hours the next day and barely moved. Jasper didn't rest at all from what I could tell. He sat beside me silently the entire time, either reading, working on his laptop, or drawing. He was doing his best not to bother me.

But I knew I couldn't lay there forever, even if I wanted to. I wasn't depressed, just overwhelmed. There were plenty of things I was happy about, but the bad was tainting everything with its anxiety and fear.

Rosalie informed Alice and Tanya what had happened in general, and they were all freaking out for me. She hadn't told them I was pregnant yet, though. We weren't going to make

any public announcements about it, just in case they were watching our social media. It killed Caroline not to brag, but she also knew it was for the best to keep everyone safe.

The three of them showed up at my doorstep in the afternoon a few days later, when I was finally ready to be around others. They were on a list of people allowed to come onto our property. There was still a cop parked on the street, as well as a security guard that stayed in a car in front of our house. There would be someone there twenty-fours a day until we figured out what was going on.

“Oh, my god!” Alice shouted when she saw my scrapped up appearance, her hand flying to her mouth. Everything had time to turn fully black, and my cuts scabbed over grossly. “What the fuck?! You’re like the nicest person I know. Why would they do this to you? You didn’t do anything!” She pulled me into a hug.

“It’s not just Bella. I think maybe they’re going after certain people connected to King,” Jasper explained to them as he stood behind me. She pouted when she saw him. Hurriedly, she embraced him too. He patted her back as she whimpered. “It’s alright, baby. I’m okay.” He held his sister next. It still surprised her when he was affectionate towards her, but she didn’t dislike it either.

Tanya put her hand on my cheek when she finally got to me. “Ow.”

“Yeah,” I remarked as I put my palm on top of hers. “How are you?”

She sighed, then clicked her tongue. Her eyelashes fluttered dramatically as she rolled her eyes. Then she shrugged. “I don’t know. Sad, frustrated, unsurprised, relieved. It’s complicated.”

“We have so much to catch up on.”

“We do,” she agreed and forced a smile.

Jasper cleared his throat. “With that, I’ll leave you ladies alone to talk for awhile. I’m going to be working in the office, darlin,” he said before he kissed my temple lightly.

I pulled him into a deeper one on the lips. His grin tugged at his cheeks. There was a long thin scratch across one of them that was already starting to fade. We were both lucky that we weren’t hurt worse. Fortunately, we rolled into a grass embankment and not into more traffic where people could have been injured.

“I’ll come to get you when we order food.”

He bowed his head in acknowledgment. “Let me know if you need anything.”

We all watched him go up the stairs silently. “Drinks?” I offered the girls. “So, where do we begin?” I questioned as we went towards our kitchen to get something. I pulled a ginger ale from the fridge. “Not it. Someone else goes first, please. Or we won’t have time for anything else.”

Tanya got a beer and sat at my island at the same spot her ex had just days before. “I’ll go!” She popped the lid and dropped the cap on the marble with a metal clink. “My boyfriend of over three years broke up with me on Valentine’s Day because he’s hung up on the fact that someone he ignored rightfully doesn’t want him. Like I didn’t always encourage him to get to know you. But as soon as you turn him down, it’s all he wants. What the fuck is that?” She took a big slurp. “Suddenly, he notices you’re stunning and interesting, which-” She waved her hand over me as if it was obvious. “It’s not like you’ve ever hidden how awesome you are. And I’ve repeatedly stated you could be a model. Those pictures you took for the book prove it!” She shook her head until her pretty strawberry blond hair bounced around her shoulders. “I don’t get it. I’d let him do whatever he wanted.”

I looked away. “He said it was because it made him realize he was shallow, and he felt hollow. I think he saw what Jasper and I have and how we’re partners in everything, and he wanted that. In his head, he convinced himself I could fix that hole. I don’t think I could have been that for him, though. Not really.”

“You’d be willing to try things I wouldn’t,” she countered. “In the bedroom.”

“But I don’t want him! I want my sweet, shy, serious artist. I would have hated being around his Dad or at their house. And I don’t want to go to galas or wear ball gowns. I don’t fit there. Justin and Caroline are filthy rich too, but they’re inviting, and their place is cozy. I’ve never felt bad about myself around them.” I put my palms over my eyes, pushing them into my skull. “Ugh, I can’t believe he showed up here. Edward’s lucky Jasper didn’t end him. It was like a chain reaction of awful.” I pursed my lip, then blew a raspberry. “What a fucking idiot.”

“Amen,” Tanya and Rosalie said at the same time. They smirked at each other.

She shook her head. “He’s not terrible. I’m not even mad. Just what a waste of energy. I put so much effort into that man.” She pointed at her chest. “Like I’m a model, and I let him fuck whoever he wished. Does he not think I have choices? Frankly, I don’t know what else he could have wanted from me.”

I loved my friend, but I could see what else he did. I smiled at her and reached for her hand. “Fuck him. He didn’t deserve you and should have asked you to marry him years ago, anyway. He needs to grow up.”

Alice took a sip of her canned wine. Her eyes were carefully aimed at the countertop. My friends were going to have to drink all my liquor for me before it went bad. "He texted me yesterday and apologized for being rude to me in the past, which is whatever, but he asked if we could go out for drinks and just talk."

Everyone was silent for a beat. My mouth dropped open. He was an ignoramus.

"What did you say?" Rose questioned as she leaned in to hear. This wasn't something any of us expected, especially this quickly.

"I haven't responded."

"Are you going to go out with him?" Tanya asked next curiously.

Alice's face automatically scrunched up in disgust. "What? No! He's your ex!"

Loudly, she scoffed. "I didn't care when we were together, why would I now? At least he won't be biting me anymore." She sipped her beer.

I snorted into my soda. Quickly, I wiped my chin to get the spittle. "T! Because we're being supportive. We don't want to hurt our friends. That's why I never could."

"And I thank you for that. It's very sweet, and I know that you ladies are on my side. Hoes before bros, always." She patted our friend's hand. "Use him for all he's worth, baby. Even if it's just getting a few free drinks out of him while he makes an ass of himself. Rebound, much?"

Alice stared at her for a long tick. "You're one cold bitch, and I respect you so much for it." They fist-bumped.

Laughing quietly, I rubbed my forehead. A headache was thinking about kicking up in the back of my skull. My friends were all strange.

"You sure you don't want to switch to something with a little alcohol? I think you need it more than either of us. Your week has been fucking nuts," Tanya offered, lifting her bottle. "Honey, it's okay to start day drinking. No one here will judge you."

Rose smiled because she was the only one that knew. I couldn't look directly at her, my cheeks flushing. "No, I can't, sadly."

"Why? Oh! I forgot about pain meds." She wagged her fingers as if she figured it out. "You're not supposed to drink with those." She said the word 'supposed' too dramatically. She did finger quotes after.

“First, don’t do that. And I’ve just been taking aspirin, actually,” I explained with a slight smirk. I tapped my nails on the counter. “So, it’s my turn!” I began cheerfully. “Guess what I forgot?”

My best friend looked between the three of us slowly. She didn’t understand why I was acting the way I was. My tone was odd, especially with everything that was going on in my life. Rosalie said nothing, looking down at her soda. “What?”

“My birth control because I’m the dumbest fucker on the planet!” I spoke in the same bright voice.

My sister-in-law laughed. Her expression was funny. “A literal fucker?”

I rolled my eyes. “Yes, obviously. Or I wouldn’t be nine weeks pregnant right now.”

Cackling, she threw her head back and clapped her hands together. “I love how you’re handling this.”

Tanya’s jaw dropped in shock. She just glanced between the two of us. Alice squealed loudly, jumping down from her stool to run to me. She began hopping up and down while her arms were still around me.

“Ahhh! You’re going to have a baby!” She yelled in my ear, unable to control herself.

Jasper popped his head into the kitchen and looked around for a moment. “Okay, just checking. Random screams make me nervous.”

She dashed over and threw herself at him next. She flung her entire body through the air. Alice’s feet dangled a foot off the ground. “You’re going to be a DADDY!”

He blushed at her reaction and her words because I knew it instantly went somewhere dirty in his head, and he didn’t want it to be there. Chuckling softly, he put her down. “Yes, ma’am, I am. And I’m pleased as punch about it.”

“A human will exist because I hooked you up! YES!” She high-fived him, then turned to me. “I am going to buy so many things for them! Baby clothes and toys!” She was vibrating in place with excitement. “We are, for sure, doing a shower, and it will be amazing.”

“You have time to plan. It’ll be a while off,” he assured her, coming to me to give me a kiss before he got a bottle of water. Wrapping his arms around my middle, he rested his chin on my shoulder. “Has she figured out she’s godmother yet?” He asked me in a teasing voice.

Her high-pitched squeal of delight could call dogs three neighborhoods over. “Really?” We both nodded. “Who’s going to be the godfather?”

“Sam, his former partner,” I replied for us as I put my hand on his. It was something we had discussed over the past few days. We also got our wills in order. “But if anything happens to us, we’re hoping Rose and Em will take care of the baby,” I added as I looked at her.

She wasn’t expecting this. Gasping, she pursed her lips to keep in her emotions. “Of course. We’d love to. You should know that.”

“I’ve already started putting money aside for them, so they’ll always be well taken care of and have the education they want. I will give this kid every advantage I didn’t have, including a mother and a father together.” I turned my face to the side so I could kiss his cheek. “And they’re going to have the very best family.”

“Yes, we will,” he cooed as he pecked my lips, curling his fingers under my chin.

“I’m getting hungry,” I playfully pouted as I looked at my friends. “Do you want to order? It’ll take a little while for it to get here. Oh, and feel free to drink all my liquor since I won’t be able to for like the next year.”

“Um, whatever Mommy wants,” Alice said sarcastically as she rolled her eyes. Smiling, she took my hand. “Of course! What does the baby want?” She asked in a cute tone, patting my tummy.

“Fried chicken.” I pointed to my face and spoke in the deadest voice possible. “It’s me. I’m the baby, and I want chicken.”

“She’s acting like everyone catering to her every whim isn’t exactly her fetish,” my husband responded with a shake of his head and a tiny, amused smirk. He smiled at me innocently when I glanced back at him. “And what may I get you, Goddess?”

“Popeye’s,” I impishly grinned.