

Chapter Twenty-six: **In Front of Me**

The next morning, we checked into The Canvas hotel. We spoke to the manager and explained our situation in detail. We needed privacy, and no one was allowed access to our room beside the two of us. Not even the maid, unless we personally requested it. We were going to have two bodyguards following us around all the time. Jasper still didn't feel like it was enough, but he didn't know what else to do.

It was the release date of my novel, and he felt this would trigger them, especially since it was already doing so well. It should have been a day of joy for me, *The Cop's Story* was number one, and *The Rabbit in the Snow* was second. It wasn't something I could have even dreamed of happening. I wasn't ever that greedy when I fantasized about my success. It was beyond my wildest aspirations.

Once we had our things in the room, I took my husband's hand. "Can we go out today?"

He frowned, ducking his head as he gave it a little shake. "I'm not sure that's a good idea."

"We're not safe anywhere, but we need new clothes, at least. I didn't bring much with me to New York. And my pants are getting tight. All my maternity things were at the townhouse. I can't shop online for this. I need to know it's comfortable, and I don't think I can wait. And the selection at Walmart and Target sucks for thick girls, let alone pregnant ones-"

"Okay," he relented and forced a smile as he took my palm. He brought it to his mouth to kiss tenderly. "You're right."

My fingers curled around his cheek. "I don't want to hide from them anymore. I'd rather confront them head-on. I'm not scared."

He gazed into my eyes. "But I am. We won't hide, though. We're not cowards."

I nodded firmly. "We're not."

He kissed my lips lightly as his fingertips trailed under my chin. "My formidable little Mama." He pecked my nose. "Alright, come on. Let's go give 'em hell, I guess," he uttered dryly in a thick country accent. It made me giggle. He smiled slightly and kissed my mouth again.

The mall that was the closest ended up being the one where we had our fateful 'first' date before we became official. It's where I awkwardly first met his mother and sister in the big bookstore in the center. I hadn't been to it since because of the dreadful memories. Thinking about that night didn't give me anxiety anymore, though. We were different people from the ones that sat in that parking garage, and we had bigger problems to overcome.

"Let's go have a little lunch first," Jasper cooed affectionately in my ear when he noticed how quiet and thoughtful I was as we wove our way through the garage to find a space. The security guard was looking for the safest spot, whatever that was. My husband's big palm smoothed over my stomach. "I bet someone's hungry."

Scoffing, I glanced at him as I put my hand on his. "Well, someone's always ravenous now, so..." I trailed off. "They have French here, I think."

He hummed in agreement. "That sounds great. They have a nice bakery, too. We should get something for breakfast in the morning. And maybe some cake for this evening." The last sentence was so suggestive. I bit my lip, wondering if he meant what I hoped he did. He dragged his finger slowly over my lock and key before moving between my breasts for only a second as it traveled back to my stomach. "Can I draw you again tonight? I think I'd like to sketch you every week as they grow, so I can see the difference."

I just kissed him, slow and deep. He rested his forehead against mine for a moment before pecking it.

A guard stayed with our car to make sure nothing happened to it while one walked behind us. When we ate, I bought him something to eat, but he sat a few tables away to give us some sense of privacy. Afterward, we went to the maternity store. It was probably our most important stop. I didn't particularly like it, but I had to suck it up. I wasn't huge, but the bump was starting to be unmissable. This kid was going to let their presence be known. Only my sleep pants were comfortable, and I couldn't wear them everywhere. At least not until the last couple of months.

We had several bags from different stores before we got to the big bookstore in the middle. I had been distracted and wasn't thinking about it, so it snuck up on me. I took a deep breath as I looked at it. It made something in the pit of my stomach flutter.

“Goddess, I’d like to buy your new book. May I have your autograph?” He whispered in my ear. Turning my face to the side to look at him, I smiled and nodded a little. Jasper winked and put his hand on the small of my back as he led me inside.

Both novels were right at the front on a huge table. There was an enormous sign in the middle that said ‘OUT NOW! NYT #1 BEST SELLER!’ in big letters. My hand slowly went to my heart. It was all I could hear. His fingers slid up my spine to my shoulder, his lips pressed to my ear. “I am so proud of you. Thank you for writing me such a wonderful story. It is, without a doubt, my second favorite gift that you’ve given me.” His palm moved over my stomach, and it fluttered again, but this time happily.

“Yeah, that was a really nice tie,” I joked, making him laugh.

“Excuse me,” a small elderly woman came up to me slowly. Tiny with only a bit of light hair on top of her head, she must have been eighty. She already had a copy of my work in her hands. My guard took a couple of steps forward, but I wasn’t worried. “Are you Isabella Swan?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She beamed. “May I have your autograph?” She held out her book. She then picked up Rabbit, too. “I’ll buy this one, too. It’s one of my favorite books of all time! Can you sign this one as well? Please?”

I laughed softly. “Um, sure.” I pulled a Sharpie from my purse. It was smart to be prepared for these sorts of things. I was surprised how many people wanted one but didn’t have something to write with. I looked over my shoulder. “Why don’t you go buy your copy, Dr. Hale?” He smirked and nodded. Then I smiled kindly at the woman. “Why don’t we go to the café so I can sit? I hurt my wrist a couple of months ago, and it’s hard to hold stuff and write.”

By the time my husband returned, I had signed five books and took two pictures with random fans. Once they noticed, it started a small chain reaction. The table had a short line forming beside it. When he finally got to the front of it, he slid it to me as he sat across from me.

“Hm, what should I write?” I opened the cover to the dedication page. It was, of course, dedicated to him. ‘To my personal bodyguard.’ I giggled evilly to myself. “Dearest Daddy,” I began in a childish voice.

Snorting, he nodded with a smirk. “Alright. Go ahead, Isabella. Test me early and see what happens tonight.”

“OoOo…” I drew out playfully. I pretended to write with big loopy letters. “Dear Daddy-”

My phone rang, probably saving me from myself. When I pulled it from my purse, I realized it was Eric. I wasn't surprised to hear from him. "Hello, Mr. Yorkie," I answered blithely. "How are you on this totally boring and normal day?"

"Much richer than I was yesterday," he chuckled. "As are you! Congratulations. How does it feel to be a two-time best-seller?"

"Amazingly reassuring to know it's not a fluke," I admitted.

"Well, I always knew it wasn't. Hey, remember, I had enough faith to sign you for three more books before the first was even published. Boy, am I glad I did, too. I don't know if I'll be able to afford your fees for the ones after this," he said teasingly.

I giggled softly. "I hope you can!" I joked right back, making him laugh. "I think you'll probably be able to swing it, though."

"If you're looking to make those big bucks, you just need to take up screenwriting full time. Turns out, you're a natural at it. Felix loved yours so much. He said it was almost perfect and that he only has a few subtle changes," he paused for a moment and lowered his voice. "Thank you for giving me that, by the way. It's given me a great excuse to talk to him a lot over the past few days."

"What?" I asked in surprise. I didn't expect him to give it to the actual Hollywood person. He knew I was only practicing because I was self-conscious and worried I would suck at it. I didn't want to embarrass myself. "He liked it?"

"No, he loved it," he corrected me. "Just like I did. I could see everything in my head so clearly. It will be magic on the big screen! We actually went out to dinner to talk about it last night. He raved about it for thirty minutes. I love how passionate he is," he sighed in longing. "If I had bigger balls, I'd ask him out."

"I haven't seen them, but I'm sure they're plenty big enough. He would be lucky to have you," I encouraged. "He is good-looking. You'd be a very cute couple. And a screenwriter and a publishing agent probably have a surprisingly lot in common. Similar interests."

"You are so right," he mumbled. "Ugh, maybe. We'll see. I just wanted to touch base with you today, but I need to get back to work. Everyone wants to get a little piece of you. I'm fielding so many calls for interviews. We'll need to set up another round of press soon. Anyway, Ciao, Bella."

After putting my phone away, I pulled the book to my lap as I picked up the marker again. I twirled it between my fingers as I considered what to write. My agent had made me lose my naughty chain of thought.

“He likes your screenplay?” Jasper questioned softly.

Wrinkling my nose, I shrugged. “Eric does. He said Felix did too, but I’m sure he’s just being polite.”

“No, he’s not,” he promised with a slight smile.

I blushed but said nothing. “Dear Daddy,” I wrote in his copy. “Even though I haven’t been born yet, I want you to know that Mama and I love you so much. You will be the best father. I hope I get your gentle, generous, and encouraging heart. With all of our love, Mommy.” I passed it to him silently. Instantly peeking inside, Jasper melted into his spot. His eyes went over the words repeatedly. His grin was enormous and sweet.

Getting up from his chair, he kneeled down in front of me. Then he took my face into his hands before kissing me fiercely. His thumbs rubbed over my temples into my hair. When he pulled back, he gazed lovingly into my eyes. “Okay, Daddy is growing on me.”

Giggling, I kissed him again. “Come on, Dad. I need to get some new bath stuff and makeup. Shoes, too.” I pushed myself out of the chair. “God, I hate this. It’s so tedious. Next time I’m bringing Alice, Rose, Tanya, and they can do most of it for me. They’ll fetch pretty things for me to approve of like a princess, and I’ll just give them my credit cards.” I popped my back and neck.

“Are you doing okay? Do we need to take a break?”

“Nah, I’m fine. I feel like I’m walking funny, and I don’t know if it’s in my head or what. It’s making my spine feel weird.”

He picked up our bags again. “It’s because your hips have spread. Our little one is sitting low. Mama said that meant it was a boy or a girl, but I don’t remember which. Not that it isn’t horseshit.”

I snorted. “We’ll hopefully find out tomorrow.”

After a few more hours, we made it back to our hotel. We had so much stuff. It just felt like a lot of packaging, though. The two bodyguards had to help us carry it all to our room. When we got there, I searched my purse for the card.

“Oh, shit,” I mumbled to myself.

“Hm?” Jasper asked, taking the bags from me, so I would have a free hand.

“I think I left my phone in the car,” I replied when I found my wallet. I finally got it and opened the door. They put everything in the entryway. We got a nice suite with a king-sized bed.

My husband quickly peered around to make sure the small space was how we left it. The bathroom door was cracked, and we could easily see inside. Everything seemed to be normal. “I’ll get it,” he offered. “Need anything else? Want a drink or something?”

I shook my head. “We should talk about what we want to do for dinner when you get back, though. I need sushi.”

“You can’t eat that,” he countered.

Blinking for a moment, I stared at him. “I can’t have raw fish. You know some of it’s cooked. Why does everyone think they can tell me what I can eat all of a sudden?” I chided with a pout. “I want shrimp and crab. It’s fried.”

He put his hands up. “You’re right. I’m sorry. Of course, we can have it for dinner.”

“Thank you,” I said with a firm nod. I was a little feisty after walking around all day. He rolled his eyes and smirked. Following him to the door, I watched as he went down the hall with one of the security guards. The other was standing beside the doorway.

“I’ll be out here if you need me, ma’am,” he stated politely.

“Thanks. Do you need anything?” He shook his head. “Do you at least want a chair or something?” I offered. “We’ve been out all day.”

“No, thank you,” he smiled.

“Let me know if you change your mind,” I declared before shutting the door. It locked automatically behind me with a heavy click. I forgot to hand him my key, just in case they needed to come in, but Jasper would be returning soon and give them his.

I picked up my bags and moved them to the table. Pulling out my purchases, I organized them on the bed. The next day, we would need to go do laundry at his parent’s place. Also, I needed scissors to cut off the tags. I realized Jasper had a pair in his luggage with the naughty things he brought with us to New York City. He had packed a fun variety to play with because he knew he wanted to try for a scene but didn’t know what we would be in the mood for. It consisted of rope, toys, lube, and some of my other favorite items, including his handcuffs.

Some clothing that he chose for me while we were out was a wide assortment of sexy lingerie. It obviously made him happy and turned him on, so I let him pick out whatever he

wanted. It was so nice to think I still aroused him, even while getting rounder. My mind floated off to some place later in the night when he would have me wear something revealing, and he would draw me while maybe in the cuffs. On my knees on the bed, gagged with my arms behind my back.

I pranced over to the closet to get his bag. When I pulled open the door, there was a man waiting for me on the other side.