



Chapter Twenty-eight: At the Top

In the mess of messages, there were a few from Eric. “I’m watching you on the television! That lady has a way with words, doesn’t she?” The next was from an hour later. “Wow. I am getting a ton of calls about you and your book, just to let you know.” Another hour later. “Like, a lot. I guess we know what we’re talking about in the interviews tomorrow!” The last one was from an hour before. “Call me when you get out of court! I have some good news to tell you.”

I sat on our sofa, wrapped in a blanket while Jasper picked out pizza on the computer beside me. He put his headphones on to give me some privacy. Biting my lip, I clicked on my agent’s number. I wasn’t in the mood to talk to anyone, but this was business, and I had to look at it differently. I was still so used to working for myself.

Mr. Yorkie breathlessly answered on the first ring. “HEY! Hey, Bella! Wow! That trial is already something, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is,” I whispered. “So, they’re calling you, too?”

“Yeah!” he responded cheerfully. “I’ve been fielding calls all day. It’s perfect. It’s exactly what I was hoping would happen when we picked the release date, but this is even better than I

could have dreamed! God, you can't pay for this kind of press." He was gushing like a proud parent.

"So, is that what you needed to tell me?" I questioned with a soft sigh in my voice. "Or is it about tomorrow?" His excitement was nice, but I couldn't muster enough energy to give him what he wanted.

"Oh!" he chuckled. "No. Actually, I wanted to be the first to congratulate you."

I picked absently at the blanket. I had done nothing, and people kept giving me credit. It was weird. "For what?"

"For securing your place on the New York Times best-seller's top twenty-five list. As of two hours ago, sales reached about ten thousand. That should get you close to the top twenty. And we still have about two weeks! Less than a thousand books and you'll be in the black. It's all profit after this. So, maybe even now!"

All of my words stuck in my throat. "Are you serious?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Holy shit," I whispered. I was saying it a lot, but it seemed like the right day for it. It had been a wild and unexpected one.

"Your birthday present will be insane if you get to number one," he chuckled. "Tomorrow, I've made reservations to celebrate. One of the nicest places in the city. You'll love it."

I tried to swallow, but I couldn't. It felt like there was a massive lump in my throat. "Thank you."

"Are you okay?" he gently questioned. Eric was genuinely concerned for me.

"Yeah. Just shocked," I honestly replied. I wasn't sure if I could explain to him everything I was feeling. It was so overwhelming. "Um, thank you for telling me. Is there anything else I need to know for tomorrow?"

He hummed. "Nope. I'll pick you up at the airport, and then we'll go to the hotel to meet the stylist and do the pictures first."

I nodded my head. "Okay. I'll see you then?"

"Alright. Have a good night, Bella!"

The phone slipped from my fingers after I hung up. A scream ripped from my lips before I could even realize what was happening. Both of my hands flew up to my mouth. Jasper almost dropped his laptop. He probably couldn't hear the conversation with his headphones on. He was listening to the news while he looked at dinner, a CNN video playing in the background.

"What's wrong?!" I heard Sam shout through the wall.

"I'M IN THE TOP TWENTY-FIVE! I'M A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER! I SOLD OVER TEN THOUSAND BOOKS TODAY!" I hollered back at him, standing up on the couch. "They haven't even released my book yet, and it's already-" I sobbed.

Jasper bounced to his feet. Within a second, I was in his arms, my legs wrapped around his waist. His fingers were in my hair, kissing me desperately. My tears were coming down his cheeks.

There was a knock on the door. "Just come in, Sam!" I yelled. It opened slowly, and he peeked his head in. "Did you hear me?"

"You're on the list already?" He asked. I nodded vigorously. "YES! Well, I'm glad I could contribute to your success."

"Thank you!" I said in a watery laugh.

"How are you going to celebrate?" He chuckled as he leaned against the doorway.

"Pizza, and then we're going to bed!" I told him gleefully. He laughed at my answer, as did Jasper. It wasn't exactly wild, but it was what I needed. My body was so confused about what was happening.

"I'll leave you to that then," he said with a small smile. "Congrats, baby. You deserve it."

When left alone again, my boyfriend and I just gazed at each other. He still hadn't put me back down on my feet. He was so strong, and he made me feel safe.

"I told you," he whispered, pressing his face in my neck. I felt his tears on my skin, squeezing me as tightly as he could. "I told you. You'll be number one. I just know it."

"No," I laughed at how excited he was. "No way."

"Yes."

I shook my head. "Don't get my hopes up like that. We need to control our expectations."

He chuckled, his fingers curling against my back. "You'll never change my mind. Just wait and see."

Chagrin suddenly washed over me. I pushed my face against his shoulder. "It's only because of the trial."

"Does it matter?" He asked, pulling back to look at my face.

"I wish that-

"No," he stopped me before I could go too far. "No. Do not downplay your success. This is only the beginning."

"I'm so scared," I confessed. My voice was so thick with emotion it trembled.

"Why?"

"What if my other books don't sell and this is my only-"

He put me down on the couch, laying me back so he could hover over me. "Then I will be so proud of you, and I will go buy every one of your next three novels in the store, too. Don't think about that now, though. Enjoy this. You earned it. You've worked so hard for it."

Then he kissed me to keep from arguing. We made out until the pizza came. Wiped out from the rollercoaster of emotions, we went to bed almost right after we ate. I just ignored all the other messages because I didn't know what to do about them. All I would tell of them was, 'no comment,' anyway.

I had to be up early to go to the airport. Jasper dropped me off since it was before the trial. My phone had been going so crazy that I had turned it on silent.

"Call me if you need me," I told him, tugging on his blazer. "I don't know if I'd see the notification. Do it a few times in a row if you have to."

"It'll be fine," he promised, brushing his knuckles over my cheek. "Hey," he whispered as he lifted my chin. "You are a Goddess. You are strong, smart, and beautiful. Men fall at your feet because of your charm. You'll captivate and enchant them. There is no reason to be frightened."

"I wish you were coming," I informed him before I kissed him firmly.

"It's just until tomorrow night. It'll be okay. Go have fun. You'll enjoy this if you relax."

I laughed. "I seriously doubt it."

He pursed his lips for a moment. "No. This is perfect for my exhibitionist who is hiding under all that modest clothing," he teased as his fingers moved over my hip slowly. "Have a safe flight and text me when you land."

"Okay. I love you, sir."

His smile stretched over his face. "I love you, too, Goddess."

Eric was waiting for me, hugging me excited as soon as he saw me. "So, guess what?"

"What?" I asked as we walked to the car.

"The numbers doubled. Last I checked, you're at twenty thousand." I stopped to look at him. "Top ten on your debut. I think it'll be easy to find something to talk about today and tomorrow."

"Why?" I shouted at him. It made him laugh. "Who- I mean, how?" I just stammered like an idiot.

"Well, first, this case is a big deal. It's the most-watched trial since OJ. It set some records yesterday. Every crime nerd is for it, and every news outlet worth its salt wants to talk about it, so they need your book. Second, it's a great novel! Why wouldn't they want it?" He took my overnight bag. "This is so exciting. This will be my highest-debuting ever. Shall we?" He gestured toward the door.

In the hotel room that Eric got for me, many people were already waiting. It was a suite, though, so it was large enough to hold them. There was a rack of dresses standing by for me.

"Hi, I'm Lauren, and I'll be your stylist," an attractive young blond woman stated, shaking my hand. "Don't worry about a thing. Today will be like a day at the spa."

"Okay," I answered softly.

"It's okay. Don't be nervous. Is this your first time?" She questioned with a knowing smile. I nodded. "Don't worry. I'll be gentle."

"Aw, I actually like it rough," I joked before I realized what I was doing. I wanted to die as soon as it came out.

She laughed hysterically. "Girl, me too." Then she turned her attention to Eric. "You. Go away. I'll let you know when she's ready."

“Okay,” he snorted at her bluntness. “I guess I’ll go get some coffee.”

When he hurried out, several other people went with him, leaving me with her and her two assistants. “Okay, so, we’ll do your hair and makeup after we pick your dress. They’re doing the shoot on the rooftop, so it’ll be windy. So, we’ll have to do something that won’t show your panties.”

I laughed. I loved that she didn’t have any tact or filter. She was funny. “That would probably be for the best.”

“The red mermaid?” One helper said, going to the rack. She took it off to show Lauren. It was stunning with crimson lace that went to the floor. The bottom fanned out around the calves. The top was surprisingly revealing, hanging off the shoulders. It wasn’t what I was expecting at all. It was so elegant.

“By the way, did Mr. Yorkie inform you that you get to keep the clothes?” The stylist asked as she turned her attention towards me for a moment. I shook my head in answer. “Yup, all yours. So, what do you think? Do you like it?”

“It’s extraordinary.”

“Perfect! Let’s do a dramatic eye and lip. We’ll switch to an interview outfit afterward.” She glanced at me and grinned. “Alright, Ms. Swan, let’s get started!” She waved towards a chair in front of a mirror. “This is thrilling!” She grinned at our reflections. “I ordered your book last night. I can’t wait to read it.”

“Thank you,” I remarked quietly.

She smiled at me again. “Alright. You’re already beautiful, but let’s make you a goddess.”

“I already am one,” I answered more confidently. Lauren winked at me.

When they got done, I resembled a version of myself I only imagined in my head. I looked like an actual model. I laughed at my reflection. This was ‘me’ as a deity. My lips were bright red, and my cleavage was out of control. I was channeling Jessica Rabbit so hard.

I texted several pictures of myself to Alice, Tanya, and Jasper while Lauren went to go get Mr. Yorkie again.

“Oh, my Goddess,” my man replied right away. They were probably on a break. It was around lunchtime. “I want to worship you in that dress.”

“I get to keep it, so just let me know when.”

“Oh, really?” He answered promptly with a smile emoji. “I can’t wait to take you out and show you off to everyone. You are beyond ravishing.”

“WOW!” Eric shouted at me from behind. “You are smoking hot!” I laughed at his reaction, quickly looking away as I put my phone down. “These will be great pictures!”

“Thanks,” I giggled, trying hard not to push my lips together. I didn’t want to ruin my lipstick.

“Alright, let’s get up there! We have a schedule to keep. They have everything set up for you.”

For the next hour, I posed around a beautiful rooftop garden. Lauren was right about the wind. It made my hair go everywhere. The photographer, an older woman, loved it. She kept praising me as she gave me instructions.

After a quick lunch, we reset my outfit and makeup. This one was much more modest and professional. Eric and I took the car to a studio where I would talk to a series of reporters.

“So, how are we doing, kiddo?” He asked, looking at me with a small smirk on his handsome face.

“Great,” I responded as confidently as I could. “I miss Jasper,” I added honestly, pouting a little. “He wouldn’t care about any of this, but he’s so good at cheering me on.”

“He seems like a great guy,” he declared thoughtfully as he nodded his head. “I could see why you’d miss him. A smart, strong hero who is admittedly very yummy.” His eyes got wider when he said, ‘yummy.’

“Yes, he is,” I giggled in agreement. Then I paused. “Eric, are you gay?” I just rudely blurted it out.

Nodding, he then grinned slowly. “Yeah. Wait, I haven’t told you?” He looked away, scrunching up his face. “Huh, thought I had. I guess it’s just never come up. We’re always working.”

“No!” I remarked in shock. I peered out the window for a moment as we rode through the middle of Manhattan. There were cars everywhere, and we weren’t getting anywhere fast. “Oh, my god. I thought you’ve been low-key flirting with me.”

He laughed loudly. "Um, well, I do with everyone. So, you're not wrong. I don't mean anything by it. You're lovely, but your guy is more my type." I giggled again. He adjusted his tie, making a funny face as he did. "I'd let that man do things to me. All the things. Anything he wanted."

"Sorry. I don't share," I joked. My nose was pink with embarrassment.

He waved me off. "I wouldn't stand a chance, anyway. He worships the ground you walk on."

I smiled at his wording. "Yes, he does."

I spent the next seven hours answering the same twenty questions repeatedly. The first ones were always about the case. As it turns out, there are only so many ways you can say, 'I will not comment.'