



Chapter Thirty: Whirling Around

There was no playtime after the trial. Jasper was too emotionally drained. He was right when he said it was brutal. He described situations in horrific detail. Sometimes his observations would pop up with his exquisite drawings of dreadful things in them. I could see the jury cringing away in pain and disgust. Sometimes, I did too. I took notes the entire time to distract myself. But every day he sat up there, I understood more and more why they wanted him in that seat. He was charming, kind, and witty. He even made the jury laugh with his smart answers to the defense.

I had to admit I found him sexy when he was like this. Jasper was being a brat to them. But often their questions were stupid. They also kept asking the same ones in different ways to trip him up. Since he was always honest, they failed, and it made them look terrible.

I continued to sit with Mrs. Tanner. It pissed Royce off so much. He glowered at us every day whenever he got a chance. It annoyed him I wasn't scared of him. With her setting an example, I couldn't be. He had no power over me. I really enjoyed chatting with her about normal things right behind his greasy head. From the weather to hobbies, we only had pleasant stuff to say.

Jasper testified for five full days. Sam was next after him. Most of the time, he acted like such a dumbass. But when he spoke passionately about the crimes, it was easy to recognize

his intelligence. I could see why my boyfriend was such good friends with his former partner. He was like Emmett, deeper than he let on.

They didn't have as many questions for him. His testimony was only two days with the cross-examination. They went through witnesses a lot quicker after him. Sometimes a couple in a day. There were a bunch of doctors being called to the stand in fields I had never heard of. They were full of information, but they were very boring.

The day before my birthday was a Friday. Thankfully, the court would call for a recess until Monday. Childishly, it was all I could think about. My perfectly pleasant day with my man that would include walking into a national chain bookstore and purchasing my top-ten best-selling novel. Eric was keeping me informed of my numbers and said he could only guess at the final rankings until it's release. They were constantly changing.

We were sitting in court, just waiting for it to start. Mrs. Stanley walked over to me from the desk. "Alright, Ms. Swan. Today is probably the day. If not, I'm calling you up to the stand on Monday for sure."

Her words lingered in the air. "Oh, okay," I finally breathed, surprised. I knew it was coming, but I thought it would be later. There was still so much more to cover and many more witnesses to talk to. My part was small and towards the end.

King was watching the whole conversation as he smiled to himself. When she went back, his grin grew. She looked disgusted with him. When she sat down, she sharply tapped some papers.

I didn't hear a thing the person on the stand was saying, and I couldn't eat lunch. Jasper didn't force me to, either. I couldn't have anything in my stomach, just in case I threw up. That would have been the worst. Especially since I knew there were so many millions of people watching. I was being talked about on the news enough as it was.

They wrapped up the cross-examination of a police officer who discovered four of the bodies on two separate occasions. He worked the route between Albany and Rochester. He literally just stumbled upon three of them on a traffic stop.

"I'd like to call Ms. Isabella Swan to the stand," Mrs. Stanley began as she rose after glancing at her notes.

I left my purse beside Jasper as I stood. Straightening my back, I tried my best to channel Mrs. Tanner. A spine of steel. There was nothing he could do to me. Taking a deep breath, I took each step purposefully. I wouldn't give King the satisfaction of even looking at him. He had no power. None. I had it all. I was a Goddess, and he was dirt under my heels.

Perhaps this was my mistake.

Just as I moved through the gate that separated the audience from the court, Royce grabbed my forearm and yanked me around so I would look at him. "I'll fuck your corpse for weeks!" He gleefully shouted in my face. I could smell his minty breath stinging my nose.

There was a moment, only a split-second before anyone could have time to react. It was like everything stood still. It was eerily silent. His hold was tight, and it burned like acid. It was unacceptable. He didn't know who he was dealing with.

He did not have permission to touch me.

Whirling around, I struck him with my other hand. My palm connected with his jaw so hard it knocked him back in his chair. It almost tipped over, loosening his grip on me.

"Not before I eat popcorn at your execution!" I hissed in return.

Then chaos erupted. The whole encounter took five seconds. It felt like years.

Hundreds of arms seemed to move around me as the noise levels went insane. People were shouting, and someone was screaming, but it wasn't me. The sounds of dozens of chairs scooting at once, followed by stomping, filled my ears. I couldn't see anything because my face was pressed into Jasper's chest, both of his strong hands pulling me away to safety. I wasn't even sure how he moved that fast.

At least a half dozen cops pounced on Royce all at once. He was on the floor and cuffed in under a minute. I twisted to the side to see him glaring at us. Spit was coming from his mouth as he struggled against the restraints.

"GET HIM OUT OF HERE!" Judge Clearwater roared angrily over all the sound as he banged his gavel repeatedly. He was standing up behind his bench. "Dammit! Get your client under control!"

His attorneys were scrambling around the table, as were the prosecution, but for different reasons. So many people were shouting around us. I heard my name a thousand times. All I could do was look up at my protector. His face was red with his anger, and his eyes were massive with fear. Jasper's arms tightened around me, his hand on the back of my head as he brought me closer. His heart was beating so hard I could feel it against my cheek.

"Ms. Swan! Are you okay?!" Mrs. Stanley rushed towards us once King was out of the room. My ears were ringing. "Can we get the paramedics in here!" She screeched at someone.

"No!" I insisted in return, shaking my head quickly. "I'm fine."

She didn't like this answer at all.

"Let me look at your arm," Jasper mumbled as he pulled back. It was pinned between us. It was already starting to bruise. I could see his fingerprints on my forearm. Carefully, he ran his fingers over them. I brought my other hand up to stare at it because it ached. My palm was turning black. He grimaced.

The judge was still barking orders over our heads. "I want the jury out of here right now! Councilors, in my chambers! Everyone else just... calm the hell down!" He pointed his gavel at us. "Ms. Swan..." He trailed off when he saw my face. Clearing his throat, he softened his tone. "Do you need medical attention?"

"No, sir," I breathed. "I'm... sorry. I just reacted. I didn't think. I shouldn't have-"

"You have nothing to apologize for," he interrupted. "That was entirely self-defense. Take a break, we will have an EMT clear you, just in case. Bailiff," he said, nodding at the officer. He understood the order because he came over to me.

"There is a holding area over here we can take you to while we wait for that," he informed me in a kind voice before putting his hand gently on my shoulder. "Follow me, sweetie." We walked towards a door at the corner of the room, Jasper right behind me. The last I looked back, people were being herded out. "Do you need anything?" He asked when I sat down at the single table in the place. It only had two chairs.

"Could I have some water?" I weakly inquired. My mouth felt parched.

"Of course. I'll be right back. They'll be here in just a minute," he assured before leaving us alone. Once again, there was silence. The clock ticked loudly.

I turned to look at Jasper. He was still standing beside the door. His expression was undefinable, his arms crossed over his chest. "Are you okay?"

He shook his head, his mouth an angry straight line. I held my hand out to him, and he hurried towards me. Once more, I was in his grasp while I continued to sit. I pushed my face into his vest, my makeup smearing on it. Automatically, my fingers curled around his pockets, so I could hold on.

"I regret every single goddamn day I didn't kill that bastard when I had the chance," he breathed as he wrapped his fingers around the back of my neck.

"No. Don't say that. You're better than him," I countered as I peered up at him.

“And I still would have been after I put a bullet between his eyes.”

“No. This is better,” I insisted. “This means we’re getting to him. He’s losing, so he’s acting like a cornered animal. He needs to be properly punished. That would be too easy. It shouldn’t be quick. He doesn’t deserve that. Don’t worry. He can’t hurt me. You’ll always protect me. I’m fine.” I smiled at him.

The EMT opened the door, and the bailiff came in behind them with a bottle of water. The young woman sympathetically smirked at me. Jasper backed up, but I kept my other hand wrapped around his.

She made a face when she saw the bruises but agreed that nothing was broken. She covered it in a cold pack to help with the swelling. I held it onto my arm with my sore hand.

When we finished, they took us back out to sit in the audience again. When I did, Mrs. Tanner was holding my purse for me in her lap. “You alright, baby?” She asked when she passed it back to Jasper to hold.

“Yes, ma’am. Thank you for watching that for me. I forgot about it.”

“No problem,” she promised. “I’ll have to make you some cookies for that,” she whispered. Brokenly, I laughed. “I’ve always wanted to do that.” I couldn’t blame her for that in the least.

The judge walked back into the room, furious. His normally neat hair was frazzled with his fury. The lawyers were already at their tables, waiting. No one was happy. Royce was nowhere in sight. “How dare you!” He roared at the defense’s side. “You harassed me for a month so your client could come to court without restraints, and this is how you repay me? Well, guess what? His permission has been revoked, and the additional charges of witness intimidation and assault will be added to-”

“Your honor!” One of them stood up to argue with him. He was the lead, a fat man in an Italian suit named Mr. Jenks.

“Sit your ass down. I’m not done talking,” he shouted back. “What did I tell you the first day, huh? He has been skating on thin ice for-”

“Your honor-” he tried again.

He slammed his gavel down. “Interrupt me again, and I will find you in contempt of court! My word is final. Shackles and extra charges. Push me, and we’ll keep adding them. I’ve got all day and five years until retirement.” The man sat back down slowly after being scolded. The judge straightened his shoulders as he looked out over the gallery. “Right. We will adjourn for

the weekend. We'll resume at nine o'clock on Monday morning. Teach Mr. King some manners before then, or so help me God..."

Sam rushed up to us as soon as he was able. His eyes were wide, his mouth already shaped in an O. "Damn! You knocked the shit out of him!"

"Well, he shouldn't have touched me," I replied as confidently as I could. In my head, I kept repeating that I was a Goddess. It was the last thought I had before he grabbed me, and I needed to hold on to it. We continued to walk towards the cop's exit. There was no way we could leave out the front through the media that was now swarming the place. I already had to change my number to a private one after the first day.

"Damn right! Will you share your popcorn with me at the execution?" He smirked, opening the door. He made a sweeping gesture with his arm.

"Hell no. Get your own," I replied dryly. Sam grinned wickedly.

"Ms. Swan!" A group of reporters yelled at me from the entrance of the garage. They couldn't come inside, but they could see us. They stationed uniformed officers around the opening. "Dr. Hale! Can we get-"

"No comment!" Our friend shouted at them, walking beside me to block us from view. Jasper was on the other side. "Vultures," he mumbled. Once again, he glanced over at me. "Man, your next novel will be awesome, though!"

I snorted softly.

Quiet on the car ride home, Jasper and I held hands the entire time. His grip was so tight. I finally let go when we got back to the apartment. Like a zombie, I walked into the bathroom before violently throwing up my breakfast.