



Chapter Thirty-two: Getting to the Point

We filled the weekend with sex, good food, and rest. It was exactly what I needed. Jasper took care of me at every point. I couldn't sleep Sunday night, though. I kept tossing and turning in bed. He was on his side, gently petting my hair.

When our alarm went off, he turned it off wordlessly. I sighed, sitting up slowly. Sweetly, he rubbed my back. Without being asked, he went into the kitchen and made some coffee and bacon.

I got up to help him, getting some eggs. Jasper sliced fresh tomato and avocado, putting it on our plates. He knew I liked mine with salt, so he sprinkled it across the top before licking his fingers.

He caught me smiling at him. "What?" He asked as he licked his thumb.

"The only thing that has kept me sane this week has been you."

"It has been crazy," he mumbled. "Hopefully, things calm down a little once the trial is over." I nodded, stirring the scrambled eggs around in the pan. He came to stand behind me, his hands on my hips. "You know what I'm looking forward to the most when this is finished?"

“What?” I questioned lightly since he was trying to distract me. I wanted to be so bad.

“Our first night in our place. We’ll make love until we can’t keep our eyes open, and we’ll sleep in. When we wake up, we’ll make breakfast together in our kitchen. Just like now. And it’ll be perfect. But the best part is it’ll be the first of thousands more.”

I glanced over my shoulder at him. “That is the best part. I guess it is a good thing we got more bedrooms. We might need it if you want a kid or two. I wonder if they’d be blond like you,” I mused. I snorted as I turned off the heat. “We definitely need to make sure not to have any of these conversations while around anyone in your family.”

“My mother can probably sense it.” He lifted his chin and dramatically sniffed. “One of my offspring is talking about procreating.”

“She’s stockpiling onesies and keeping them with all the monogrammed napkins she’s bought for our wedding,” I joked. He laughed softly, shaking his head.

“Aw, she will be so disappointed,” he breathed before pressing his lips to my cheek.

There was so much press outside the courthouse. It was insane. They shouted at us from the garage entrance. Royce’s groupies were out in force, too, and they didn’t like me. I was grateful that they had to stay so far back. They had posted extra security because of it. Once again, Sam blocked me from view as he walked with us. He purposely waited until we arrived.

“Hey, gorgeous!” He winked at me. “So, will you sign my copy later?”

“I’d love to. Thanks for the balloons,” I replied bashfully. They were still floating around the apartment.

“Thirty dollars was worth it to see his annoyed mug.”

Jasper opened the courtroom doors. “I was pissed about being awake, not about them. I’d been irritated no matter what you bought. But the idea of you walking down the street with all of them like a clown is entertaining.”

I smirked at their playfulness. I realized this was what they did when they were anxious. It was why they made jokes when Jasper was injured all those months ago. They understood I was and were trying to make me feel better.

Mrs. Stanley was waiting for us. As soon as we walked in, she came directly towards us. Her expression was serious. “Good morning. How are you feeling? How’s your arm?”

“Fine,” I breathed. I pulled up the sleeve of my dress to reveal the bruises. They were dark purple and black, his fingerprints left on my skin. My palm was spotty, too. She hissed through her teeth. “It’s just a little sore. I’ve had worse.”

“I want you to know we will seek to press additional charges. That was beyond assault and witness intimidation at its worst.”

I squared my shoulders. “Well, it didn’t work, and I don’t know why he would try to rattle me, anyway. I don’t know anything interesting. I’m not that important in the grand scheme of things.”

“He seems to think so,” the lawyer said with a slight smirk.

“It’s because she’s getting so much attention,” Ms. Rachelle added as she came to stand beside her with an armful of folders. Her boss nodded in agreement. “Don’t worry. This will be quick, and you won’t have to come anymore if you don’t want to.”

“No. I want to be here for Jasper. I’ll be fine,” I promised. “He doesn’t scare me.”

We sat down in the audience to wait for it to begin. Mrs. Tanner touched my shoulder as she walked by, smiling at me reassuringly before taking her regular spot.

When King emerged from the side door, he was in full shackles. They clanged noisily as he ambled forward, his feet shuffling from the weight. A guard held him. He plopped down in his chair.

“I’d like to call Ms. Isabella Swan to the stand,” Mrs. Stanley stated firmly when it was time.

Once again, I stood to walk to the witness stand. The bailiff came to open the gate for me. I didn’t look at Royce, keeping my chin up as I walked proudly. The guard brought a bible for me to lay my hand on. “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, or so help you God?”

“Yes,” I breathed before swallowing. I sat down with my hands in my lap.

“Good morning, Ms. Swan. Thank you for being here today,” she started reassuringly. “So, I’d like to ask about your involvement in this case. I have to admit, this is new for me. How did you come to learn about it?”

For two hours, I answered all of her questions as honestly as I could. It was admittedly more boring than the jury was expecting. When you hear ‘writer’ and ‘murderer’ you think more ‘Murder She Wrote’ and less ‘nerd in underwear thinking up conspiracy theories.’

“Your witness,” she finished, pointing to the defense’s side.

The main one, Mr. Jenks, got up. He was a fat man with greasy black hair. “Ms. Swan,” he spoke in a booming voice. “Good morning. I guess congratulations are in order.” I said nothing in return. Jasper told me not to talk unless they gave me a question. “Did you purposefully plan the release of your novel to coincide with this masquerade of a trial to boost your book sales?”

I opened my mouth angrily, but both Mr. Crowley and Mrs. Stanley stood up to shout ‘objection’ at the same time.

“Your honor, what does this have to do with anything?” The lead prosecutor questioned in annoyance.

Judge Clearwater grumbled. “I agree. Is there a point, or are you continuing to harass a witness your client has already attacked?”

“It does, your honor,” he replied, steepling his fingers. “But we’ll move on. Ms. Swan, as stated before, you are a writer, correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And what sort of writer are you?”

“I’m a novelist,” I explained. Jasper said to keep everything as short as possible.

“What type of stories do you write, Ms. Swan?” He continued. I wasn’t sure where he was going with this, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to know either. I was convinced that everyone knew who I was at that point.

“Everything from adult romance to teen and children’s novels.”

He nodded his head gravely. “And would you say that some of your stories are violent or graphic in nature?”

“Yes,” I drawled. My eyes met Jasper’s in the audience. He didn’t look happy either.

“In what way?”

“I have a lot of work. There are many that have violent content. Murder, gore, horror elements. All common fictional tropes.”

He looked at his notes. "And some of these violent tales are sexual, aren't they?"

"Objection!" The councilors called again. "This has nothing to do with the case."

"I'm getting to the point," he argued back.

The judge pointed the gavel at him. "You better get to it quickly because I am losing my patience already, Mr. Jenks." He looked at me. "If you could, Ms. Swan."

"I have written some stories with a more aggressive sexual element. I don't know if I'd call it violent."

He inclined his head to the side. "Several of your books involve elements of 'BDSM', a term that has been brought up many times during this trial. Particularly by your romantic partner, Dr. Hale. These novels contain women tied up and beaten for the sexual pleasure of a powerful male figure. You published these under the name Marie Bell. Is this correct?"

I blinked. "Yes."

The jury was leaning in to hear what he would ask next. I couldn't fathom where he was going. I could see Mrs. Stanley already gearing up to storm the bench.

"Ms. Swan, did you, with the help of your boyfriend, Dr. Jasper Hale, create this fable that has us here today?"

"What?" I almost laughingly said.

"Did you, with the aid of Special Agent Hale, make up this tale about my innocent client?"

"OBJECTION!" the prosecutors shouted again. It was all three of them this time.

He turned to look at the table, his back to me. "I think it's more than reasonable to ask. Ms. Swan has been putting out novels with very similar-

I laughed. I couldn't help it. "Are you kidding me?" I shook my head. "Your client was caught red-handed torturing two young women who are watching this from their home where they're still recovering. You dishonor them and their experiences for even suggesting it."

"Ms. Swan-" He tried to talk over me, but I wouldn't allow it.

"No. All I did was express that someone gave me a bad feeling, and Dr. Hale made the connection. In the process, he saved those girls and almost lost his life. Every day he will live with the pain and memories of that night. An evening witnessed by many people. How dare you

even suggest such a thing! You're trying to slut-shame me because you literally have nothing else to go on. They're romance novels. Fantasy. Grow up. You are grasping at straws, and it's pathetic," I finished in an angry huff.

Mr. Jenks stared at me in surprise, his mouth hanging open. He must have thought I would be a pushover.

Judge Clearwater chuckled. "I agree. It is. I won't allow you to badger the witness. Unless you have some proof of your theory, I suggest you drop this line of questioning right now."

He looked at the judge then at me before glancing at the jury. They were not on his side. He was hoping to create doubt. All he did was make a fool of himself. He straightened his back. "I have no further questions."

With my head held high, I walked to Jasper. Once again, I didn't look at Royce. The bailiff opened the gates standing between him and me. When I sat down, my boyfriend instantly took my hand in his. He made his eyes wide.

"Your honor, I'd like to take a short recess to gather notes before we call our next witness," Mrs. Stanley said with a bit of a sigh.

The judge looked at his watch. "Sounds like a good idea. We'll take two hours for lunch. One o'clock?" He glanced at her to see if that was enough time. She nodded her head, glaring at the defense with a frown. He smacked his gavel.

"What was that?" Sam whispered from behind us. "What the hell was he thinking?"

"He was trying to create even a trace amount of doubt. Mrs. Stanley knew they would go after her like this, so they called her in the middle. So, she could bury them in facts," Jasper muttered under his breath in return, watching as the room started to clear.

"Bella made one of the baddest criminal defense lawyers in all of New York her bitch," Sam chuckled. "Do you know how hard it is to get a prick like him to tuck tail like that? Damn, you put him down like a dog."

Shaking my head, I stood as I picked up my purse. "I couldn't let him sully Jasper's good name. I don't care if he wants to talk shit about my dirty books, but I'll be damned if he'll try to make my man look bad for even a second. That was bullshit." I took a deep breath and frowned as I looked at Jasper. "Can we go have some cheese fries? Can we skip the rest of the day?"

He nodded. "I don't think it'll be a problem if we take the day off, no. I'll text Mrs. Stanley to let her know." He stood and offered me his hand. "I'll get you whatever you want, darlin."

“I might do some day-drinking,” I warned him as I took it.

“I kind of figured. I might join you,” he mumbled teasingly.

There weren't many people at the bar at noon on a Monday. I was grateful. It was quiet. I ordered a tall draft beer and a basket of fries with extra cheese as soon as we sat down.

Jasper rubbed my shoulder. “It's over. We'll eat. Then go home and take a nap.” I nodded my head, smiling at him weakly. “You were incredible up there.”

“I guess that cat is out of the bag, though.” I frowned as I took a sip of my drink. “Ugh, your mother will know about all my books. This is awful.”

My boyfriend shifted uncomfortably in his seat. “I warned her already.”

“What did you tell her?” I choked out.

He licked his lips as he looked down at the table. “That they will bring up information about our private lives to smear our reputation.”

“Did you word it like that?” He nodded. I bit my lip as I looked away. “I'm sure she didn't let you just say that.”

“No,” he chuckled darkly. “I had to explain a little more than that. I didn't have to say much. All I had to mention was ‘BDSM,’ and she laughed and said ‘Oh, I read Fifty Shades!’” He copied his mother's tone, making me giggle. He flushed, shaking his head. “She told me it was nothing to be ashamed of. Then asked if she'd like those novels. I almost hung up on her.”

“Oh, no!” I gasped, covering my face with my hands. “That's- no! Please! I don't want my mother-in-law to read my porn!”

“Me either!” He agreed. “Especially when I know some of them were written for me,” he continued before leaning in for a kiss. I smirked against his mouth.

My phone rang in my purse, and I groaned loudly. I had gotten a new number to deal with everyone calling me. I had made it private and only gave it to a few people. It was a secured cell that Jasper picked out for me. He said they were harder to hack into. He just wanted to keep me safe from all the unwanted attention.

I didn't recognize the number, but it was a New York State one. “Hello?”

“Hello, Ms. Swan. This is Gerald Jenks. I’m calling on behalf of my client, Mr. King,” the man started right away. I sat stunned, silent for a moment. “Hello?”

“Yes?” I finally choked out. “What do you want?”

“Mr. King would like to speak to you.”

The words hung in the air for a second. “Why?”

“He’d like to apologize.”

I laughed bitterly. “That’s not a very good excuse. It wouldn’t be sincere, and I wouldn’t accept it. He’d have to give me a better reason than that.”

“He also said he would like to help answer some questions you might have about another case you’re interested in.”