



Chapter Thirty-three: In Prison

“No! No! You can’t do this,” Jasper argued with me outside the bar in the middle of the afternoon. He had taken off his jacket, and his sleeves were rolled up. Pacing around, he kept shaking his head. “It’s insane, Bella. He won’t tell you anything. You can’t honestly think he will!”

“I don’t know that for sure. If he’s willing to-”

He put both of his hands onto my shoulders. “He’s going to fuck with your head. That’s it. That’s what he does. If he can’t control someone, he fucks with them then kills them.”

“I’m not stupid. I know that!” I declared with a little stomp. We had already been fighting for fifteen minutes, and we were going around in circles.

“Then what’s the point?” He demanded, holding his hands out in front of him. “Why allow him the satisfaction of giving him what he wants? Why let him have any power?”

Spinning around, I crossed my arms over my chest. “I just want to look him in the face and ask. I want to stare into his eyes and see for myself.” I couldn’t explain it more than that. The possibility was too tempting. Normally, I learned through reading alone. I rarely got to go out and ask the questions to myself. If Jasper could do it, so could I. I was smart enough to go up against King.

“He won’t tell you anything,” he repeated, bending down to look into my eyes as he followed me. “Darlin, I can’t let you do this.”

I scoffed. “You can’t stop me.”

He grunted at my words, straightening his back. Pinching his nose, he shook his head. “You’re right. I can’t. But you- I-” he stuttered. “Let me protect you. Listen to me!” He concluded desperately. He shook his head again.

“We’ll be surrounded by guards. He won’t be able to hurt me.”

“He did on Friday,” he swiftly countered. Jasper pushed the sleeve of my dress up my arm. “That fucker did that to you in a second. What could he do with thirty? Or a full minute? I can’t let you sit down with him, especially alone.”

I never said I had to do it solo.

“Then come with me. Punch him in the face if he tries anything. If you do, it’ll be super hot,” I responded, shrugging my shoulders.

Jasper stopped, blinking at me for a second. Sighing, he looked up towards the baby blue cloudless sky. He just kept shaking his head like he needed the idea out of it. “It won’t be worth it. You won’t get whatever you think you will out of this. You have to know that.”

Once again, I shrugged. “I’ll only find out for certain if I talk to him.”

“I hate this so goddamn much,” he finally gave in. Pulling the keys from his pocket, he stomped toward the car door. “If he touches you again, I’ll smash his head against the table until he stops moving. I will kill him.”

“Seems fair,” I responded, walking past him. He pushed me against it angrily, his hand wrapped around my forearm. “I need to do this. He doesn’t scare me.”

“Yes, he does, and he should,” he growled.

“You’re scarier than him, and I have you to protect me. I don’t have to be afraid,” I promised as I peered in his fluid eyes. They were almost the same color as the sky in the light. There was so much passion in them. I ran my hands up his chest slowly. I liked it when he was protective of me. “Kiss me, please.”

He did so fearsomely, his whole body pressing me against the car door. His fingers twisted in my hair, holding me tightly in place. I held onto the lapels of his jacket as I moaned against his mouth, wanting more of his frustration.

“Let’s get this over with,” he grunted when he finally pulled away from me.

The drive over to the courthouse was silent. King was being detained in the little jail there during the week before being transported back to the prison for the weekends. Jasper showed his badge the entire way, walking me down to the area where we would meet him. Everyone knew who he was. They had been talking about the trial and us for weeks.

His lawyer, Mr. Jenks, was waiting for us outside the room. Frowning, he was reading something on his phone. He put it away with a sigh. “I want you to know that I advised him against this,” he greeted us.

“I’m sure you did,” Jasper smirked. “Do you not have any control over your client?”

“No,” he mumbled before opening the door.

There were four guards in the large room already waiting for us. They were standing beside an exit on the other side, their arms crossed over their chests. There was only a table with two chairs around it. The space was concrete and steel gray, and the walls were off white. King smiled when he saw me come in after his attorney.

“Hello, Bella!” He brightly sang my name. “I knew you’d come!” He laughed, holding his manacled hands in the air. It was like I surprised him for lunch. “You said she wouldn’t, but once again, you’re wrong,” he fussed to Mr. Jenks as he wagged his fingers. It made his chains rattle. He paused when he saw Jasper. “No! Not you. Only her. I don’t want to talk to you.”

“Like hell,” my man began, but I put my hand on his.

“It’s okay,” I whispered.

“The only reason I agreed to this is me being here.”

I frowned, turning to look at him. “I know.”

“Don’t worry, doctor,” the monster grinned. “She’ll be perfectly fine.”

I glanced over my shoulder. “I know you’re smart enough to realize you’re not helping. If you’d like to talk to me, I’d suggest shutting the fuck up.” Royce sat up in his chair a little more, smiling. He waved his hand in front of him, allowing me to continue. “Wait by the door, okay? If he touches me, you’ll be less than twenty feet away. It’ll give me time to get my punch in before you finish him.” I breathed the last words so only he could hear them.

“Fine,” he sighed, marching to stand beside it with his arms crossed over his chest like one of the guards. It was probably a good thing he didn’t have his gun on him right then. Jasper’s anger was palpable even from yards away.

Coming to sit, I stared the villain in the eye. “That’s the best you’ll get. So, what do you really want?”

He glared at Jasper for a long awkward minute before looking at me. Royce turned his snake-like grin on. “Well, I wish to start by truly apologizing. First, for my behavior on Friday and then for my council’s crude treatment of you today. I didn’t want them to do that, but they don’t listen to me,” he shouted at the lawyer. He was standing behind us, just watching. It was like he didn’t want to be next to him either. “Your marvelously kinky stories have nothing to do with this. And you’re right, they are grasping at straws.”

“Then why not plead guilty and end everyone’s suffering? Including yours.”

He chuckled. “Because this is so much more fun. I’ll spend the rest of my life in prison.” He shook his head, bored with the idea. “Let’s be honest here. They won’t give me the death penalty, not even if they want to. They’ll want to study my brain for a few decades, at least. And there will always be more skeletons in the closet,” he concluded with a snicker. “So, I got to entertain myself.”

“Like Bree’s? Will you ever tell us what you did with her remains?”

“Would you sign my book while you’re here?” He changed the subject, smiling at me as he shifted in his seat. “It really is so good. It’s almost inspiring.” He winked at me. “I can’t wait for the next one.”

I grinned back. I could play his game if that’s what he wanted. “I’ll sign it if you tell me what you did with Bree Tanner. I’ll send you a personalized copy of all my future books if you do,” I offered. “As you said, you’ll be in prison for the rest of your life. There is no reason to keep it to yourself.”

“I didn’t do anything to her.” He was lying. That much was obvious. His nose wrinkled when he delivered the line.

“Where’s her body, Royce?” I spoke in a flirtatious voice. Inclining forward, I put my elbows on the table. “Come on! Think about how much chaos you would cause if you told me right now. You’d love it. It would probably throw this whole thing into a tailspin.”

Laughing loudly again, he leaned forward. His shackles clanged against the tabletop, the metal-on-metal sound echoing throughout the hollow space. “Oh, I like the way you think. Hey, Doc! She’d be a great interrogator!” He shouted at Jasper from across the room. “People

assume you get what you want by threatening them, but that's not it at all. You give them what they crave most," he continued to his lawyer almost conversationally.

"And what you crave is chaos," I concluded.

"Obviously." His smile was genuine. He liked that I understood this part of him.

"If you create it, you control it."

His grin grew wider. "Exactly. You're as smart as you are sexy. You're not my usual type, but I bet you're a lot of fun. Am I right, Dr. Hale?" I had no doubt he reacted with annoyance because it made King laugh. "Clearly, if you're this protective of her. I'd want to hide away something so sweet, too." He looked over me again as if I was delicious. "I always kept my favorites longer. I would have fun with you for months."

"Did you murder Bree?" I questioned him directly, ignoring everything he just said.

It faded away from his face. He leaned in as far as he could and stared me straight in the eye. "No. I did not kill Bree Tanner." He was silent for a long moment. He never flinched or wavered. Then his expression became slightly cruel. "But I'd love to hear her mother's screams when they find her." I got up without another word. He sat back, his eyes narrowing on me. "Where are you going?"

"I believe you," I told him, walking toward Jasper. "So, we have nothing else to discuss. You've apologized. I don't accept it for the record. And you have, surprisingly, been helpful answering questions I have with another case I am interested in." I shrugged my shoulders at him, raising my hands up as I did. "We're done."

"You believe me?" he said in shock. He stood up from his chair, and the guards took a few steps forward. I didn't even glance behind me. I just heard the scoting of the metal on concrete, his shackles shifting on the floor. "Look at me!" he roared at my back.

"Why do you think I'd give you what you want?" I replied as I reached for my man's hand. I turned to look at the lawyer who was hurrying behind me. "I won't be seeing your client again, so lose my number."

He seemed shocked, his eyes wide. "Yes, ma'am."

I could hear Royce screaming the entire walk down the hall. When the double doors to the main part of the courthouse closed, it muffled the sound.

Jasper and I said nothing to each other until we got back to the car. He sat with the keys in his hand, staring straight ahead at the gray concrete wall.

"I don't think he killed her," I remarked softly.

Sighing, he shut his eyes tightly. "I suspect you're right, actually." I turned in my seat. "The files are sketchy, but things don't line up with her disappearance. It doesn't mean he didn't have an accomplice."

"Have you found any evidence of that?" He shook his head in answer. "What if it was a copycat or just a fluke?"

"It wasn't a coincidence, no matter what. They targeted her because of what she went through. And she sure as fuck didn't run away."

I wrapped my arms around my torso as a chill ran down my spine. "They finished what he started."

Putting his hands on the steering wheel, he squeezed the leather tightly. "Bella, darlin, I know you want to help that poor woman, but I'm not confident we'll ever find out what happened to her. I hate that and trust me when I say I've lost sleep over it, but sometimes there isn't a lot you can do. There just isn't enough to go on."

"I bet there was before King and his lawyers got to it," I complained. "All of his stupid money."

"You're probably right, but you can't put yourself into harm's way to get answers again." He finally twisted in his seat to look at me. "It scared the hell out of me. Every second was torture."

"I wasn't."

Jasper took my hand from my lap. His were so big they wrapped perfectly around mine. "Little girl, I know you're brave, but for me. Please. My heart can't take it."

I pouted a bit. "You face men like him every day-"

"Yes," he interrupted, "so beautiful pure souls like you don't have to taint themselves with his presence." Gingerly, he pushed my hair out of my eyes.

Leaning over, I pressed a kiss to his cheek. "I'm fine, and I got something out of it. I don't know what to do with the information, but-" I paused, glancing at him hopefully. "Are you going to keep looking for her?"

He bumped his forehead against mine. "Of course."

Smiling at his words, I rubbed my nose against his. "We'll try to figure it out together."