



Chapter Thirty-four:

I woke up around nine in the morning with a slight headache, but nothing major. It was just from staying up so late. But It was worth it, though. It seemed whenever I was with my boyfriend I got less sleep, but it never bothered me.

I was alone, but it didn't surprise me. I knew he would be up before me. He was too excited about his family to relax. I heard the quiet hum of the radio downstairs telling me exactly where he was. The sounds of children running somewhere echoed down the hall.

Suddenly I remembered I had agreed to babysit later in the day, at least for a few hours. I didn't regret it, but I would need something to eat, some tea, and aspirin before it all began.

After a quick human moment in the restroom where I washed my face and brushed my teeth, I put on a pair of jeans and a comfortable t-shirt I had in Edward's closet. I slipped on socks but remained shoeless. I didn't imagine we would go out. A day at home, even if it was with children, sounded pleasant.

I smiled to myself when I realized I had referred to his house as my home. It was something I would have to think about later, though.

I made my way downstairs to the little gym. The door was open, and the music was turned down low. It almost drowned out the sounds of machines. I realized before I even went in

that there was more than one going. Slowly I poked my head inside to see my boyfriend on the treadmill, Emmett on the elliptical, and Eleazar on the bike.

His brother saw me first and waved. "Good morning, sweet cheeks." He beamed. Edward turned to see who he was talking to, and when he realized it was me, he smiled but rolled his eyes.

Grinning, I suddenly felt a little shy. I cleared my throat and decided it was just best to ignore him. For some reason, I had a suspicion he was like that all the time with everyone. "I thought you two had to work this morning," I remarked, glancing up at the clock on the wall.

"Oh, we do. Mom and Dad are already up there," he answered as he stopped his machine and walked over to me.

"And they are not pleased we are running behind," Emmett chimed in with a laugh. "But I think I speak for everyone in this room when I say that we needed a little something to help us wake up."

"Mm," Edward agreed. Eleazar only nodded his head as he turned off the bike and went over to the treadmill. He was shirtless, and his pale body was nearly hairless. I had to admit he was in better shape than my boyfriend, but it was too much. There was such a thing as too many muscles. I liked him just the way he was, his stomach firm but soft around the edges.

"Want me to make you guys some breakfast?" I offered, but my question was mainly directed towards him. I slid my arms around his waist and lightly kissed his chin.

He brought his mouth to mine before anyone could answer, kissing me soundly.

"Hell yeah, especially if you cook it as well as you make midnight snacks," Emmett's voice echoed around my head.

My man waved him off, continuing to kiss me. "That would be lovely, but we're running way behind, and we really don't have time for anything. We'll grab something on the way," he said when he finally pulled away, his nose an inch from mine. I felt myself swoon a little. "Are you up to watching the girls?"

"If they still want me to, yes," I replied in a whisper.

"Call if you need anything, and I'll be home right away," he assured me, his hand on the small of my back.

"I'll be fine," I smiled, getting one more kiss before he headed up towards his room.

Emmett followed behind, pouting the whole way. “But I want some good food.”

“Stop thinking with your stomach.”

“Yeah, but that was fantastic last night,” he whined before he got out of my earshot.

I snickered to myself. “What about you? Would you like some? What about Carmen and the girls?” I asked Eleazar.

“Oh,” he nervously smiled before shaking his head. He was a very quiet man. “We already had breakfast a while ago. You may want to ask her, though. She’s in the girl’s room.”

I nodded my head and gave him privacy to finish up his workout. I headed towards the room where they had slept the night before to find Carmen sitting on the floor with a pile of toys around her. The baby was in her lap, attempting to chew on a giant Lego while the others were trying to construct a tower.

“We should build a mote,” Tanya declared in a no-nonsense voice, nodding her head to herself with a hand on her slightly swaying hips. She wiggled when she spoke.

“A mote!” Kate agreed with a happy clap of her hands.

“She has no idea what that is, does she?” I laughed as I came in.

“No,” their mother stated with a laugh. “She doesn’t. Good morning.”

“Morning,” I replied with a smile. “I was just going to make myself some breakfast, and I wanted to see if you’d like anything.”

“Breakfast?” Tanya perked up, finally noticing I was in the room.

“Hush,” she said to the eager child. “We’re fine. We ate an hour ago.”

“But I’m hungry!”

“You ate a banana and bowl of cereal not that long ago.”

The girl rolled her eyes at her. She pouted out her pink lips and tried to look as pathetic as possible.

“I was just going to fix some eggs and bacon. It wouldn’t be too hard to make enough for the girls if they’d like a second breakfast,” I told her. She bounced and beamed at the idea,

turning to stare at her mother with big eyes. “But it’s up to you. You’re the mommy.” She clapped her hands together and smiled as innocently as possible.

Carmen rolled her eyes like her daughter and sighed as she stood. “Sure. Why not?”

“Yay!” Tanya squealed and rushed over to me, hugging my leg tightly.

“Don’t thank me yet. Go tell your mom, ‘thank you,’” I remarked with a laugh. She instantly released me and ran towards her. Kate saw her big sister do it as well and hugged the other leg.

“Okay, okay,” she giggled. “That’s enough. Let’s go wash up before we go downstairs.”

“Do you want anything?” I asked Carmen.

“Coffee. I could use some caffeine.”

Exhausted was an excellent way to describe her expression. The poor girl had dark purple circles underneath her eyes. She wasn’t getting enough sleep.

I headed to the kitchen to start the coffee first. It wasn’t my favorite drink in the world. But it always made the space smell homey and warm. It was pleasant.

I just made a simple breakfast with scrambled eggs and some bacon in the microwave. I knew it would be easy for them to eat. And it would be quicker. I made the kids milk and warmed up some leftover rolls in the oven from the night before to go along with the fast meal.

Carmen placed Irina in her high chair before putting the other two girls onto stools at the island. I passed them their spill-proof drinks and handed their mother the first mug of coffee.

“Thanks,” she smiled warmly.

Edward groaned loudly when he came into the kitchen, and I swear I could hear his stomach growl from across the room. “It smells so good in here,” he complained as he came over to give me a goodbye kiss. He was wearing one of his beautiful black suits, a bright orange tie hanging undone around his neck.

“Want me to fix you some coffee in a to-go mug?”

“You are an angel,” he answered. I went off to do that, finding a travel cup for both him and Emmett. My boyfriend went around the room and collected kisses from all the females who were eager enough to give them to him.

“Two mugs, one for you and one for your brother,” I explained as I passed them over to my sweet man. He smiled gratefully as he planted a solid kiss on my mouth. “I’ll see you tonight?”

“Yes, ma’am, you will. Have a good day,” he stated before kissing my forehead. He came over to his half-sister and rubbed her back and pecked her cheek. “Have a wonderful afternoon, everyone.”

“Bye!” The girls called to him in somewhat unison. It wasn’t perfect, but it was cute. Even the baby got into it with two waving fists.

I set the plates out for the kids first, all with a scoop of eggs, a piece of bacon, and a buttered roll. I sat beside Carmen with mine and a mug of coffee that was sweetened with cream and sugar. Taking a bite, I moved it around my plate a little to cool it down.

“So, you still want me to watch the girls for a while?” I inquired. “You and Eleazar can go to lunch and a movie or something. Shopping or whatever. It is Black Friday. Lots of good deals today.”

“Yeah, that would be great, but are you sure?” She asked again nervously as if I would suddenly say no.

“Of course. It sounds like a lot of fun. And I can make dinner for everyone tonight.”

Eleazar came in then with a loose tank top practically hanging off of him. His ultra blond hair was slicked back in some places and sticking up in others. He kissed his wife tenderly as she grinned as if the entire world melted away.

“Do you want to get a shower first, and I’ll watch the girls? Thank you for letting me get a workout in,” he said to her in his thickly accented voice.

“I can keep them, and you two can get ready to go out. I’ve got this,” I assured them.

He beamed and tugged his wife out of her chair before she could say anything. “Thank you so much.”

“Are you positive?” Carmen questioned. Her husband had already dragged her halfway out of the room.

“Yes!” I laughed. “Go! They’re just eating. I think I can handle them for a while.”

“Ms. Bella, can we watch some cartoons after we finish?” Tanya asked politely once her mother left.

“Sure, but just for a little while. It’s a pretty day outside. Maybe we can go play in the backyard for a bit. It’s not too cold, and everything should be dried up from the rain.”

“One show?”

“Depends,” I replied, figuring out quickly she liked to negotiate to get things her way. That was okay, I would just have to keep my eye on her.

“K,” she finally responded, getting distracted by her bread.

It took them about twenty minutes to finish their food, but they did. Every single bite, even draining the cups of milk to go with it. I poured myself another cup of coffee and grabbed my cell phone before we headed into the geek room. It took some searching, but I found the Disney Jr. channel that was playing a Mickey Mouse cartoon I had never seen before. It looked newer, and it seemed like an educational show. The girls, including the baby who was sitting on my lap, were instantly glued to the screen.

When I was sure their attention was directed elsewhere, I dialed my best friend.

“Well, hello there, missy. It’s been way too long,” Alice teased when she answered.

“I know, sorry. It’s been a hectic week.”

“Oh, what’s up?” She asked, suddenly concerned by my tone of voice.

“Quite a lot, actually. Most of it’s good, though. Anyway, I had a purpose in calling you.”

“And what’s that?”

“Well,” I began, “I offered to babysit for Edward’s sister so she and her husband could go out for a few hours this afternoon. It’s been forever, and I wouldn’t mind some adult company. And I know how you like kids...” I trailed off. “Want to come over and hang out with us awhile? If you don’t have any plans.”

“Sure! It sounds like fun. I was taking the day off. And I’m not insane enough to go out today,” she laughed happily. “Give me the address and I’ll GPS my ass over there.”

I was glad she agreed to join us. Not only because I didn’t want to be alone, but because it made my relationship with Edward seem more real. Alice had never seen where he lived before. It was like the first step in introducing my old life to my new one.

The show was just about over when Carmen and Eleazar came down from the shower. She looked much more human and relaxed. I had no doubt in my mind that there was some sexy time going on, but I wouldn't say anything. The smile on her face gave it all away.

"Okay, so here is a list of numbers you may need. Mine, Eleazar's. Momma's too, just in case you can't get a hold of us. I'll call in a couple of hours to make sure you're doing okay," she began nervously.

"You don't leave the kids with babysitters often, do you?" I asked, looking at the piece of paper.

"Only three times that it wasn't her mother." Eleazar gazed at me, and I nodded my head in understanding.

"Don't worry about us! I'll call if we need anything. We're about to play outside, and after a while, I'll make us some lunch. That should work out with nap time," I said as I looked at her list of information she had for me.

"Sometimes they can be a little hard to get down but-" Carmen started, but her husband stopped her by turning around and placing a solid kiss on her lips.

"She says she's got it. Stop. They'll be fine. Relax, or you will give yourself a heart attack. As a doctor, there is only so much I can do about that."

"Fine," she breathed out heavily like the word tasted bad in her mouth. "Okay. Yeah, relax. Okay," she repeated, going around to the girls and kissing them all lightly. Once they were done, they ran over to their father, except for the baby, and hugged him goodbye. "Be good, my loves. Be nice to Ms. Bella. And be polite. Remember your manners and-"

"Go!" I laughed.

Once they left, we all went upstairs, and they put on their shoes and sweaters while I changed the baby's diaper. I snagged a blanket and found my own too. The older kids grabbed a few toys to take out.

The sun was warming up beautifully. I picked a spot where the lawn was dry and laid out the quilt for Irina and me. Kate and Tanya were instantly off to play, enjoying the enormous backyard. She crawled along the edge of the blanket, pulling at the long strands of beautiful green grass.

We had only been outside for a few minutes when Alice came up the driveway in her cute little yellow sports car. She was wearing her hippie skirt with a long-sleeved peasant blouse she had made herself. A bug-eyed pair of sunglasses shielded her eyes from the late morning

sun, but it was easy to tell her expression was amazement. She dragged them away from her face and peered over the back of the house.

“Jesus, Bella. This is a shack! Couldn’t you date a man with a little more money?” She teased from across the yard.

Laughing, I lounged back on my hands. “Well, I know he’s poor, but I like him anyway,” I giggled as she sat down beside me.

“This place is spectacular,” she sighed. “Seriously, was that a historical marker upfront?”

“Yeah. A judge lived here or something. Someone important. I’ve read it, but I don’t remember exactly what it says,” I explained. But my attention was directed elsewhere when the chunky-legged baby pushed herself upwards into a standing position with the aid of my shirt. She wobbled but didn’t fall down. “Well, hey there,” I laughed. “What are you doing?” She just smiled before she walked the length of my back bent arm then fell onto her bottom.

Alice giggled. “Wow, she’s a cutie.”

“They all are. Good genes.” I nodded my head towards the two playing girls. They were interested in a patch of grass with a few purple flowers. They were picking them carefully and putting them in their dress pockets.

“And they’re all wearing my clothes!” She practically exclaimed. “Wow. That’s crazy. I’ve never seen a child wear my things like this. Not in real life. Usually, it’s because I’m forcing them to.”

“Carmen, their mom, wants to set up a time to look at all your stuff,” I told her. “And I’m guessing she shops like her brother.”

“Sweet! Maybe Jasper and I can go to France for Christmas then,” she joked lightly as the baby crab-walked over to her. “Hi!” She giggled. “You are a cutie pie. What’s your name?”

“That’s Irina.”

“Such a serious name.”

“Her father is Russian. Might have something to do with it. The eldest over there with the red curls is Tanya. The middle girl with the dark hair is Kate,” I explained.

Tanya’s ears perked up when she heard her moniker, and she waved over at me happily. I gave her my best smile and returned it.

The weather was so pleasant, and the girls were more than happy enough to play. They gathered what they considered flowers, which to most people would be weeds, and brought them over to Alice and me. She always took them with a grin. Irina moved out to the grass, sometimes trying to walk again, but she wasn't having much luck. I think her legs were a little too fat for it. Her poor adorable chunky thighs had at least two rolls each.

But soon noon rolled around, and we took our party inside for lunch. I decided since I had so much cheese already grated, I would just make them a quesadilla. I didn't do all the peppers, only turkey with a side salad for everyone. The baby didn't really have any interest in the lettuce, but the other two seemed to like it. We had fruit with whipped cream for dessert, which they spread all over their faces.

Carmen called about thirty minutes after I got them down for a nap, playing the role of nervous mother perfectly. I assured her everything was fine, and they were well-fed and had worn themselves out. Only after five minutes of reassurance did she seem to believe me. She promised to be back before dinnertime, but I told her not to worry and enjoy herself.

I brewed a pot of green tea for Alice and me to share as we sat around the island with the baby monitor at our side. We had a lot of stuff to catch up on.

"So, he proposed to her right after dinner? And she fainted?" She laughed as I retold the story of my father's engagement. "Wow."

"I know! I couldn't believe it either. But he seems happy. And I got an awesome step-brother out of the deal."

"Does Renee know yet?" Alice asked, and my stomach plummeted. I must have turned gray because she snorted and answered herself. "I take that as a no."

"I have no idea, but I will tell you one thing. It won't be me that tells her." I sipped my tea.

"What are you going to do? Ignore her until she finds out some other way?"

"No, I figure she'll get a wedding invitation or something. It is none of my business, and I'm not getting in the middle of that drama. She's like a teenager. I mean, it's like high school again. I'm done with it."

It was close to three in the afternoon, and the girls were still asleep, which surprised me. I didn't know whether to get them or just let them rest. Alice and I were talking about her future spring designs when I heard the front door open and shut. She was feeling really inspired after seeing them play. It made me happy to see her speak with so much animation. I knew if she ever got the chance, my best friend would make a fun mother.

I overheard a female laugh, but it wasn't Carmen like I was expecting. Instead, it was Esme who was walking with her arm around Edward's as they talked quietly. They made their way into the kitchen.

"I knew you'd be in here." He smiled as he let go of his stepmother and came to give me a kiss.

"You're home earlier than I expected," I informed them. "Emmett and Carlisle still at work?"

"Oh, no. They went into the media room," she explained. "We got a lot of work done, and we decided to come home early. Edward had the lovely idea to grill out. If that's acceptable to you. We weren't certain if you had any other plans."

"No." I shook my head. "I haven't even gotten that far yet."

"And Alice, Jasper and you are invited, of course," he said with a charming smile. He was normally a little awkward when dealing with people, but he seemed more relaxed than usual.

"Sure, that sounds great." She beamed. She had just been waiting for her moment to get to know him. It killed her that we hadn't done something together yet. "I'll go call him and tell him to head this way after work. Excuse me a minute," she spoke politely, taking her cell phone out as she headed out of the room.

"So, that was the girl that designed those lovely dresses?" Esme asked.

"Yup, that's the one," he remarked. "You met her husband earlier. The lanky man with blond curly hair."

"Of course," she said with a nod before turning her attention to me. "So, I know Edward has no idea what's in his kitchen, so I figured I better come to you. I assume we'll have to go to the grocery store to get some meat, but what else will we need? What sort of sides do you like? I thought we could do some grilled corn. The girls enjoy that. Tanya really likes vegetables."

It was like her name summoned her. She stirred from her bed, and the reason I knew it was her was that she started whispering for Kate to wake up. It didn't take long for the baby to move too. They weren't upset or anything, but if they were left alone, I had a feeling they would cause trouble.

"I'll go get them," their uncle offered, brushing his hand over my back. I sighed happily, and so did Esme. She shook her head and gave me a little smile.

“What?” I asked with a brief laugh when he was out of the room.

“Oh, nothing. You two are just so cute.” She wrinkled her nose playfully. “Anyway, do you have a piece of paper and a pen? I figured I could go to the market, but I wasn’t sure what I needed to get.”

So Esme and I made a list together. Alice soon came back with her own suggestions and ideas, which were helpful. They seemed to like each other, and though his stepmother seemed more proper, they were a lot alike.

She dragged Carlisle with her to the store after my boyfriend gave them some basic directions and any car they wanted from the garage. The girls sat in the middle of the geek room with their blocks while Emmett and Edward got changed into more comfortable clothes. His brother put on a football game to watch. Every time something would happen, he would cheer and make Irina jump in surprise. It never failed to make me laugh.

When Carmen came home, I guess she expected something else. Like the place to be destroyed, and for me to be pulling out my hair. Tanya told her parents hello when they came in before going straight back to her blocks. Kate barely even lifted her head from her work. Irina reached for her mother, who she stayed with for a few minutes before crawling onto her father’s lap. It wasn’t long before she made it back onto the floor with her uncle and her sisters.

Edward had a massive grill perfect for steaks. His father arranged the charcoal while the women worked in the kitchen to prepare the food. It was a lot of fun. Everything was ready to go when Jasper showed up. Everyone was outside. He had the same reaction his wife did.

My best friends were there and some new ones too. I honestly couldn’t imagine a better Friday night. Emmett was having a lively conversation with Alice and her husband, who I was standing next to. Carmen was laughing and chatting with her mother, who had scooped up the baby. Edward and Carlisle were beside the grill, each of them with a cream soda. Though I felt outside all the conversations, I was extremely happy.

Everything seemed to slow down when our gaze met from across the darkening patio. The porch lights came on, and there was a buzz of talking going around us, but we were in our own little bubble. It was only Edward and me at that moment. He grinned his charming half-smile, peering down and back up as he brushed his hair out of his eyes.

“Hi,” I mouthed.

“Hi,” he returned, and his cheeks flushed.

I bit my lip and felt mine heat too, though I couldn’t tell you why. “What?” I asked without using my voice.

He shook his head, looking bashful. It was adorable. I rolled my eyes dramatically when he didn't answer, but my grin never left my face. He just shrugged, continuing our silent conversation. Edward looked away for a moment like he was thinking about something, but then his gaze met mine once more. It was more intense than ever. "I love you," he finally mouthed.

"Really?" I giggled, and he chuckled too before nodding his head. "I love you, too."

The smile on his face was glorious. It was truly amazing.

Alice bumped my shoulder, trying to get my attention. Time was still going, even if it had felt like it had stopped just for us. The moment was gone, and I remembered that we were surrounded by all the people we loved and who loved us in return.