



Chapter Thirty-four: At the end of the Interview

“Hello, Bella! Hi! Good morning!” Eric said cheerfully about two months later. He had finally convinced me to sit down for more interviews. The trial was still going on, and I used that as an excuse, especially since they had called Jasper back to the stand a few more times, but the book was now eight weeks at number one and almost a million copies sold. Major news organizations flooded me with requests.

They booked me to spend the whole day on television. To say I was nervous was an understatement. I kept trying to breathe, but it wasn’t working. My heart pounded against my breast relentlessly.

“How much coffee have you had this morning?” I questioned, clutching my jacket to me. I was shivering. It was mid-November, and New York was much colder than Texas. I was hoping I would get to have another snow day with Jasper like the one before by the end of the trial. But I didn’t think I would get that lucky, though.

“Two...” He trailed off before rocking on his heels. “Huge ones. They were buckets. I’m sorry.” He grinned at me apologetically. “I couldn’t sleep. I will be annoying.”

“Why couldn’t you?” I asked worriedly. He opened the vehicle door for me. It was a beautiful, sleek town car with a driver. Once again, Mr. Yorkie went all out with my visit. I admittedly enjoyed the attention. He was always so full of praise, and I felt better about myself after talking to him.

“I’m just so excited for you! This is the biggest thing I’ve ever dealt with. It’s so cool. I knew it would be a hit!” He reached over and squeezed my hand once he was in the car, too.

I laughed a little. “That’s sweet. I’m terrified.”

He patted my knuckles comfortingly. “You’ll do great!” He promised. Suddenly, Mr. Yorkie lifted his finger, pulling out his phone with his other hand. “I know what will distract you from that. I’ve got something to show you.” His smile was huge.

Leaning over, I gazed at the screen as he pressed several buttons. Then he showed me a picture of something white with black letters and numbers on it. I couldn’t tell exactly what it was from the angle. I turned my head to the side to read it. “What’s that?” I asked, squinting my eyes.

“Your first royalty check. It came through yesterday, and they should post it to your account by the end of the week.” He twisted his phone so I could look at it better. It finally came into focus.

It was just over two million dollars after taxes.

Swaying in my spot, my head was extremely dizzy from all the blood rushing to it. “Whoa.”

Eric put his hand on my shoulder. “Bella? Are you okay?” He leaned in some.

Swallowing, I tried to get the huge lump to go down. My nose stung. “It’s so much,” I whimpered eventually.

“Well, you’ve sold a lot of books,” he chuckled affectionately. “And it looks like you’ll be crossing a million by the end of the week! This is just the beginning. Oh, I still have to get you a gift!”

I knew it was coming and that it would be a ton of cash, but nothing prepared me for seeing it for the first time. My hand flew to my mouth as I tried to keep my tears in, but it was too strong. It overwhelmed me with happiness and pride. I knew I could take care of myself for the rest of my life, and Jasper, too. For so many years, I felt like I was pretending to be an author. For the first time, I genuinely felt like it.

There were so many things I could do. I would pay all of my credit cards and student loans off. And I could pay off the townhouse, so we would always have a place to live no matter what happened in our lives. I wasn't sure how Jasper would feel about that, but it was a wonderful thought.

Eric wrapped his arm around me. "Are these happy tears?" I nodded my head vigorously because I couldn't talk. "Aw, I know. I cried a little when I got my cut, too." I laughed because I knew he got a lot being my agent, more than I did. I didn't mind, though. I think he deserved it for everything he did to help me. He planned every part of the launch perfectly, and I couldn't have asked for a better friend to encourage me.

My face was red and blotchy when we got to the hotel. It was probably puffy and swollen, too. I sniffled the entire way. Lauren, the same stylist from before, was waiting for us. She instantly looked angry when she saw me.

"What did you do to her?!" she snapped at Eric, putting her arm around me quickly.

"Oh, I'm—" I began. It was almost funny how fast she jumped to my defense even though she didn't understand what was going on or why I was emotional. I wasn't upset. That wasn't the right word for it.

"Hey! I gave her money! She's okay!" He interrupted, defending himself. He stopped when he realized it didn't sound very good. "She's crying because she got paid today! Jesus. You are always so mean to me."

She ignored him. She leaned in and squeezed me tighter. "Let's get you cleaned up, sweetheart. We'll have a facial while we do your hair and nails," she cooed as if I was an injured child.

Eric shook his head. "Bella, do you want me to get you some coffee?"

"Yes, please," I smiled. "Thank you."

"Bring me one, too!" Lauren fussed at him. He sighed and nodded, going once he had the order. She was treating him like an assistant. It was funny how he just took it. Apparently, she was employed by the publisher, and they worked together all the time, so they knew each other well. "I've got some banging power suits for you today."

"Please tell me they're pants. It's so cold."

She nodded in understanding. "It's definitely trousers with a turtleneck and blazer. You just get to pick out which one you like the best."

“Thank goodness,” I mumbled, plunking down in the chair waiting for me. “I can’t be freezing and nervous as hell at the same time. I don’t have enough energy for that.”

“Don’t worry. We’ve got you.” She winked at me in the mirror before fluffing my locks. “Please never cut your hair. It’s so lovely. Ugh, I love working with pretty women,” she mumbled to herself. Lauren piled it on top of my head. “Let’s do lots of curls.”

Blushing, I shrugged. “Whatever you want to do. I trust you.”

For two hours, they pampered me before they shoved me back into the car. Security guards walked us through the back entrance of the first show I was filming for the day. It was one of the late-night programs. They took me to a green room to wait. They would interview me in front of an audience for the first time. After I finished, I would do another in the same building.

Rocking back and forth, I wrung my hands as I waited for my turn on the couch. Eric was leaning against the wall beside me, drinking from a bottle of water. He was only trying to keep his own busy.

My phone dinged in my purse. It was just before noon. I had a long day ahead of me. A message from Jasper was waiting for me. “I love you, Goddess. I wish I could be there to see you in person. Good luck. You’ve got this. Go show them how powerful you are.”

Biting my lip, I read the text repeatedly as I smiled to myself. I didn’t realize Eric was looking over my shoulder. “Aw. Yes! Listen to him! You are a powerful book writing goddess! There is nothing to fear. They’ll love you.”

I laughed because he didn’t really understand why he was calling me that, but I liked his attitude. We had talked about my erotic novels, and he had read a few, but they were more in the romance vein. His publisher didn’t do those, but he was considering looking for another company to do it under my Marie Bell name. If Anne Rice could do it, so could I.

The host walked in. He was a tall black man with perfect skin and a big smile. He was already covered in makeup, dressed up in his suit for the show. “Hi, Ms. Swan. Welcome! Thank you for coming. I’m really excited to have you. I love the book!”

“Wow! Thank you. I am, too. I’ve done nothing like this before.”

“Really?!” He beamed. “Oh, well, I promise I’ll take it easy on you.”

“Thanks,” I awkwardly giggled, looking down at my feet shyly.

“We’re about to get started. If you need anything, please let my wonderful staff know. And I’ll see you on stage in just a few minutes.”

Plastering a fake smile on my face, I nodded. "Great!"

"Do you think they'll give me some tequila?" I questioned Eric once the man shut the door behind him. "Holy shit. Holy shit. Holy shit," I chanted as my panic set in. It was amazing how I could handle a killer with ease, but this scared the hell out of me.

"I'll buy you all the liquor you want tonight. I promise," he said, trying to quell some of my freaking out. I wasn't sure how well it was working.

About thirty minutes later, a woman with a headset knocked on the door. She was holding a clipboard. "Okay, Ms. Swan. We're ready for you. Will you follow me?"

"Yes, ma'am," I nodded. It felt as if I was gliding forward, my feet not even touching the ground. When I got to the spot where I was supposed to wait, they dusted my nose with more powder for a touch-up. My lipstick was still perfect.

They were on a commercial break as they reset for my interview. I watched as the director counted down and pointed at the host. He turned on like a light. "Our guest tonight is a New York Best-selling author who's been at number one for eight weeks and isn't slowing down. Vanity Fair called her debut novel, *The Rabbit in the Snow*, a sensational thriller from the first sentence to the last. Join me in welcoming Ms. Isabella Swan!"

People cheered as soon as I came out. I smiled at them, waving as I was told to do. He came around and pulled out my chair for me before sitting at the desk. "Welcome! Thank you for joining me!"

"Thank you for having me, Laurent!" I grinned, sitting up straight. I focused on him and not the audience of probably two hundred. We were just having a pleasant conversation. We were new friends. I could pretend. I was good at role-playing.

"So, congratulations first." He gave the crowd a moment to clap for me. "The book is superb. I loved it."

Shifting in my seat, I continued to smile. I wondered how many times I could repeat myself before I sounded like an idiot. "Oh, thank you!"

He tilted toward me. "Please tell me when the film is coming out. I am ready for it."

I laughed more genuinely. "Well, I don't know if there will be a movie. At least, no one has talked to me about buying the rights, yet." Like every writer, I had imagined my stories on the big screen. I even joked with Eric about it. But I only ever considered it a fantasy. I realized as I sat across from him, it was a legitimate possibility.

“Oh, there will be one,” he said seriously as if he were reading my thoughts. “If someone doesn’t snatch it up, I will make it myself. I’ll kidnap Ryan Reynolds if I must.” The audience laughed and whooped in approval.

“Who would you have him play?” I questioned, leaning in.

“The doctor.”

“Oo, the bad guy! I can see that.” I nodded my head in agreement. “He seems all sweet and funny at first. Good choice. Who do you see as your lead?”

We chatted back and forth about the perfect imaginary world where the best actors on the planet were in the adaptation of my favorite book. The crowd did their part, laughing and clapping at the right times.

At the end of the interview, he got more serious. “So, I know you probably can’t say anything about the I-90 Tracker case.” I shook my head. “Can’t tell us anything?” He hopefully asked.

“No. It’s an ongoing thing, and it’s something the FBI will deal with for a very long time. I don’t want to add to the confusion and misinformation. It’s most likely a subject I won’t talk about for years after it’s done, and that is perfectly fine with me.”

Laurent nodded in understanding. “You’ve been at the trial every day, even after you were attacked. Are you frightened?”

I shook my head again. “Not in the least. He doesn’t have any power anymore. King can try to scare me and others, but it won’t hide the truth. I just hope justice is served, and we can give peace to those who have suffered at his hands.”

“I couldn’t say it better myself! Ms. Isabella Swan!” He called in a loud voice as he stood. The audience cheered vehemently, giving me a standing ovation. He helped me to my feet so I could take a bow.

My whole body felt like it was on fire.

Then it was onto the next interview. It went almost exactly the same. The conversations were a little different, but it was still about the book. The crowds all clapped for me. After, we went to eat before going to two more. Thankfully, these were in private with journalists. They were in front of big cameras and hot lights, though. People kept touching my face to add more makeup. It felt layered on by the end of the night.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when we got finished with the final one. I was starving and tired. It was probably the hardest work I had ever done as an author, and I hadn't written a damn thing all day besides my name. I signed so many autographs. Eric ordered us food once we were alone. I kicked off my shoes and flopped onto the couch with my phone after throwing off my blazer. My agent brought me a large glass of wine from the bar in the room before I could check it. I smiled in gratitude.

I had another message waiting for me from Jasper. He had been sending words of encouragement whenever he had a chance. It gave me something to look forward to. This one was different and made my heart speed up. "They're starting closing statements tomorrow."