



Chapter Thirty-Six-

The next two days I set about decorating Edward's house for Christmas. He had no decorations whatsoever, so I bought everything from scratch. I purchased him a nice small fake tree with fiber optic lights built in. I went with a candy theme for his tree. He loved it and was very surprised when I set it all up while he was at work. He hadn't expected to put anything up, but it gave him great pleasure in seeing my handiwork.

It didn't feel very Christmassy with it being in the seventies outside though. I had gotten a little sick of the wet cold in Queens, honestly. I took this chance to wear my rompers and shorts that I left behind at his place, much to Edward's delight. He especially liked the silky sleeveless one that I wore with no bra since I was just around the house. Whenever he would pass me, he would trace my nipple through the fabric, a naughty pleased smile on his handsome face.

I filled his cabinets with fresh food that I would be cooking for us the next full week. I would be making us a small Christmas Eve dinner, and then we would go to a Christmas party the following night at Tyler and Lauren's. The theme was 'an excuse to leave your family's place early.' It was a theme Edward, and I could actually both understand. Alice kept texting me about her crazy mother, complaining about her pushiness.

Edward was giving Seth and Tyler the week off for the holidays, but we had major plans

together starting after Christmas. He delighted in telling me his ideas and the list was ever growing. There were so many links, notes, and pictures now in our shared file that it had become pages and pages long.

They did have one more day of shooting together before the end of the year, though. Eddie filled it to the very brim, starting very early so he could get as much in as possible. He made a giant pot of coffee while I finished getting ready. He had perfected it by that point. Edward made it just as well as I could. I loved the smell as it wafted up towards my nose as I finished doing my makeup for the day.

"Hey!" Seth shouted at me when he came into the house to meet us for our day together. "There's our favorite soccer player!"

"Soccer player?" Edward questioned in confusion.

"Because she's good at kicking balls, Eddie. Please try to keep up," Tyler answered calmly as he hugged me. "How's your foot? No more cast, I see."

I smiled but felt a little embarrassed. "Yeah, no more regular cast but it feels like I broke it kicking a racist in the balls. So, just great. Just no high heels for a couple of months. It'll be fine."

"That's is the price one must pay for sweet, sweet justice." Tyler patted my shoulder.

"It was his chin that broke your foot," Edward commented. "I don't think nuts can do that kind of damage. I shudder to think of what you did to his."

Seth shook his head, pained. "If he broke your foot, what did you do to his chin?"

Edward was putting his wallet, phone, and keys into his hoodie pocket. "According to my attorney, she knocked out two teeth and loosen two more which were restored at the hospital, broke his nose, fractured his cheekbone, split his lip, blackened his eye and gave him a concussion. With one kick." He held up a single finger. "One. Lets just assumed his balls were purple as well."

"Oh, I didn't know all that," I said quietly. We hadn't really brought up the attack much because it upset both of us. I didn't even consider the fact that he had a lawyer to look at these things. I should have assumed it with his money. He had to probably actually have a couple, come to think of it.

"It's almost as if you had been dancing and kicking three and four hours a day for three weeks solid just before," he smirked a little bit. "And, you don't believe in destiny."

"Your skills were perfectly honed," Seth replied dramatically. "Fate and karma came walking in, hand in hand, gloriously together. Bringing you to the exact right moment for you to punish this limped dicked, pea-brained, ugly, toothless, mouth breathing, sister fucker!" He then cackled crazily.

"Alright. No coffee for you." Edward pointed at Seth.

"Hey!" He shouted. "Okay, maybe I have had enough already," he said more quietly.

"We stopped at Starbucks, but yours is better," Tyler said warmly as he went to make himself a travel mug from the carafe. "He's already had a triple shot venti iced mocha with extra mocha this morning."

I rolled my eyes. "Eddie made it."

"Then why don't you make us coffee, asshole?" Seth put his hands on his hips, turning to look at his employer.

"I obviously like her more than you."

"Yeah, that's fair." Tyler nodded. "Good coffee though, boss."

The first video was about an intense workout that was becoming popular around Hollywood. I couldn't do the exercises due to my injuries. Seth was in the video with Edward. They both hated it. Seth ended throwing up. Both men were so disgustingly drenched that they showered at the gym. I took pictures of the whole thing, sitting on a random weight bench that line one of the walls. Not the showers, sadly. Just pictures of the workouts. I would have happily watched that part, too.

His fans really did like to see them suffer in the weirdest ways.

The next video was a much easier food truck one that was very quick to shoot. I was in this one because mainly I was hungry and the weird Chinese food filled burritos looked good. I had one with crispy rice, vegetable lo mein, and orange chicken with sweet chili sauce drenching the top. I could have eaten three of them. Next time, I decided, I would get the deep fried version.

The video after that we filmed at an animal shelter. It was an amazing time. I sat on the floor surrounded by puppies and kittens, taking pictures and playing with them all. My tone might have gone up two octaves as I spoke in a baby voice to all of them no matter the size. I loved them all. I was pretty sure it's exactly what I needed. Nothing was as wholesome as baby animals.

All at once, the shelter staff released a dozen golden retriever puppy siblings into the yard with us. They were eight weeks old and just the cutest things on the planet. Their tongues seemed permanently lulled to one side, and their wildly yellow hair was so fluffy and insanely soft.

Tyler became rather attached to them. Apparently, no one had ever seen him react like that before. He turned into a pile of mush around them.

"Get Lauren a puppy for Christmas," I suggested as we drove to the next location, which was another restaurant shoot. This time it was a local fried chicken place known for their spicy

chicken. Edward was glad to have me along for it. Their spicy videos had become very popular. "You have a pug, right?"

"Is a puppy really a good Christmas gift?" Seth asked.

"Either give her a baby or a puppy to practice on," I replied. "Or a kitten. She seemed kinda gothy. Goth chicks dig cats."

"She's allergic to cats, even if she loves them. She's not allergic to dogs though," Tyler commented. "I don't know. Maybe. It's been five years since I've had a puppy."

"My parents had dogs growing up, but they don't anymore. I've not had a pet in years either," Edward added into the conversation. "Not since before Uni."

"I love my cat, *asshole*," Seth chimed in with an annoyed expression. He was obviously thinking about something in particular that his pet had done.

"I hope that's not its name," I laughed.

He smirked. "Might as well be. Doesn't come to anything anyway. It's actually Cracker."

"Hey, come 'ere, Cracker!" Edward teased him. "*Really?*"

"I didn't name it. My little sister did. She was nine," he defended his pet's name to us as we continued to tease him.

"Is he white?" I asked. "He has to be a white cat. Obviously, right?"

"Oh, yes. Obviously," Edward snickered in amusement.

"She's a ginger. It's Cheese Cracker," he mumbled out quietly as he gripped the steering wheel tighter.

"Awww..." I drew out. "I like Cheese Cracker better."

"Ms. Cracker if ya nasty," Tyler said dryly.

Seth irritated face gave me so much joy. He was so easy to egg on. "You need another orange kitty and call it Goldfish."

"I like that," Edward laughed. "You've got Patricia. Such a normal name for a pet."

"Patty Cat is Alice's. I've never had a pet of my own actually. My grandmother didn't like them growing up. Alice and Rosalie had a bunch of pets growing up, though. When I first moved in, they had a wolf named Tenaha and a bobcat mix named Nubby," I remembered fondly. "Nubby was a sweetie."

"Surely not," he seemed shocked.

"What?" I asked.

"Was it a real wolf?" Seth asked.

"Oh yeah. In Texas, you can own almost anything without a permit. Their mama has a small ranch and a big plantation house. Forty Acres. Tons of space. They had an opossum, skunk, and a raccoon too. Those are less crazy in Texas. Plus all the cows, chickens, horses, pigs, turkeys and ducks. You know, normal farm animals. They had goats and sheep, too. Some donkeys. I love donkeys. They're so cute," I mused. "Lettie, their mama, would buy whatever animal she thought looked cute. She still does."

"A skunk?" Tyler asked excitedly.

"It was de-scented, so it couldn't spray. It's like a ferret cat," I explained with a laugh. "It was super cute and lived in the house. It had a little bed it would nap in all the time. You'd think Bob Bob and Nubby, the two bobcat mixes they had at the time would eat it. But, no. They lived in the house, too. Just one big weird family. They'd all cuddle up together. Bob Bob, the other cat, and Posey died before I moved in though. Not at the same time," I explained. "They were old."

"I wonder how long a skunk lives," Tyler mused. "That would be a fun pet."

"Posey was about eleven. She was an old lady, though. When we were kids, we'd take her with us trick or treating on a leash." I remembered all the kids and parents freaking out. It was so much fun. I giggled at the memory. One year we all went as skunks with her in a red radio flyer wagon. We were maybe eight.

"I didn't know if you're fucking with us or not," Edward said very seriously.

"Call and ask AI," I laughed. "She can confirm everything. It's not that weird, really. Our priest growing up, had a pet alligator named Sam. We'd throw candy in its open mouth in its pond behind his house. Texas is wild, y'all."

"Alice would fuck with me too," he pointed out. I shrugged a little, smirking. He wasn't wrong.

"Texas and Australia have a lot in common," Seth teased us both. "Crazy fucking animals. It's huge and hot as fuck and both filled with people who think it's a good idea to fuck with toothy reptiles."

"Yeah, a maybe a little in common," I replied dryly. "Both were also filled with brown people who said 'we were here first' and then a bunch of white guys were like 'but do you have flag?'"

"Hashtag hard truth," Seth snorted at my comment. "World history summed up in one sentence. 'white guys with their stupid fucking flags.'"

It was kind of fun to make the two white guys in the car a little nervous. Especially the half Englishman.

Even Edward found this spicy chicken mild. It was good, though. It had a nice flavor. They deep fried whole birds at a time after soaking them in buttermilk for two days. They had good creamy, garlicky rice to go with it. I liked it even more than the chicken.

Edward carried me inside after the shoot because my foot hurt so much. That next day he refused to let me out of bed, giving me a good excuse to stay there every time I tried to get up. He brought me food. We made love twice throughout the day, though. If we were going to be in bed anyway, I was going to make good use of it. That evening he drew me a bath with loads of Epsom salt to soak my foot in.

He laid on his bed, working on his computer while I relaxed with my brace off. My foot was still bruised, though it was starting to fade. It had been deep and tinged with black and purple but was now a sickly gross yellow and brown, especially around my big toe which had the faintest hint of a nail growing. The boot had rubbed my foot and ankles in weird ways, so it was a good thing to have it off all day. None of it looked sexy, that was for sure. Edward was concerned that I wouldn't be up for our trip, but I was forcing myself to be better. He had arranged it right before I was hurt, but I wasn't going to let that stand in my way.

"What shall we do tomorrow?" I asked with my good leg hanging off the edge of the tub.

"You mean you don't want to stay in bed and continue to be treated like the queen that you are?" He asked without looking up from his rapid typing. The keys clicked barely loud enough for me to hear from the distance.

I ignored him. "Do you need to work on anything?"

"Only what I'm doing now. And I'll be working on it every day for a while."

"I'm sorry that I'm keeping you from working."

"You're not. It's just something I need to stay on top of. It's script stuff for a television project. I work it out in my head then write until I've got it all down. And then I have to take a break and daydream all over again until I work out the next scene in my mind's eye. That sounds convoluted. Does that make sense?"

"Yeah, it does. Let me know if there is ever anything you need help on. I'm a pretty good proofreader. I've been doing it for Alice for years," I offered. I could see his small smile lit up by the laptop screen. "She writes a lot."

"You're sweet. I might take you up on that offer when I get to that part. You'll have to be brutally honest and tell me if it's funny or not though." His eyes flicked towards me then back to the screen.

"I'm not qualified for that last part," I replied. "Just at finding typos."

"You're funnier than me. If I had your sense of timing and were half as witty, this would be so much easier," he mumbled, almost annoyed.

I shook my head. "You only think I'm funny because you get to see my tits."

"Wait- no. I-" he began, stuttering. Edward made a little face and looked over to me. "I don't know. Let me see them again and check."

And he didn't think he was funny.

I lifted up out of the bathtub some as I fully sat up, putting my breasts in my hands and bounced them like I was trying to see if they were ripe fruit at a grocery store. I wiggled my chest to get my point even further across.

Edward was very serious as he looked at my chest.

"Okay, maybe."

I laughed and laid back into the water, covering my chest with my arms. "No more boobs for you."

"Aw," he chuckled and grinned. Edward shut his computer and put it on the bedside table. He slid, so he laid down fully on the bed and rolled over to his side so that he was facing me. "But, *boobies*. I like them so much."

I shook my head, closing my arms around myself tighter. "Nope. Too bad, too. They're warm and soft and all wet. And probably well seasoned at this point because I've been marinating in this salty water for a while now."

He covered his face with his big hands, but I could see his stupid grin curling around the edges. Edward cleared his throat after a moment. He loved my stupid comments.

"Shall I get you out then?"

"Hm, maybe." I pulled the plug on the water and slowly adjusted myself so that it would be easier to stand. He hopped off the bed and took my arms as I came to stand entirely on one foot. "Pass me the towel."

Edward grabbed it from the heated towel warmer he had for some reason and barely used. It was amazing. He took this chance to rub me all over with the warm terry cloth, leaving little kisses along the way. When he finished drying my body, he wrapped it around my body and scooped me out of the tub.

"Seriously can't tell you how much I like this," I told him as I held onto his neck. "You're the only guy I've ever dated that could do this on the regular."

"But you're so tiny," he chuckled. "There are ten years olds who weigh more than you. Are you even a hundred pounds?"

I made a little pouty face. Because he didn't get an answer, he walked over to his scale while still holding me. I threw my head back in laughter.

"Yeah, that's what I thought. I'd say... ninety-five?" He bounced me a little.

"I was one hundred and five last time I went. Last week or the week before. Whenever that was."

He put me on the bed and went to the fetch the lotion he knew I liked. Edward sat at my feet, and tenderly began to rub it onto my legs. He was careful to avoid the breaks, smoothing the cream over my ankles and calves. All I could do was lay back and enjoy.

"What do you want to do tomorrow?" He asked sweetly as I relaxed with my eyes closed and my arms above my head.

"Do you need to go Christmas shopping? Or, get anything for the trip?" I asked. "I finished while you were working on Monday and Tuesday."

"No, I'm good. I had a lot of downtime on set to shop online. I might have gone overboard," he admitted. "I did quite a bit of shopping on your page as well. Made that part easier."

"Really?" I asked. "You could have told me, and I would have given it to you at my cost. I have a code. I gave a bunch to Esther for their Hanukkah silent action for their youth programs at her temple," I commented, wondering if he had bought more things for his family. He said that his sister really loved the one he had gotten her.

"Well, maybe next time then," he mused.

"What did you get?" I asked, lifting my arm from my eyes to look at him.

"Oh, loads of things, actually. I sent a big canvas to a lot of my professional connections. Some of the directors and such that I've been working with lately. I sent some to my sisters, too. Because they really liked that one I sent of the beach scene with the sunset and the clouds, you know? I got some more with the cool clouds. And I got some posters of the cute animals for my nieces. The smaller ones. They're their stocking stuffers from me. The ones that are old enough, anyway. I was thinking about getting some of the postcards so I could start to write to them regularly. They do so love getting things in the post from their uncle," he told me cheerfully as he rubbed some lotion over one of my knees. He was trying to distract me with his hands and words.

"Eddie, that's so much stuff," I said quietly. "How many canvases did you get?"

He didn't look at me as he switched knees. "Um... thirty or so? Give or take around that. I don't remember. More of the posters, though. I got them a few each, and I have six to buy for. The youngest is too little for posters. As I said, I might have gone nuts. I like to spoil my girls."

I sat fully up. "What? Which size canvas?"

"The biggest. Whatever that is. I don't remember the exact numbers." Edward rubbed the extra lotion into his own hands and arms. He wasn't really looking at me.

"When?"

"Um, last Tuesday," he said innocently. "Why?"

"Why did you do that, Edward?" I asked faintly.

His face was worried, the stress visible in his lips. "Are you mad?"

"I-" I opened my mouth. "Yeah?" It was kind of a question.

"Why?"

"They're two hundred a piece!" I exclaimed. "Thirty, Edward. *Thirty.*"

"Yeah, and I get to write them off my taxes in a month because they're for work reasons. It's networking. That's how that works. I have no doubt it'll be worth the investment." He tried to go for the bottle of lotion again, but I pulled it away from him. "I'd rather give you that money than a stranger."

"How much did you spend?" I demanded.

"There isn't a number where you're not going to not freak out, Bella. How much do you get from your sales? I know it's a print as they order type thing," he asked me curiously.

"Usually, around seventy-five percent after printing costs. It increases the more I sale though," I answered him in a quietly strained voice. I hadn't checked my bank since the Saturday before I came. I expected to do decently well on my sale's site because it was around Christmas and Edward's endorsements had been giving me an astonishing boost. Without thinking, I hit his shoulder hard. "Why'd you do that? I don't want your damn money."

"Ow," he laughed in surprise, rubbing the spot where I had tagged him. "Because they made for good gifts. They're so pretty. I don't think that deserves a smack."

"I don't want your money," I repeated anxiously.

"Next Christmas you can give me the code then." He casually shrugged his shoulders. He obviously liked the idea of another Christmas together though.

I shook my head, my wet hair sticking to my shoulders as I did. "I'm going to give it back right now."

Edward was unmoved by my annoyance. He was still working the cream into his skin, rubbing his fingers together. "No, you're not. You can use it to plan our next little trip."

I wanted to cry, tears pricking at the edge of my eyes and stinging my nose. "Edward, I'm doing fine right now. Really. You don't have to give me money. Everything is different from two months ago."

"I am very pleased to hear that you're doing better." He smiled at me sweetly, ignoring part of what I said.

"Edward!" I snapped, feeling the annoyance building up in my throat.

He was trying not to smirk at me. "Stop saying my name like it's going to change my mind. It's your money now. And hey, two months exactly today!" I kind of hated how happy he was about that because it was hard to be mad when he was that cute. "That's nice. I should have taken you out to celebrate."

I covered my face with a pillow. "You ass. I need to look at my bank app. I don't think I can. Oh, god. My chest hurts," I heaved, placing my hand over my thumping heart.

"You need to talk to your therapist about your money feelings," Edward complained as he picked up my phone from the bedside table beside his laptop. He passed it to me.

"She needs to up my anxiety medication dosage next time I see her," I replied honestly. "Christ."

"Agreed," he said gently.

"Can you check for me?" I asked nervously.

Edward laughed despite himself, "what is that going to do?" I quickly typed in the password, then handed it back to him before it loaded. He clicked a couple of screens, trying to keep his face neutral. "It would probably be helpful to know how much you had last time you checked."

"The bill's checking and my savings automatically get the same amount every month unless I do something to them, so I know how much are in those. It's the other one. It was like twenty something thousand on Saturday when I bought my tickets. It should be the top one," I pointed out. My hands were actually shaking a little, a little bit of sweat forming on my palms.

He shook his head as he considered his words carefully. "Hm. Oh. Well. I'd like to give you a number that would not trigger your money feels in a bad way, but you can check this yourself to see. So, I don't know what you want from me? Please don't shoot the messenger."

"What does it say?" I demanded from him. He frowned before pushing his lips out slightly.

"Forty-five. Thousand."

I gasped loudly. It felt like my entire rib cage tightened around my heart. "No."

"I didn't spend that much, I swear," he told me firmly. Edward turned off the phone and put it on the bed beside me carefully. "That's not all me."

I laughed a little crazily as I pushed the pillow into my face hard. I wanted to suffocate under the feathers. "I could take the whole damn year off," I said sarcastically in the fabric.

Edward pulled the pillow away and threw it to the side. "I realize you're not being serious but... Do it. Move here and make videos with me. You can still do your store. You could be the photographer for the channel and help me expand the content. We'll go to a ton of amazing places, and you'll have more pictures than you know what to do with. And you can help me pick those places. You're so good at helping me come up with ideas," he said almost as if he was begging me. "I swear, I'll make sure it's the best decision you ever make."

"It's too soon," I said quietly, worried. He was so young and impatient. He wanted everything, and he wanted it right away.

"Says who?" He questioned me gently.

"Me." I moved my head so I could look at him. I felt too anxious to do anything besides watch him. My body was stiff and my chest was sore, making me ache.

"When will it not be too soon?" He questioned me again. "Because I hate this, Bella. I hate not being able to kiss you goodnight. I hate not waking up to you in the morning. Either I need to move to New York, or you need to move here because this is torture. Even if we don't live together, it would be better than this."

"We're going to see each other a lot for a while. And then I figured we could make a quick trip early for our Valentine's. And then we're going to Australia for a full month. Isn't that a good start?" I said in a pleading tone.

"It'll never be enough." His eyes were so expressive. They were so bright and green, focused on me intently.

I bit my lip. "You're going to be busy in January anyway."

"So? Why does it matter? I'd rather be worked to the bone with you here than have a vacation without you," he bemoaned.

"You're so sweet," I replied.

"No. I'm very selfish. I want you all the time. Alright, look... We'll have been together for almost five months when we get back to Australia. If you can still withstand me after and don't hate my family-" He began, but I stopped him.

"I won't hate them," I promised him. "I couldn't. They love you."

He smiled a little, hopeful. "If it's not too soon then... Move in with me after? We're going

on a practice run in Australian anyway.”

“I’m pretty sure me being here right now is a practice run,” I pointed out. “That’s all we’ve been practicing.”

“Right. Exactly. We already know how well we do together. We’re very good at being roommates.” He leaned down and kissed one of my knees before laying down with his head on my thigh.

“What if I end up breaking your heart with my craziness before then?” I petted his hair, scratching my nails along his scalp carefully.

“It’s yours to break.” He kissed my towel covered thigh again. “Whatever you decide, I understand. I just know how much I’m going to miss you when you’re gone.”