



Chapter Thirty-Seven:

Edward had to wake me when we arrived at his place. Seth asked if I needed help to get in the house, but I assured him I was just fine, only tired. I kissed him on the cheek with the promise of lunch sometime later in the week. That seemed to calm his nerves, and he smiled at me in his sweet way.

When we got inside, my boyfriend took my purse from my hands and placed it on the table by the door before hanging up both of our coats. Without warning, he scooped me up in his arms and carried me up the stairs. I considered arguing and telling him he would throw out his back, but I enjoyed it too much to ruin the moment. Besides, he didn't seem strained in the least. He was so much stronger than me.

With gentle and loving hands, he removed my dress after starting my bath in his giant clawed tub. He hung it up carefully, placing my shoes out of the way.

"I knew you wouldn't lose these," Edward said teasingly as he took out my earrings and unclasped the necklace before taking my wrist. He brought it to his lips, kissing it lightly before removing the bracelet with a flick of his fingers. The chain slipped from my arm into his waiting palm. He put them in a little empty glass dish that he had on his dresser, one I had never seen before. I could only assume he got it for my jewelry. The forethought made me smile to myself. He was so considerate.

I removed the rest of my clothing when he went to check on the water. I could hear him pouring something into it, but I wasn't sure what. Sitting on the edge of the mattress, my palms held me up as I hunched over. Closing my eyes, I breathed in deeply.

"Why didn't you tell me you weren't feeling well earlier?" Edward asked when he came back into the bedroom.

"It's only a cold," I explained. "I'm just aching. Don't be too surprised if I have to spend a day in bed soon."

"Then I'll make sure to take care of you," he remarked softly as he removed his bow tie.

"I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself," I promised as he walked over to me. I wrapped my arms around his waist and rested my head against his stomach. Sighing in pleasure, I breathed in his scent mixed with the smell of liquor and my perfume.

"I know you can. But I enjoy taking care of you too," he responded, brushing a few random curls away from my eyes. My braids were still intact at the base of my skull, but some spots were worse for wear. "Can I join you in the bath?"

"I wouldn't have it any other way," I told him with a tired but genuine smile.

After relaxing, I climbed into bed, barely bothering to put on panties to sleep in. It didn't bother Edward, but he wasn't going to get anything from me that night. Almost as soon as my cheek touched the silky fabric of the pillow, I was out like a light.

It was late when I woke up, especially for me. It was nearly eleven in the morning on Sunday. But it was gray outside, which explained why I slept in so much. The sun was beginning to peek through, though. I was alone, but that part never really surprised me. I almost always woke up that way when I stayed at Edward's house.

I stretched and groaned as my back popped loudly. I got out of bed and went to the bathroom, feeling a little gross. Mild dehydration made my joints even more tender, and my skin dry, so I slurped down a couple of quick cups of water from the sink. He had a filtration system, but it still tasted mildly of sand.

Afterward, I gazed at my body in the mirror. I turned to the side and patted my stomach with a frown. Holiday love handles were making themselves known. There was no way around it, I would have to start a diet at the beginning of the year. Doing it before Christmas would be pointless, but if I wished to keep up with my somewhat buff boyfriend, I would have to take up jogging. Or biking, or something.

I finally took down my hair since it was half torn up on one side and brushed all the knots out. I would have to take a shower to wash my itchy scalp, but I wanted to see if Edward wished to join me again before I did.

First, I checked his gym, but it was empty. I would have walked right past the library if he hadn't called to me. Glancing inside, I saw him sitting in a pair of his ratty exercise shorts and a white tank. His hair was crazy, going in all directions. He hadn't washed it the night before, and he had obviously worked out, which made it go wild.

"Hey there," I smiled. "What are you doing?"

"Oh, doing some paperwork. The story of my life. We've got a lot of things to do since we're going ahead with the Greece merger," he explained, his eyes barely darting up from his desk.

"Will you be going there?" I inquired in a small voice. This got his attention.

He looked up. "Emmett will be the one to set up everything, though I'll probably have to visit once or twice. How does a nice vacation in Athens sound?" He asked with a charming smile.

"You'd take me with you?"

His brow wrinkled at my question. "Of course. Like I could be away from you for a week, if not more. Besides, I'm sure you could find something to do. It's a beautiful country," he replied before his eyes drifted back down to his desk. He signed something with flourish and turned it over into a neat little pile. He had been working for a while.

"Have you eaten yet?" He just shook his head. "How about I get you some tea and croissants? Would you like some fruit with it? I've got some melon in the fridge. I can bring it in here so you can get some more work done."

"That would be lovely, darling. Thank you." He gave me a quick smile. I nodded before I made my way to the kitchen to make up a small tray. I had picked up some beautiful pastries from a bakery a couple of days before and the honeydew I had sliced for our previous breakfast. It was all easy.

The smell of Edward's favorite green tea filled the room as the leaves spread open. He preferred a loose-leaf kind made of tiny pearls that came to life as the boiling water poured over them. They had a stronger, more pleasant aroma than the simple bags I got from the grocery store. He offered to order me some, but when I saw the prices, I blanched.

Who in their right mind would spend that much on an ounce of leaves?

I carried the breakfast tray into the library. The bread was warmed and the pot ready. And I even brought some delicious Irish butter and homemade strawberry jam to go with it. I was going to eat with him, just reading a book quietly so he could keep toiling away. He rarely worked when we were together, but sometimes I worried he was getting behind because of me. I wasn't even sure that was possible for a boss. He made the schedule.

"Here we go," I said cheerfully as I put the tray down on a coffee table he had by the loveseat. There were several papers on top of it like it was yesterday's mail carelessly thrown down after being read. One of the folded pieces took flight and sailed down to the floor. "Oops," I murmured.

"Oh! I've got it!" Edward hurriedly stated as he practically flew from behind his desk, but it was too late. I could see my name written, my full legal one, at the top. No, it wasn't written. It was printed. It looked very official.

"It's got my name on it," I remarked as I unfolded it to glance at it.

"It's nothing." He tried to take it from my hands, but I turned away from him so I could look.

"It's not 'nothing' if it has my name on it." I frowned, wondering what had gotten into him. It was probably just something to do with my insurance or something like that, but I was more curious because of his reaction. My eyes scrolled over the page, lazily skipping words until I got to '401k'.

It hadn't been something I had really thought about. Some of my wages came out weekly and went into it, but other than that, I didn't even consider looking at it. I didn't think I needed the blasted thing, but Edward had insisted on it. I told him I didn't want any more of his money that I didn't earn. Of course, that got him started on how I earned it and all that. Honestly, the conversation never went well, and it ended with either one or both of us pouting.

I peeked at the bottom where I assumed the balance would be, but it wasn't. I turned over the page to the back, where the words continued. My eyes grew wide, and I nearly fell to the floor. It was only anger that kept me standing.

"What the hell is this?" I blurted out, shoving it towards him.

"It's nothing," he repeated in an attempt to assure me, but I could see the worry on his face.

“Fifty thousand dollars isn’t nothing, Edward!” I shouted. He was adding thousands to it a week to go along with my two hundred. “Why!? Why is there that much in there? Please tell me it’s a mistake!”

“It’s not,” he murmured quietly, his fists balled up at his sides.

“Then what the hell is it?” I snapped angrily. “Why would you do that? I thought we had an agreement. Why didn’t you tell me?” My voice got higher with each frustrated sentence.

“Because I knew it would upset you.”

I glared at him for a long second. “Of course it does! I’m not a charity case. You don’t have to take care of me,” I began to cry uselessly as my anger grew. “I can find a job. A real one. On my own. And I can make my own money.”

He put his hand on my shoulder. “I know you can! It’s not about that. Not in the way you think, anyway,” he spoke soothingly, but I had none of it. I twisted away from him.

“What is that supposed to mean?” I demanded in annoyance, a mixture of at myself for crying like a little girl and him for not answering questions. He just loved to dance around things.

“Love, what if I die tomorrow?” Edward pleaded in a soft voice. So much so, I barely heard him. I turned towards my boyfriend and eyed him carefully. It was so painfully sincere and frightened.

“What?” I asked, just to clarify that I understood him correctly.

He swallowed, licking his bottom lip. “What if I die? Tomorrow or next week?” He earnestly pressed, his eyes starting to turn red around the rims. He was on the edge of crying, too.

“Why would you even think that?”

He stared into my eyes, his fists still at his side. “I am the same age my mother was when she died, Bella.”

I quickly shook my head, blinking rapidly. “But that’s different. You’re strong and as healthy as an ox.”

“Mum was too,” Edward responded in a raised voice. “And she just fucking dropped dead. What if I did the same thing, huh? What would happen to you?” His face flushed with frustration as tears gathered around his deep green eyes. “We’re not married yet. I have to-”

It slowly hit me. The weight of his words and his fears. "Oh."

"Bella, I can put you in my will. I have. But that can be fought. By the company and my father. I can't have that. I have to take care of you. But if we were... If I had a ring on that finger. Well, it would be different. But I don't. If I were to die, then you'd be left in a horrible position. I know you have your savings, and I try to keep you from spending as much of your money as possible, but that would run out too quickly. I can't let you live the way you were before. You don't complain, but I know it was awful. You felt so insecure, always worried. This would go directly to you." He took the paper from my hands and turned. "No questions, no way anyone could take it away from you. This would at least keep you sheltered and fed for a couple of years."

All the fight left my body as his monologue went on. I dropped to the loveseat with a little thud and sighed. "Edward," I whimpered. "You're not going to die."

"You don't know that."

I shook my head. "Yes, I do."

"How could you possibly?" He asked, getting frustrated with my simple answers.

"Because... you belong to me, and I won't let you give up your life so easily."

With that, his fight was gone too. He sat down beside me, putting the piece of paper on the table so his fingers could dig into his thick reddish hair. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you about it. That was wrong of me, but I knew it would bother you. But there is no way I'm going to stop doing it."

"You don't have to put so much," I told him quietly, but it was futile. He glanced in my direction, and I only rolled my eyes. "Well, you don't."

"I have to make sure you're taken care of," he whispered faintly. "Bella, I just... I have to."

With that, Edward began to cry. I sighed and wrapped my arms around his shoulders so he could lean into me. I soothed him tenderly, kissing his temple. Sometimes I forgot that he didn't really know how to handle his emotions. Sometimes, I didn't know how to either.

"Thank you," I whispered lightly into his hair. "Thank you for loving me and caring about me."

"Why would you thank me for something silly like that?" He teased in a rough voice, his throat hoarse from crying.

“Because I just have to...”