



## Chapter Thirty-nine

The noise in the limo was almost overwhelming. Between the clinking of glasses, the rustling of dresses, and the sheer amount of people talking, we could have drowned out a jet engine.

Edward was resting next to me in his handsome tux, an outfit I had grown to love. He had no idea how sexy he looked in it. Honestly, the rest of the men didn't look too bad, either. He had bought tickets for everyone to join us at the Krewe's New Year's party. There was Seth, Jasper, Emmett, and Eleazar all sitting in almost the same kind of tuxedo, though Emmett's bow tie was bright pink, and Seth was wearing a collarless shirt. It fit him well, but he kind of looked like he was going to prom.

Alice sat prettily in a fluffy cupcake of a cocktail dress that was shiny baby blue with little pearls sewn into the fabric. A matching bow, no doubt of her own creation, was on the side of her head. Beside her sat Carmen in an elegant red floor-length gown that made her slightly olive skin practically dance with color. She was beautiful, and Eleazar was making sure she knew it.

The most surprising guest in the car was Rosalie, Jasper's twin sister. Edward had gotten a ticket for Angela to join us, but she ended up getting a horrible case of the flu. He didn't want it to go to waste, asking each of us if there was anyone we could invite. Finally, Jasper

mentioned her, but he doubted she would come. She shocked us all by agreeing. I guess getting the chance to mingle with the rich, wear fancy clothes, and ride in a limo was too much of an opportunity even for her to pass up. And as always, she looked ravishing. Her long blond hair was down in silky waves around her shoulders, and her bright bubblegum pink dress matched not only her lips and rosy cheeks but Emmett's bow tie.

Em wasted no time pointing that out and flirting with her in his loud manner. And she was having nothing to do with it. Instead, she was letting him go on like an idiot while she sipped on her champagne silently.

Edward and Seth were deep in a conversation involving video games that I wasn't really paying attention to. I just kind of sat there with my head against his shoulder as I thought about the previous year. It had been the most roller-coaster one of my life. But at least it was ending on a very high note. I think for my boyfriend, too.

He seemed happy, constantly laughing and joking as he sipped his drink with his arm around my shoulder. I must have been smiling stupidly because I caught Carmen grinning at me with a curious expression on her face, tilting it to the side. I raised an eyebrow in question, but she just shook her head, putting me off until later.

The party was one of the largest I had ever seen. They were holding it at a convention center in the middle of downtown Shreveport. There were limos and sports cars everywhere. Women dripping in jewelry and furs seemed to be common, almost every male in the joint wearing a black tux, though there were a few more colorful ones around.

We must have been stopped at least a half dozen times as we walked in, this person or that wanting to say hello to Edward. One I recognized as the mayor, but he was rather hard to miss. He was a huge man, roughly seven feet and almost as wide as he was tall. His skin was nearly the color of ebony, and his voice was the deepest I had ever heard before. Their conversation was strictly business, grabbing Emmett's attention more than mine, so I made my way back to Carmen. We linked arms, my head leaned against hers.

"So, what was that face you were giving me earlier?"

"Oh, nothing. It's just that I've never seen Edward so happy and social. Ever. Even with family. You've transformed him," she explained with a mildly amused tone.

"I don't know about that. I think it was always there. He just needed help to get it out," I replied, but I couldn't help the slight blush on my cheeks. It made me feel slightly exposed like I was the one revealing my true self.

When we finally got into the main room, it was filled with people of all ages, shapes, and sizes. Tables lined the outer edges of the dance floor, but there wouldn't be a meal served.

There was a snack table, though. There was an enormous bar and waiters with trays of drinks walking about. I think it would have been unwise not to serve a bit of food with that much liquor around. There would be a lot of drunks leaving later.

And I had no doubt that some of them would be in my group.

After a single drink together, we all split into couples, except for Seth, who was off by himself. He wasn't alone long, though. He began chatting up a pretty red-headed girl in a fiery orange dress. She was freckled and tiny, and he looked like a giant compared to her.

"So," Edward began in his best, most charming voice as we danced in the middle of the crowded dance floor. The song was slow, and we were close together with my head resting comfortably on his shoulder.

"So," I copied him in a light tone.

"It'll be midnight in about an hour," he breathed as his fingers drifted over my bare spine. My dress was purple, low cut, and sequined. Edward very much approved of it. He kept touching my exposed back, surprising me almost every single time. I kept forgetting that I was showing skin.

"Yes, it will be," I remarked vaguely. Though I knew what he was leading to, I wanted to make it a little harder on him. I wanted him to work for it. He got everything he wanted so quickly.

"Bella," he sighed softly, looking down at me with a bemused expression.

"Tony," I teased.

He scoffed quietly, rolling his eyes. "So, is the answer still yes?"

"Yes' to what?"

"You know what."

"Haven't the foggiest," I replied as we did a little turn. He dipped me so that my head is nearly parallel with the floor. "Whatever could you be referring to?"

He swung me back up, the aggravation plain in his features as I almost slammed into his muscular chest. "Will you move in with me?"

My hand slid from his shoulder to his neck, cupping it as I pulled his mouth closer to mine. When it was less than an inch away, I whispered. "I didn't realize it was after midnight. That was a quick hour."

"Bella," he sighed at my little act, but I was having far too much fun. He usually had me on the ropes, and it was nice to have the reverse true at least once. I wanted to play it for all it was worth.

"You know, I think I'll refresh my drink before midnight," I murmured after a swift peck on the lips. "Check on Alice, too. Would you like anything?"

"Go," he frowned, but one corner of his mouth tried not to twitch upwards. He knew what I was doing. "But, at midnight, you are mine."

I waved him off as I walked away, making my hips sway as much as possible. Though I couldn't hear him groaning over the music, I was sure he did.

"What did you do to him?" Alice questioned with a laugh as I came over. I was looking far too pleased with myself, apparently.

"Edward asked me to move in with him," I explained, taking a sip of my brand-new champagne. The sensation of bubbles surged through my nose pleasantly.

"And?" My best friend pushed as she leaned forward. "You said 'no'?"

"No," I laughed evilly to myself. "I told him I'd give him my response after midnight."

"That's mean! Why make him wait?" She smirked, plucking a chocolate-covered strawberry from a tray as it passed by us.

"Because he already knows the answer, but he just wants it to be official. He can wait for that. Besides, it's funny." I shrugged. "So, is Rosalie having any fun?"

Alice pointed off to one corner of the dance floor. Glued together were Emmett and Rose, both obviously drunk. I wasn't positive how much either of them had, but someone needed to cut them off soon.

"I bet you five dollars they go home together," I muttered under my breath as I thought of his famous womanizing ways.

Jasper scoffed as he returned from.... somewhere. I wasn't sure where. Perhaps someone needed to cut me off too. "I wouldn't take that bet."

I took another long drag of my drink. Maybe after midnight, they could cut me off. Somehow my flute was already empty. I snatched another from a passing platter. We had a rather choice table near the kitchen where they came with refreshed trays of snacks and drinks.

Seth came over with his new friend, and we talked for a while. Edward was busy in a conversation with someone he knew. I assumed it was another business person. When it was about five minutes to midnight, he broke away from the discussion and came over to the group. Even Rosalie and Emmett joined us, though they were more interested in making out with each other.

“Hey,” Jasper tried to call over the music, “the ball hasn’t dropped yet.”

“Don’t bother,” Edward smirked. “I already know how this story will end. Here, let’s get some fresh drinks and head over into the middle of the floor.”

We were smashed in close together as everyone came to the dance floor to start the countdown. It began at sixty, and as it did, my boyfriend leaned in and whispered in my ear. “When I started this year, I never imagined it would end like this. You have made my life so much better. You are my life. I want- No, that’s not right. That’s not a strong enough word. I need you. Bella, I need you to live with me. I need you in my bed every single night, lying beside me. I need your face to be the first one I see in the morning. Please tell me you’ll live with me.”

In his eyes, I could see his worry I would say no. I had no idea how he could imagine me saying that. He knew I adored him and that I wanted to be with him.

I wrapped my arms around his waist and pressed myself completely against him as he leaned down some. I mashed my mouth eagerly against his, pouring all my love and passion into it. The crowd went nuts, and the feeling of confetti brushing against my skin wasn’t enough to pull us apart. It wasn’t until both of us needed air that we separated, and then just enough to breathe.

“Yes.”

My entire world was on fire with our next kiss, passion-filled champagne kisses with the slightest taste of chocolate and strawberries in the background. His fingers rested on either side of my face, smiling in his charming, almost childlike way. His green eyes were full of wonder, love, and happiness.

And I put all those things there.

I should have said yes to him sooner.

I wasn't sure how long we danced for after that. And I didn't really stop drinking, but I slowed down. It reminded me of a very drunken prom. The girls, except for Rose, giggly as they made their way to the bathroom to 'powder their noses' and the boys waiting like eager puppies. It was like a flashback.

Somewhere along the way, we lost Rosalie and Emmett, but we didn't discover this until we went looking for them and couldn't find them. None of us had seen either of them in over an hour. Edward was going to call his brother to find out what the hell was going on when he realized he had a text message. He rubbed a rough hand over his face and rolled his eyes.

"What?" I asked, wanting to know what it said.

He just handed it to me. I laughed and passed it to Alice, who cheerfully read it out loud. "Hey Tony, no worries. We caught a cab to our hotel. Rosie is with me. I'll make sure she gets home. Score! See you laterz."

"Sounds like our brother," Carmen laughed as she took the phone from Alice's grip and read it to herself.

"Doesn't sound like my sister," my friend added in with a slight smirk.

"This will end badly, won't it?" Seth asked with a laugh.

"Oh, no doubt," Edward sighed. "I apologize in advance for the drama."

"Ah, they're adults. They can handle themselves," Jasper tried to reassure him, who just shrugged his shoulders. "You know what I could handle, though? Some food. I am starving!"

"Yeah, so could I," I agreed as I rested against my boyfriend. "Want to grab some breakfast? It's probably the only thing open."

"Wafflehouse?" Seth offered with a sly smile.

"Wafflehouse," I repeated with a wicked grin.

Nothing, and I mean nothing, is better than Wafflehouse after a night of partying, drinking, and friends. It was always the best end to an evening when I was in Tech.

"I'm down for anything," Edward agreed, his bowtie already hanging around his neck undone.

'Yup, this feels like college,' I thought to myself as we arranged ourselves at two of the tiny booths that filled the small restaurant. Apparently, we showed up right after the post-club

rush because the place was scattered with plates, mugs of cold coffee, and exhausted looking waitresses. Jasper, Alice, Seth, and I didn't bother to pull out menus. We already knew what we wanted. There was only one thing you came for. And that was an All-Star.

Edward raised an eyebrow in my direction but said nothing. I smiled at him, resting my head on his shoulder while my best friend and I had a conversation from two separate booths.

"What do you think, Bella?" Jasper got into it with an accent so thick it almost sounded comical. "Scattered, capped, and smothered?"

"I'm getting mine chunked, capped, and smothered," I commented as I took a sip of my big chocolate milk. "I think."

"What are you talking about?" Eleazar asked in a confused tone. I leaned over and pointed at the spot on his menu with the hash browns. "Chunked comes with cubes of ham. Smothered with cheese and capped is with mushrooms. You can also get peppers and onions too."

"Sweet! The only way this could be better is if they had bloody Marys," a very drunk Carmen said with a slight giggle. She was able to relax knowing the girls were with her parents at Edward's house. I had a feeling they were going to be spending all day with their grandparents too. All of us would be useless.

Oh well, you only live once.

"What do you think I should get?" My boyfriend inquired as he looked over the small menu.

I took it from his grip. "Don't worry. I got this," I promised with overconfident drunkenness. "I'll order for you."

"Alright," he laughed, and I had a feeling that he and Eleazar were probably the soberest of the group. The rest of us were pretty much gone. I reminded myself to get some water so my hangover wouldn't be so bad the following day.

Every little thing helps.

I don't think our waitress, an older woman with sagging skin from years of smoking and a voice to match, was very amused by our loud conversations and fits of laughter. But she could get over it. I hadn't had that much fun with a group of people my own age in a very long time.

When she finally came to get our order, I started off, wagging my finger between Edward and myself. "Okay, so we are both going to have an All-star, eggs over medium with country

ham. Hash browns instead of grits with cheese and ham. One each, I mean. We're not sharing. Uh, and a cup of water for both of us. Oh! And can I have a mixed berry jam, please?" I smiled overly wide, trying to hold in a weird giggle that was hanging in the back of my throat.

"Okay," she rasped, then took Carmen and Eleazar's order. They got the same thing as did everyone else in some variation. I had no idea where we would put all that food on our tiny tables.

"So, what do you think Emmett and Rosalie are doing right about now?" His half-sister asked with a snort, her cheeks a soft shade of pink.

"Ew," Edward drew out, making Eleazar laugh quietly with an agreeing nod.

"My sister will tear your brother apart," Jasper informed the pair. "She can take care of herself. I hope he can too."

"Em is a big boy," he shrugged.

"Ha! Have you met him?" Carmen giggled. "I'm pretty sure I'm more mature, and he's nearly double my age."

"You're more grown-up than most people I know," I remarked. "Including my mother."

"That's a scary thought," she said with a bit of a pout on her red lips. It didn't stay there long because the waitress sat a waffle right in front of her, along with her hash browns, ham, eggs, and toast. "Oh, my. This is a lot of food."

"Awesome, ain't it?" I joked as my own made its appearance. "They have the best waffles."

We chowed down, continuing our conversations and good times. I ate almost all of mine, but Carmen couldn't, and she ended up feeding the rest of it to her half-brother. I had another cup of chocolate milk while the others had their coffee.

Our waitress was pissed that we lingered so long until she saw the tip Edward left her on his credit card. It was actually more than the meal. She smiled and thanked us, wishing us a very happy New Year as we walked out the door.

The sun was rising, the sky a light gray-blue and the air cool with dew. The birds were waking up and singing their songs. Sparrows were already fluttering around the parking lot, looking for their easy and probably tasty breakfast.

We were all starting to lean into each other, our liquor, and the long night getting to us. But everyone had a smile on their face.

First, we took Seth back to his apartment because he was the closest, and then Alice and Jasper got dropped off at their cute little home. Carmen had fallen asleep with her head on Eleazar's shoulder and her feet on Edward's lap. I was dozing off as well when we finally pulled into his house.

The sun was fully up by then. The girls were already awake, and as soon as we came in, they were chattering about what they did the night before. It took some time to pull away from them, but when we ultimately did, we made our way up to our rooms.

I fell happily onto Edward's mattress without bothering to get undressed. He laughed as he worked off his jacket and shirt.

"What a night."

"It was great," I mumbled into the comforter, not even lifting my face up, but I managed to kick my shoes off the end of the bed.

"Yes, it was," he agreed as he pulled on his pajama pants. When he was finally done with getting himself ready, he came to unzip my dress.

"I don't think I can move," I said as I snuggled into the comfortable quilt. "So soft," I moaned.

"You'll sleep better once you take it off."

Groaning, I shook my head as my fingers curled around the fabric. "That requires movement. Not going to happen."

"I'll rip it off of you," Edward threatened.

"That works for me." As soon as the words were out of my mouth, he flipped me over onto my back and then grabbed the edge of my dress. With a single yank, he got it to my ass and then another, and it was gone. But still, there was underwear beneath that. With another shove, I was rolled onto my stomach. He tugged the hose off rather roughly, and with some skill, he popped the hook on my bra with one hand.

"There you go." He slapped my panty covered ass. I laughed quietly, lifting to throw my bustier off before crawling underneath the blanket.

“You are so helpful,” I teased as he crawled in next to me. Gently, I gave him a kiss, snuggling into him.

“Well, I don’t want the first time you sleep in your new home to be uncomfortable,” he whispered in my ear.

“Wow,” I murmured, the phrase jolting me a little. “I guess so, huh? Do you want me to start moving my stuff tomorrow?”

“If you’d like to,” he replied, playing carefully with my hair. It took me a moment to realize that he was working the bobby pins out so it could fall from its up-do.

“I wonder what we should do with the trailer.”

“That’s up to you. I don’t think you could sell it, but you never know. I can call my lawyer and see what he thinks,” Edward answered as he settled in behind me with his face arranged in my curls. He loved the smell of my hair.

“Perhaps I can give it to my dad. Or Seth. That way, he can stop paying rent and maybe save up for a house or something,” I threw out as my eyes drooped.

“Bella, whatever you want to do. It doesn’t matter to me. As long as you promise to stay with me always,” he spoke in an almost sleepy, dream-like voice.

Just as I was drifting off, I replied softly. “Always.”