



Chapter Six: Around the House

I didn't want to go home.

It was such a reversal from just a month before, when we were in Albany.

Neither did Jasper. We couldn't live in Vegas, though. It was too busy, too bright.

He spoke to Sam before we left, making sure the house was fine and that everything that he ordered was installed and working correctly. The FBI was still looking into the car. The only camera in the neighborhood was four houses down, and all it caught was a woman jogging in the middle of the night. Her face was covered so we couldn't even tell if she was one of our neighbors so we could ask if she saw anything. It wasn't as if I would know them on sight, anyway. I hadn't introduced myself yet.

The whole situation was extremely frustrating, and it made him feel out of control.

The story hadn't gotten onto the news, but people were calling Eric. They wanted statements from me, or to do interviews. Several local newspapers were especially interested in sitting down with me. I had no comment for any of them. I didn't know what was going on, and I didn't

feel like reliving the stress of it repeatedly. Annoyingly, I knew I would talk about it for a long time, whether I wanted to or not.

I texted Alice and Tanya to let them know we were coming back into town. They were hanging out with Rosalie, shopping. They were all worried about me, which was sweet. I missed my friends. We agreed to meet up in a few days for lunch.

Our townhouse looked perfectly normal when we arrived back from the airport with ten times more than what we left with. Jasper was still concerned, though. He went through it, clearing each room like he was on an active scene. Once I was settled inside our bedroom with the door locked behind me, he went outside to go around it with his gun.

Our neighbors were going to think we were freaks.

We were, but not because my romantic partner was sneaking around the house at nine o'clock at night with a loaded handgun. He was actually trained to do that, and at least if the cops were called, we had a good excuse.

After coming back upstairs, he put it back in the safe that was hidden away in the closet. He had a small collection, but they were mostly for work. He wasn't a gun nut. There were a couple that meant something to him, a BB gun from his childhood and his grandfather's hunting rifle. He also had one that was a gift from his parents. It was engraved with the date of his graduation from West Point. It was an old-fashioned six-shooter with a mother-of-pearl handle. Jasper had gone through a cowboy phase as a child, which is why he wanted to be a 'sheriff.' The idea was very cute. He kept it clean but had only fired it a few times. It was more of a showpiece than a weapon. It stayed in the closet in his old bedroom until just a couple of weeks before.

I considered getting him a display case for it for Christmas. We could stick it up somewhere in the office. I could have it engraved, too. The day was approaching so quickly. I hoped I could find something else to go with it in New York.

My mind was lost in thought as I unpacked. When the doorbell rang, I jumped a mile. Just being in the house made me on edge. Jasper and I looked at each other. He pulled his gun right out and stuck it in his back pocket after making sure the safety was on. He tugged his shirt over it and went to go get it. I was grateful he wasn't drawing his weapon on random people yet.

Following behind, I stopped at the top of the stairs. It was easy to observe from there, but anyone at the door wouldn't be able to see me. The angle was too steep. The bell rang again. I could only see someone's hair through the small glass window at the top of the door. It was a man or a very tall woman.

Jasper peeked through it, then groaned. "It's fine," he grumbled softly before opening it wide. It was Edward, appearing nervous with his hands shoved into his scrub pockets. He must have come from work. "What are you doing here?" He rudely greeted him.

"I'm sorry. I just... Um," he paused, staring down at his feet as he rocked. "I wanted to make sure you and Bella were alright. I know we're not friends anymore, but she was terrified the other day and... And it scared me."

I came down the steps, using the railing so I didn't trip down them. "That's nice. We're fine, though. Thank you." Nodding, Edward's cheeks were slightly pink as he looked away in embarrassment. "Has everything been okay?"

"Yeah. Nothing has happened at the apartment. Tanya stayed with me for a couple of days, but she's gone back. She prefers her bed," he explained while still not looking at either of us.

"This might be the time to think about moving in together seriously," I suggested.

He chuckled, nodding again. "Yeah. You're probably right. But she enjoys having her personal space, though. You know her."

"I'm going to put my gun away," Jasper muttered in a low tone, trudging up the stairs. He didn't want to be a part of the tedious small talk. He pulled it from his pocket and removed the clip, loudly taking each step. With a sigh, I shook my head. He was still in his work boots, so he used them to send a noisy message... which was 'not welcome, go away.' He wasn't subtle.

"Oh, that's a real pistol," Edward murmured to himself, leaning over to watch him go up to our room. "He had-" He looked at me in surprise. His mouth opened and closed several times as he peered towards our bedroom.

I snorted because I couldn't help it. "Yup, he did. Don't worry, he won't shoot you. Just make sure you properly announce yourself, and I would suggest visiting during the daylight hours. For your own protection."

Laughing, he shook his head. "So, you're okay?"

I leaned against the door frame with one shoulder and sighed. "Yeah. I'm a little stressed, but I'm really happy overall. Everything isn't perfect, but some remarkable things have happened to me this month. The house and our trip. Other stuff."

"Where did you end up going?" He inquired, continuing the small talk. I hadn't spoken to my roommate much. He seemed genuinely curious.

“Vegas,” I replied with a smile, absently pushing my hair out of my eyes and behind my ear. “I’ve never gone. It was so much fun.”

His expression changed, and his face dropped. “Oh, that is a very big ring on your finger,” he breathed and became visibly redder. “Did- Did you... get engaged?” He gazed at my left hand. Then it fully dawned on him. “You got married in Las Vegas.”

“Um, yeah,” I grinned at his stumbling summary. “It’s not as cheesy as it sounds. We got married outside in the desert. Red Canyon. It was beautiful.” I took a deep breath. “Could you not tell T yet, please? We’re telling his family in a couple of days, and she’ll definitely tell Rosalie. Family needs to be the first to know.”

His eyes were a little glazed over, and he had an odd smile. When he glanced in my direction, it was somewhere past me. “Oh, yeah. Sure. Of course. I won’t say anything.” He laughed awkwardly. “God, Tanya would just tell everyone, wouldn’t she?”

“Oh, everyone,” I agreed with a laugh. “This is too dramatic and romantic not to share.”

“I hope you don’t plan on keeping it from her for long.”

I shook my head quickly. “Of course not. I was going to tell her and Alice at the same time. I’m not sure how either of them will react, so I’m nervous.”

“They’ll be thrilled for you, just like I am.” Jasper came down and sort of glared at him. He grimaced and swallowed before forcing a grin. “Congrats, man. That’s awesome. You are very, very lucky.”

“I am,” he remarked as he put his hand on my spine. I rolled my eyes at his possessiveness. It was silly.

“Hopefully, uh, we’ll be making that trip next year too. Down the aisle, I mean,” he added. “I was thinking of proposing either New Year’s or Valentine’s Day. Haven’t decided,” Edward blurted out as he looked down at his feet.

“Oh! Great! Let me know if you need any help setting that up. I’d love to make it special for her,” I offered right away. “I’ll be happy to distract or decorate or whatever.”

“Thank you,” he said in surprise. He bowed his head and cleared his throat. “Okay, so you’re good. That’s why I came. I just wanted to make sure. I’m certain you’re tired, so I’ll talk to you later.”

“Alright, bye,” I called softly, watching him turn around to go to his fancy silver sports car. It was too cold for his motorcycle, which he preferred. It was brand new, and I had never seen it before. He loved his shiny toys.

“Goodnight,” Jasper sarcastically sang in a thick southern accent. I glanced at him, and he raised his eyebrows innocently. Silently, I tilted my head to the side.

Suddenly, Edward turned back around. “Oh, wait.” He pulled a box from his jacket pocket. “I got you something. I got one for Tanya, too. Here.” He shoved it in my hand before rushing away. When I looked down, I realized it was a can of mace in a fancy silver metal key chain in the shape of a cat. The ears were slightly sharp for poking or stabbing in the eyes. It was heavy and would do some damage.

My husband took it from my grip. “I don’t like him giving you a gift, but I understand why he gave you this.”

“It’s nice,” I remarked with a smirk. “He’s trying harder to be a decent human.” Taking the box from his hands, I put it in my purse. “Do you want to order a pizza? I’m hungry, and there isn’t any food in the house.”

After dinner, we went to bed. We woke up slowly in our new room. It felt like staying in a hotel. I wasn’t used to my surroundings and needed to make it our own. No place felt like home yet, and I didn’t like it.

The movers brought my things along with our pod. It didn’t take us long to take all our stuff out. It would go back the next day. After that, we showered and went to the market to fill our pantry with all the staple items we needed. There was nothing but some liquor in there from when he proposed.

Once we dropped off the groceries, we went to the kitchen store so I could buy some new pots and pans. Everything was perfect in our place, and my old things just wouldn’t do. I wanted everything to be pretty. When my mother-in-law came over for dinner, I wanted to show off. I had the money to change the world around me.

I needed a fresh start.

We were so tired afterward that we ordered a ton of Chinese. Sitting in the sunroom, we listened to music and enjoyed our meal. It was quiet and comfortable, but I still felt uneasy. My anxiety was on edge. Every movement in the backyard made me nervous, even though it was just the wind. I told myself it was only in my head. A million lights and alarms would go off if someone stepped foot on our property.

The next morning, I woke up determined to make Jasper a big breakfast. Muffins, eggs, bacon, and coffee with fruit. I put it on the tray he used for that special night and brought it up to the bedroom. He was still asleep. It was late in the day for him, almost nine. He was enjoying the rest. I loved seeing him like that. I liked watching him sleep, and I knew he enjoyed it too. His art books were proof of that.

I put the food on the dresser so I could kiss him awake. He grinned drowsily at me, his fingers coming to my hair. "I made you something. Go wash up real quick."

"Thank you," he mumbled, brushing his other hand over his face. When he saw the tray, he impishly smiled. "Oh, darlin. You are so damn good to me."

Giggling, I brought it to the bed. I also arranged his laptop so we could watch something while we ate together.

We were about halfway through our feast when his phone dinged. He smirked a little. "Mama says to text her when you get a chance."

"She could just text me."

"She could, but she has to talk to as many people as possible," he chuckled.

I sent her a message. I needed to speak to them about getting together that night, anyway. Everyone had already agreed, but we hadn't discussed the spot. With something in mind, I only had to make reservations.

"Are you busy right now?" His mother asked promptly.

"Nope," I responded. Almost instantly, my cell rang. Putting it on speaker, I answered while holding my husband's gaze. "Hi, Caroline. How are you?"

"I'm so good, baby. How are y'all?"

I smiled. He was shaking his head as he nibbled at the end of a piece of bacon. "We're great. I brought your wonderful son breakfast in bed, and we're watching Netflix. So, it's a perfect morning."

"Aw, that's sweet. I'm just so excited about tonight. I miss y'all so much," she said in a thick Texan drawl.

"We miss you, too," I replied softly.

I nudged Jasper. "We do. Very much so. We're excited about tonight, too."

“Is there anything I need to bring?” She questioned. “Did you decide on a place?”

“Yes, ma’am. I’m working on that now. I’ll text you the name and directions when I get it all confirmed. You don’t need to bring anything. This evening is all my treat,” I informed her quickly. Jasper made a little face. I put my hand in it, pushing him away slightly. It made him snort. I didn’t care if he didn’t like me paying for things. I had the money, and I could do whatever the hell I wanted with it, which included taking my new in-laws to a fancy-ass steakhouse.

“Okay, honey. I only wanted to check and make sure everything was still on. Oh! Did y’all want to come to the house this weekend to grill out? Sunday? We can go to church first.”

I looked at her son and smiled. He did too. “Sure, Mama. Sounds good. Love you. See you tonight.”

“Love you both!” She cooed before she hung up.

We stared at each other for a moment. He smirked before he took a sip of his coffee. “Are you ready, Mrs. Hale?”