



Chapter Nine

In the morning, I scrolled through my numbers for the first time on my new phone and called Seth. I tapped my fingernails on my table as I impatiently waited for him to answer. I started talking as soon as I heard him mumble a tired hello. “Hey, sorry. This is Bella.”

“Oh! Hi!” He perked up instantly. “What can I do for you? Want me to pick you up a little early?”

“Uh... No, actually. I’m going to drive myself today.”

There was a slight pause. “Um, okay.” He seemed deflated by the idea. I wasn’t entirely sure why.

“Can we keep this between us? You don’t have to call Mr. Masen or anything, do you?” I asked, nibbling on my thumbnail. “Please?”

“No. I guess not. But if you don’t arrive by a certain time, he’ll call me and wonder where you are,” Seth responded apprehensively.

I had to put him at ease. “Don’t worry. I was just going to go early,” I told him quickly. “I’ll make sure you don’t get in trouble. I’ll see you later. Thanks, by the way.”

“You’re welcome,” he answered, still sounding concerned. I would tell his boss if he had any troubles with it that the entire thing was my idea, and I didn’t give Seth a real choice in the matter. I was reasonably confident it wouldn’t. Edward didn’t seem unfair like that.

I wore jeans again and a nicer green blouse with my ballet flats. But I didn’t bother with my makeup since I was positive I would leave soon after I got there. I had a few things I wanted to say to him, and we had some matters we needed to discuss further if this arrangement was going to work.

My mind was scrambling to figure out what I would do if he fired me. I would probably sell all my new clothes and give him back the computer and phone. I would have to get on unemployment for a while until I found another job. A real one.

If I could.

It was nine when I showed up at his silent door. I rang the bell, the calm mildly eerie. It was several minutes later when it finally cracked open. Edward was standing there in jeans and a gray sweater, his feet bare. His eyes widened then narrowed slightly when he saw it was me. He silently looked over at the driveway.

“I drove myself,” I informed him. “We need to talk.”

“Of course,” he replied, opening it wider so I could enter. When we were safely in the foyer, he shut the door behind us. Edward walked away without a single glance in my direction. “I assumed you would come to your senses. I can give you a small severance package. I know how hard it’s been for you, and I don’t wish to leave you in the lurch.”

“I’m not quitting, Mr. Masen. Unless... You’re firing me?”

He stopped in the hallway and finally turned to look at me, surprised. “No,” he drawled. “Why would I do that?”

“Why would I quit?” I asked instead of answering his question.

Scoffing, he shook his head as he looked down at his feet. Slowly, he licked his lips. “Because I’m a jackass who has placed you in an immoral position.”

"I put myself in that position. If I didn't want to be in it, I wouldn't have accepted your offer in the first place. We just need to figure this out. Edward, I don't know exactly what upset you last night. I really didn't mean to hurt your feelings. But what this started out as was business. We both know that. Did you want me to pretend otherwise?"

"No." Glancing down, his cheeks were slightly pink. "I was frustrated because I legitimately forgot. When I was with you yesterday, I didn't feel like I was with someone I was forcing to-

I brought my hand up, taking a step towards him as I shook my head. "You are not forcing me." He leaned against the wall, his eyes darting away from mine. "You're not. I am an adult. And you saw how I was with that blond bitch in the lobby. I don't take shit from anyone. I'm a big girl, and I can damn well take care of myself. And if I didn't wish to be here, I wouldn't be."

He took in a slow and steady breath through his nose. Then he shook his head. "The money helps." He frowned at his feet.

"Do you want me to lie and say it doesn't?" I put my hand on my heart. "Edward, I needed- need a job. You don't understand how hard it's been. Yes, the cash got me in the front door, so to speak, but I'll stay because of you. You shouldn't pay me for what we did yesterday. Or for Friday. Because that wasn't working. I did nothing for you. This has been the best weekend I've had in years. I feel like I'm stealing from you."

Biting his lip, he finally peered up at me. "Friday and Saturday are exactly why I offered you what I did." His deep green eyes were slightly red and moist around the rims. "There are other things I need you for, too, I promise. Not sexual stuff. But that was the main reason. Bella, I am so lonely. I have no friends."

"I can't believe a wonderful man like you can't find companions," I told him as I took the final step between us and grabbed his hand. His fingers curled gently around mine. "I would have thought you had dozens."

"I never learned how to make them. When I was a child, we'd live in a place for a few months here and a couple there. I wasn't ever in a normal school. My father always wanted his family together, so he got us a tutor and took us with him. And it was a good life, but as soon as I got to know anybody, we were ripped away. Then I went to college." Edward sighed, leaning his head back against the wall with his eyes shut tight. "And I was so damned eager for friends and girls that I'd do anything for them. It didn't take me long to realize they were using me for my money. Once I figured out that I couldn't trust anyone... I changed my name and went to a different university across the country, but even then."

I squeezed his hand to get him to look at me again. "Then why have me do this?" I pushed. "You're making me one of those people, and I don't want to be."

"Because at least I know. It won't rip my heart out of my chest in six months. I'm not sure I could handle it. I think I'd rather be alone than feel used. This way, you're not. You can't."

"I don't want to be one of those people, Edward. But now, I am no matter what I do." I touched the side of his neck and sighed. "You are nothing like I expected you to be."

"What did you expect?"

Shaking my head, I gazed into his eyes. "I don't know, but I didn't think you would be such a sensitive person."

"I'm not, usually. But I didn't expect you to be so honest." He brought his hand up to his mouth and scrubbed it over his face. "Bella, I'm exploiting you. I'm horrible. I knew you couldn't say no to me, and I took advantage of that. But I was just so instantly attracted to you, and it's only gotten stronger and—"

Stopping him with a kiss on the lips, I lifted as much as I could on my tiptoes. I wouldn't have been able to make it if it weren't for the fact he was slightly slouched down against the wall. It was slow and tender. His hands were to the side as if he was afraid to touch me.

"Do you want me to go?" I asked against his mouth, my eyes closed because I couldn't look at his heartbroken expression. He would make me cry.

"No." His lips moved against mine. "I don't want you to leave."

"I don't want too, either. But you have to tell me what I am to you. I need to know. I need to know more information. Edward, I don't want to hurt you."

His forehead brushed against mine. "You are my beautiful and trusted companion."

"You don't trust me, though. I'm not sure how you could."

"Because I feel like I can." He pressed his palm against my chest over my fast-beating heart. "I can tell you're a good person. I think we will have to be honest with each other, and we will have to trust one another. At least a little."

My hands slid up his pecs, gripping his sweater as I looked into his eyes. "You don't have to pay me to be here. This isn't working. I don't want your money if it hurts you."

The words hung in the air for a long moment before Edward placed both of his hands on my cheeks and brought me into a deep and passionate kiss. It was so different from any of the others we had shared. It was desperate and hungry. My arms went around his neck, my feet seeming to lift off the ground as he grabbed onto me frantically. I held on for dear life, giving it all back.

He breathlessly pulled away. His temple rested against mine, his chest heaving. "Would it make you feel better about me paying you if I worked you hard?" He asked against my ear teasingly. The chill that ran down my spine turned into a fire in the pit of my stomach.

"Yes," I whimpered, my chest moving against his. The heat and moisture doubled between my legs, and I wanted nothing more than to grind myself against him.

Our lips came together again, and he moved us so that we were against the opposite wall. This time with my back against it. I clawed at his shoulders, my nails seeking purchase. He hissed loudly as they finally did, his head going back in pained pleasure before coming down on my neck with a nip that made me moan his name.

Something about saying it forced him out of his sexual haze, and he pulled away. Edward placed both of his palms against the wall above me, his head hanging low as he tried to catch his breath. "I'm sorry... too soon. It's too soon. I'm sorry," he repeated.

I shook my head quickly. "Don't apologize. That was so hot," I smiled wickedly.

He chuckled, still breathless. "So, it wasn't just good for me?"

Leaning forward, I did something that made me feel naughty and sexy all at the same time. First, I dragged the tip of my tongue from the underside of his chin to his bottom lip before I gently nipped at his jaw. He growled, and the look in his eyes when I pulled away was pure hunger. His chest was rising and falling quickly. Bringing my hands to his hips, I tried to smile as innocently as possible as my eyelashes batted up at him.

"Why do you have to be so stunning? If you weren't, this would be so much easier," he said coyly. "I can't control myself."

"You don't have to," I promised, thinking about the pile of pillows in his den. I wouldn't mind rolling around in them with him for a while.

"Oh, but I do, my darling. I do." He pushed himself away from me and straightened his clothes. "We have some business to conduct today."

Pouting, I followed him as he began to walk again. "I was rather enjoying the work we were doing."

He reached behind him without looking and took my hand to pull me along. "Yes, I was too. But there are things I want to take care of first before we enjoy the rest of the day. Since you're going to be hanging around, it seems."

We went in a different direction than the den, passing through a beautiful yet dull-white living room. Nothing in it said anything about him. Then we came into a very formal dining room, which led to a large kitchen. There was an island in the middle with papers organized neatly into piles on the countertop.

Edward pulled out a stool for me and then picked up the pen. "I filled out some of your basic info for you so you wouldn't have to. Address, name, birthday. Stuff like that. I want you to go over everything and make sure I got it right. And you'll need to sign a lot."

"I could have done all of this," I told him, looking at all the information. It must have taken him an hour, at least, if not more. All I would have to do was glance over a few things and sign my name on them.

Waving me off, he gave me the pen as he leaned over my shoulder. "Insurance." He pointed at a set of papers and then another. "401k. This one is for your check. It'll show up under my name when it's posted."

"Okay." I swallowed, looking over each page, but I was having a hard time with him being so close to me. I could feel his warm breath on my neck, and his palm was resting at the base of my spine. I couldn't help myself. Twisting, I kissed his cheek softly before turning my attention to endorsing a piece of paper. He chuckled and moved my hair away from my throat with a brush of his hand.

So in between signing and filling things in, there were light kisses and soft touches. When I finished the last page, I pushed it away and looked up at him with a slight smile. "I'm officially yours now."

A look of pure pleasure came over his face as he brought his fingers to my jaw. Edward leaned in slowly and gave me a gentle peck on the side of my neck. As he dragged his lips over my skin to my ear, he asked softly. "Are you?"

"Yup," I simpered playfully as I tilted my head to give him better access. "I'm your willing slave now."

"So, if you are, does that make me your master?" He pulled back and raised an eyebrow. The desire turned to amusement, like a thirteen-year-old boy who just made a slightly dirty sexual innuendo for the first time.

“Yes, sir. It does,” I flirted, feeling mischievous. His cheeks reddened, and I half expected him to giggle excitedly. It somewhat surprised me how cool he kept despite himself. I could see it brewing in his eyes, though.

“Well, then get off your ass and make me something to eat,” he demanded in a comical tone, acting so much bigger than himself as he pulled me off the stool. I laughed loudly, throwing my head back at his horrible performance. He smacked me lightly on the rear for it, making me giggle like a moron. It was nothing, just a playful slap that left a pleasant sting.

I wanted him to do it again.